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Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, February 26, 2018

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayer

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1105)

[*English*]

HISTORIC SITES AND MONUMENTS ACT

The House resumed from December 13, 2017, consideration of the motion that Bill C-374, An Act to amend the Historic Sites and Monuments Act (composition of the Board), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am certainly honoured to stand in this place today to speak to Bill C-374, an act to amend the Historic Sites and Monuments Act. I know that the bill has its inspiration in a very practical call to action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It is from recommendation 79, which reads:

We call upon the federal government, in collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal organizations, and the arts community, to develop a reconciliation framework for Canadian heritage in commemoration. This would include, but not be limited to: i. Amending the Historic Sites and Monuments Act to include First Nations, Inuit, and Métis representation on the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada and its Secretariat.

Currently the board consists of one representative from each of our provinces and territories but no formal representation from indigenous peoples or organizations. This would add three more seats to the table: one for first nations, one for Métis, and one for Inuit.

I know from my colleague on the opposite side of the House that this issue is very near and dear to his heart. We all bring our life experiences to our work in this chamber in making decisions on behalf of our constituents and all Canadians. For him, it is over 30 years at Parks Canada, including the last 10 with historic sites. He saw the need to increase the voices of Canadians in making, frankly, very important and challenging decisions about which places to protect, which individuals to promote, and which stories to preserve for future generations.

I agree that this is a significant, practical step toward long-term reconciliation. That is why I am looking forward to supporting my

colleague's private member's bill. I want to congratulate him and his team for bringing it before us today.

I will take a moment to talk about a project I undertook over the past year. I wanted to find an appropriate way to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Canada's Confederation in my riding of Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo. I know that for many indigenous peoples, it was something they were somewhat hesitant to celebrate, but we wanted to make sure that we had an inclusive conversation.

With my team, we decided that we wanted to recognize 50 people, 50 places, and 50 events across our communities. Among these, I explored the trails near the ice caves on Bridge Lake, known to local first nations as the entrance to the bear world. I will not try to pronounce the indigenous word, because it is not up to the standard that would be expected.

I watched the unveiling of stunning totem poles carved by local artist Jerome Boyce. I visited the Secwepemc Museum and Heritage Park. This is situated along the South Thompson River in a building that was once the Kamloops Indian Residential School, where first nations children were taken after they were removed from their homes, their families, and their culture. I welcome my colleagues to visit that area with me when they are in Kamloops.

For me, the Secwepemc site symbolizes that not all Canadians have had the opportunity for their history to be celebrated, and this is a key area where the Historic Sites and Monuments Board could do good work.

We are at a pivotal time. Communities across the country are struggling with challenging questions of what to do with the awkward, messy, painful parts of our history. They are looking at statues, at plaques, and at other memorials that have for many years been at the centre of our communities. There are serious questions. How do we commemorate the accomplishments of men and women while learning from their failures? How do we recognize that Canada's history, and its very creation, was shaped by imperfect people?

One hundred and fifty years of Canadian history have passed, and now is the opportunity to chart a path forward for the next 150 years. Part of that, I believe, is ensuring that there are more voices at the table to make these vital decisions. There is definitely reason for hope.

Private Members' Business

The Historic Sites and Monuments Board has evolved several times since its genesis in 1919. I would like to point out that there are currently, I believe, six female members of the board, but for the last 30 years, it typically consisted of white men of European descent, as was typical for that period. It certainly could be argued that the merits of national commemoration of individuals and locations came from that vantage point.

We have come a long way since then, and now we are looking to add voices specifically from indigenous peoples, voices that could help provide a more complete picture of the journey Canada has taken: the moments to celebrate and the failures from which to learn. Commemorating and recognizing the history of Canada's indigenous peoples is a key step along the road of reconciliation, and that is why the TRC made it part of its calls to action.

I was very proud to be a member of the former Conservative government when the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was created. I stood in the room and listened to former prime minister Stephen Harper's powerful apology on behalf of the government. Actually, I was not quite elected yet, but I certainly watched. I did not stand in this room, but I was certainly profoundly impacted, like so many others.

I heard, too, the apology for Canada's relocation of Inuit families to the high Arctic and the honouring of all Métis veterans at Juno Beach. As I said in this place on February 14, "The contributions and challenges of Canada's indigenous peoples were, and must continue to be, recognized and addressed."

This is just a small step. Much more work will need to be done. We firmly believe that economic reconciliation must be part of this journey. Governments at all levels and private businesses can empower indigenous communities to share in the wealth Canada is so capable of creating for its citizens. Conservatives can and will urge the government in its consultations to consider what impediments exist to the financial success of indigenous communities and how they can be removed. That would ensure long-term prosperity rather than continued reliance on short-term solutions. It is in this way that the horrific poverty so pervasive in this country can be reduced.

We know that there were a number of calls to action put forward as part of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. We have made a good journey toward many of them. I know that the government indicated that it was going to implement all 94 calls to action. One of my concerns is that the Liberals have never really come out with a costed plan that indicates what the implementation will be and what the impacts will be. I still wait for a more comprehensive look at how they have analyzed those 94 calls to action and what the impacts will be, what laws will have to change, and what the financial implications will be. Certainly there are many of them that we, as Conservatives, on this side of the House are very pleased to support. The private member's bill that has been put forward is a welcome and good step in the right direction, and I would again like to congratulate the member.

● (1110)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am thrilled to rise today to speak to Bill C-374, which

would amend the Historic Sites and Monuments Act to create three new Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada positions, thereby providing for first nations, Inuit, and Métis representation on the board.

This subject is of tremendous importance to me. When I was re-elected, our oath of allegiance was changed to reflect this. Although many people find it odd that we still swear allegiance to Queen Elizabeth II, we nevertheless added a sentence to the oath about how, in carrying out our duties, we will honour and respect the treaties signed with first nations. That was particularly important to me because, as a proud Quebec nationalist, I am acutely aware of some of our gravest misconceptions about this country.

Although I am very proud of NDP members across Canada who chose to recognize the 1982 repatriation of the Constitution as a historical error that violated Quebec's rights, I can also certainly understand the perspective of first nations representatives who feel that their rights were ignored.

We are living in very interesting times, both politically and socially. Many things are no longer considered acceptable. As I myself have had the privilege of attending one of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings, with the member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, I truly appreciate how urgently these changes are needed.

There is nothing more fundamental in a society than its heritage, including its historic sites and the significance attached to them. Adding these three additional representatives to the board is just common sense. Looking at the bill, one has to wonder why this was not done sooner. When was the tipping point finally reached? Was it two years ago or 12 years ago? In any case, our colleague's bill can only be commended at this point, and I know the NDP fully supports it. We think it is quite obvious that the bill should be supported. It is the right thing to do for our friends, with whom we share so much.

I think it is a great idea for the Historic Sites and Monuments Board to embrace the first nations' belief that we need to recognize more than just physical sites. We must also recognize places where people have had significant or important experiences, whether they are natural sites or built heritage. Accordingly, I am delighted that our colleague's initiative in sponsoring Bill C-374 has been exceptionally well received by all stakeholders aware of the issues and injustices that need to be fixed. One person who comes to mind is Karen Aird of the Indigenous Heritage Circle, who had this to say:

● (1115)

[*English*]

We feel that in this time, this time of reconciliation, this time when we see a new change in government, there's a need for people to start thinking differently about heritage, and moving it beyond built heritage, and thinking about how indigenous people perceive it and how we want to protect it. We do have our own mechanisms. We do have our own methods and approaches to protecting and interpreting heritage, and we feel it's really time now for indigenous people to have a voice in this.

[*Translation*]

I would also like to quote Mr. Sinclair, of the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation:

Private Members' Business

[English]

the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission] has described the mountain, the calls to action issued by the TRC represent the path to the top. The Calls to Action represent the synthesis of one of the largest engagement sessions with indigenous peoples in the history of the country. We must understand these calls as the articulation of the collective voices of thousands upon thousands of Survivors, families and communities across the Country.

Central in the work of reconciliation is this is the recognition that Canada, as a nation, has not accurately or effectively portrayed the perspectives of indigenous peoples in the telling of our collective history. So long as this continues, Canadians and visitors to this country will be prevented from knowing not only who we were, but will be denied an understanding of what we can become.

Including indigenous perspectives and histories in commemorating national historic sites is paramount. Ensuring there is a clear strategy to commemorate and honour community perspectives on the residential schools is in our national interest.

Through these collective steps, we have the potential to tell a much more accurate, richer and honest story of who we are and where we are going.

For these, and many other reasons, we offer our full support for this bill and encourage all parliamentarians to do the same.

[Translation]

At a time when many things are being challenged, when many foundations are being rocked by shifting paradigms, I am proud to say that this Friday I will be using some of my constituency time to visit the community of Kahnawake in a neighbouring riding. This community is part of the greater Montérégie area and lies on the fringes of Montreal's south shore.

It is crucial that we recharge and reconnect with the first nations. I urge all of my colleagues to attend the *Secret Path* screening being held somewhere in this building this evening.

I call on all of us, as Quebeckers and Canadians of unquestionably mixed origins, perhaps because of the French regime, to discover the roots that we share, either by blood or by spirit, with the first nations.

On June 21, I got to attend the summer solstice ceremony on Victoria Island with Dominique Rankin and an elder who lit a fire. Moments like these make us realize that what these people care about is not buildings, or stained glass windows, or statues. What they care about is the fundamental principle behind these places and these activities.

As vice-chair of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, I consider it a privilege to acknowledge how relevant this private member's bill is. I also want to acknowledge how enthusiastically the NDP stands behind this bill. Naturally, we support this initiative, and we hope to see as much concrete and immediate action taken as possible.

Everyone saw these images over the weekend. We need action, and we are taking parliamentary action here. I am keeping my fingers crossed. I urge the government and all parliamentarians to support concrete action to make this bill a reality.

Once we have a board that will establish what we deem to be part of the official heritage of this country, first nations, Inuit, and Métis people will be able to express their views in an atmosphere of full respect and equality.

• (1120)

[English]

Mr. Jonathan Wilkinson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr.

Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to participate in this important debate regarding Bill C-374, an act to amend the Historic Sites and Monuments Act.

I preface my remarks with an acknowledgement that we are on the traditional territory of the Algonquin and Anishinaabe peoples. Acknowledgements such as this are increasingly common today, as more and more Canadians recognize that indigenous peoples have been marginalized for far too long in this country. Bill C-374 proposes a tangible way to address this problem by legislating first nations, Métis, and Inuit representation on the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, which recommends which historic places, persons, and events receive official designation to the minister responsible for Parks Canada.

I salute my colleague, the hon. member for Cloverdale—Langley City, for championing Bill C-374, and I am pleased to say that the Government of Canada will support this bill with amendments that would strengthen the legislation now before us.

[Translation]

To date, nearly 1,000 sites, 700 people, and 500 events have been given national historic designation. Behind every designation there is a story that is part of Canada's broader history. Canada's network of historic sites helps define us as a country.

[English]

The important role that indigenous peoples have played and continue to play in Canada has consistently been ignored or downplayed. As a result, most Canadians are not aware of indigenous history in the way that they should be. This is precisely why the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, led by Senator Murray Sinclair, called for a concerted effort to educate Canadians about indigenous history.

Among the commission's 94 calls to action are more than a dozen specific appeals for greater education about the history of indigenous peoples in Canada. Call to action 79 addresses the lack of indigenous representation on the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada. Private Members' Bill C-374 responds directly to this call to action.

Since its establishment in 1919, the board has played a central role in this country's official historic designations. Ensuring additional first nations, Métis, and Inuit representation on the board will help in the long process to promote recognition and understanding of the history of indigenous peoples, and the important contributions they have made to Canada and their nations.

Under the current Historic Sites and Monuments Act, the board is comprised of 16 members. They include a representative from each province and territory, the librarian and archivist of Canada, and representatives from the Canadian Museum of History and Parks Canada.

Private Members' Business

Bill C-374 would authorize three additional representatives, for first nations, Inuit, and Métis, alongside existing provincial and territorial representation. By modernizing the board in this way, Canada would take one more step towards reconciliation with indigenous peoples.

For my colleagues to fully appreciate the context of Bill C-374, it is important to note that the Historic Sites and Monuments Act was first proposed in a Speech from the Throne in November 1952, to give a statutory basis to the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada in response to recommendations in the Massey commission report of 1951. To say that the government at the time paid little attention to indigenous history would be an understatement, given the history of assimilationist policy in Canada.

There have been many attempts by the board over the years to look in a serious way at indigenous history, but there have always been issues in reconciling the history with the existing narratives in the commemoration of Canada's history. I believe that can be partly attributed to the fact there has never been a legislative requirement for indigenous representation on the board.

• (1125)

[*Translation*]

Launched in 2000 by the then Canadian heritage minister, Sheila Copps, the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada and Parks Canada created the new commemorations initiative, one of the most effective programs for improving the representation of groups identified as under-represented within the national historic designation system. The purpose of the initiative was to enhance awareness of the history of indigenous peoples, women, and ethnocultural communities.

Before coming to a close in 2011, the initiative had a significant and positive impact on Canada's network of national historic sites, people, and events. The number of official designations for women and ethnocultural groups, for example, increased by 81% and 112% respectively. The number of official designations relating to the history of indigenous peoples increased by 31%.

[*English*]

The board, with the support of Parks Canada, continues to take steps to broaden the representation of indigenous peoples and historic designations. The text on many plaques, for instance, has been revised to more appropriately reflect indigenous perspectives on history. In some cases, indigenous language text has been added. However, these efforts are not enough to fill the gap. With indigenous representation, the board will be better able to include indigenous history and heritage values in the designation and commemoration process.

A report published in December by the Standing Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development reached the same conclusion. To quote from the report, "Preserving Canada's Heritage: the Foundation for Tomorrow", it states, "Indigenous peoples must be included on the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada so that the Board integrates Indigenous history, heritage values and memory practices into Canada's national heritage and history."

With respect to the amendments I mentioned earlier, we will propose to amend Bill C-374 to ensure that the text of the bill aligns

more closely with the wording of call to action 79. Three other proposed amendments would further strengthen Bill C-374. One would clarify that the board can comprise up to 19 members. Two other amendments address matters related to expenses for board-related travel, accommodation, and for administrative and clerical work. With the proposed amendments, Bill C-374 would allow us to take another step toward reconciliation with indigenous peoples and implementing the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

More than ever before, Canadians appreciate the relationship between the policies of past governments and the current circumstances of indigenous peoples. Canadians believe in justice. They believe that indigenous peoples should be able to participate equally and contribute fully to the commemoration of our shared history. This is part of what reconciliation is all about. The passage of Bill C-374 is only one step in the work required, as in order to fully implement call to action 79, we also need to revise the policies, criteria, and practices of the national program of historical commemoration to integrate indigenous history, heritage values, and memory practices into Canada's national heritage and history.

The time has come to modernize the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada in keeping with the recommendation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The legislation now before us from the member for Cloverdale—Langley City, along with the amendments I have outlined, will help to continue Canada's path toward reconciliation with indigenous peoples. I encourage my hon. colleagues to join me and support Bill C-374.

Mr. Jim Eglinski (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House to speak in support of Bill C-374, which seeks to update and amend the Historic Sites and Monuments Act. Specifically, it is a direct response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's call to action 79, which calls on the government to include first nations, Inuit, and Métis representation on the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada.

The Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada has been mandated to provide advice to the Canadian government on the designation of places, persons, and events that have marked and shaped Canada. Every year, new subjects are added to the list of designations, which the board considers.

National historic sites are organized according to five broad themes: peopling the land, governing Canada, developing economies, building social and community life, and expressing intellectual and cultural life. These sites represent significant stages in the development of Canada, symbolize cultural traditions, and recognize meaningful people and locations of national historic significance.

As of 2018, there are 171 national historic sites administered by Parks Canada. The remainder are administered or owned by other levels of government or private entities. The sites are located across all 10 provinces and three territories. There are even two sites located in France, the Beaumont-Hamel Newfoundland Memorial and the Canadian National Vimy Memorial.

I have been very fortunate to have visited nearly half of Canada's historic sites, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean and north to the Arctic Ocean. It is one of the pleasures in life that I treasure, and I hope to work toward the other half in my lifetime.

I had the pleasure of serving with the member for Cloverdale—Langley City on the environment and sustainable development committee for a year and a half. During that time, we heard from indigenous people from across the country on issues relating to the environment, sustainable development, and the use of their land. They have been on these lands for thousands of years, and they have a lot of knowledge and history to share with us.

In my own riding, I have a number of historic sites, almost all of which are related to the exploration of western Canada. These sites include the Rocky Mountain House, Jasper House, Yellowhead Pass, and Athabasca Pass.

In September, I attended the plaque unveiling of the Maligne Lake Chalet and Guest House in Jasper National Park. This is one of Canada's newest historic sites. Also in attendance was a representative of the Big Horn Stoney Nation, as well as the great-niece of explorer Fred Brewster. In 1908, members of the Stoney Nation drew a map by hand for explorer Mary Schaffer that led her to Maligne Lake in the Rocky Mountains near Jasper. Later, Fred Brewster built a chalet to lodge travellers who wanted to experience the great beauty the region has to offer. The site represents a century of shared history between explorers and the indigenous people in the region. In fact, the majority of national historic sites in Alberta, and many more across Canada, have their roots in the interaction between explorers and indigenous peoples. Indigenous involvement is an important component in the management and development of establishing historic sites and monuments in Canada.

When I lived in Fort St. James, British Columbia, I was privy to watching the opening of the new interpretive centre at Fort St. James National Historic Site, a former Hudson's Bay Company fur trading post. The site was recognized as a historic site while Hudson's Bay Company still operated it as a fur trading centre, up until 1952. In the wisdom of Parks Canada, it now rents out the old Hudson's Bay Company manager's home as a bed and breakfast. What a great way for Canadians to experience what it was like to live in the past. The site is located right next door to the Nak'azdli First Nation reserve, where I have many friends.

That is why I support the bill, which would ensure that first nations, Métis, and Inuit communities are represented on the National Historic Sites and Monuments Board.

● (1130)

I do have a concern with the bill that I know has been shared by my colleagues. Adding three members to the board would require additional government expenditures. This is something that cannot be done by a private member's bill without a royal recommendation.

Private Members' Business

Mr. Speaker, I understand that you also expressed concern over this issue on November 22.

As far as I am aware, the member for Cloverdale-Langley City has not requested a royal recommendation. According to his comments on December 13, he is hoping to deal with this specific issue at the committee stage. In recognition of this, I want to support the suggestion from the member for Saskatoon—Grasswood to amend the bill to keep the number of members on the board the same and require that three of those members be first nations, Inuit, and Métis. This would eliminate the need to increase expenditures, and therefore eliminate the need to obtain a royal recommendation, while ensuring that there is representation from indigenous Canadians on the board. This could be done relatively easily.

We all know that this year, British Columbia, New Brunswick, Northwest Territories, and Ontario will all have vacant seats. All these vacancies are opportunities to appoint indigenous Canadians to the board and fulfill call to action 79 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The final report of the TRC helped to explain this dark chapter in Canadian history, and the calls to action advance the process of reconciliation.

In the wake of the commission's work, it is important that the Government of Canada continue to work toward meaningful reconciliation. This bill is a step in that direction.

I want to thank the member for Cloverdale-Langley City for bringing this bill forward. I look forward to hearing how he plans on resolving some of the concerns that have been raised today.

I see I have a couple of minutes.

I had the great privilege, as the mayor of Fort St. John, to build an international monument on the side of the Alaska Highway near Charlie Lake. We built that monument when we heard the sad and very tragic story of 12 United States soldiers who lost their lives in 1942. There were 17 of them on a barge going across Charlie Lake, a lake just outside of the city of Fort St. John, and bad weather overcame them. The barge was swamped and went down with all 17 people. A local trapper, who lived on the shores of the lake at that time, saw the tragedy happen. He rowed out there and managed to save five of them. Some drowned as he was trying to get them back to shore, as they were hanging onto his boat in the cold, freezing water in April.

We contacted the U.S. government, and a bunch of us from the community of Fort St. John got together and built a monument to recognize those 12 heroes who lost their lives trying to build a highway to protect Canada and the United States. The monument sits at the edge of the lake. When one looks through a window in the monument it is possible to see where the boat went down on the horizon.

It is important to recognize historic events in Canada. I am glad the hon. member brought this bill forward.

● (1135)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette (Winnipeg Centre, Lib.):

[*Member spoke in Cree*]

Private Members' Business

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to rise in the House today to debate Bill C-374, an act to amend the Historic Sites and Monuments Act, and to be doing so on Algonquin territory.

I fully support Bill C-374, which was introduced by my friend, the member for Cloverdale—Langley City, especially with the addition of a few amendments proposed by the Government of Canada. Bill C-374 will modernize the membership and the operational activities of the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada and provide for first nations, Inuit, and Métis representation on the board.

The proposed legislation represents an important step in Canada's journey towards reconciliation with indigenous peoples. The amendments proposed by the government will improve the original version of the private member's bill in a few important ways, for example by clarifying that the board may include up to 19 members, modernizing the language dealing with board members' expenses, and ensuring that the bill is more in keeping with call to action 79 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Bill C-374 is based on a number of fundamental facts. Canada is a progressive country, and Canadians are people of principle who care about Canada's history, our nation, and the way it is commemorated. Canada and our attitude toward commemoration continue to evolve. Therefore, it only makes sense that a mechanism such as the board should evolve as well.

About a century ago, Canada established an advisory board on the conservation of national historic sites. One of the first official measures taken by that board was to adopt its current official name, the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada. The six members of the board then began identifying the most significant historic sites in the country and recognizing their importance with bronze plaques mounted on stone cairns. Some of those cairns still exist today.

In 1953, the Historic Sites and Monuments Act gave the board the legal authority to carry out its duties. The board's role of advising the government on historical issues has evolved since then. Today, the board advises the government on the designation of people, places, and events of national historic significance, on the designation and conservation of heritage railway stations and lighthouses, and on the preservation and commemoration of the grave sites of Canadian prime ministers.

Today, Canada's network of national heritage designations encompasses nearly 1,000 sites, 700 persons, and 500 events. This network celebrates our rich and varied heritage and provides opportunities for Canadians and other visitors to learn more about this land we call home. Each designation recounts a unique chapter of Canada's history and gives a temporal, geographic, and identity-based perspective to our country's larger story. Together, these designations show who we are, we have done, and, in some cases, what we have lost along the way. These designations ultimately help people connect the past to the present and to think about the future.

I am proud to say that public nominations drive the commemoration process. Members of the public submit most of the subjects examined by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada. The participation of Canadians is important. The board carefully examines every nomination and often conducts additional research.

The board currently has 16 members: one representative from each province and territory, one representative from the Canadian Museum of History, one representative from Parks Canada, and the Librarian and Archivist of Canada.

• (1140)

Every year, the board makes recommendations to the minister responsible for Parks Canada, who is authorized to designate symbols of national historic significance. Parks Canada is responsible for announcing new designations, organizing ceremonies, and installing and maintaining plaques.

Canada's designation system works well and is admirable to be sure, but many past designations and some of the criteria used to assess subjects are rooted in our country's colonial history. These shortcomings are becoming obvious to a growing number of Canadians.

As a progressive country, we need to take the appropriate steps. More and more Canadians are recognizing that there is no relationship more important than the relationship with indigenous peoples. Canada, as a country, and Canadians themselves have made considerable progress in recent years in the process of reconciliation. Two years ago, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission published calls to action, a list of 94 concrete measures to strengthen ties between Canada and indigenous peoples. This private member's bill is a direct response to the recommendations set out in call to action No. 79.

As my hon. colleagues have pointed out, indigenous peoples have been living in what is now known as Canada for thousands of years. Long before the Vikings established settlements on the east coast and Samuel de Champlain paddled up the river that flows past these very Parliament buildings, indigenous communities were flourishing across the country. Despite that fact, few of the historic designations go further back than the past 450 years, and very few of them highlight the many contributions of indigenous peoples. We have every reason to ask why this is so, and the answer to that question should prompt us to do better. No, we cannot change the past, but that should not prevent us from creating a better future and providing other perspectives on our past.

Parks Canada works with more than 300 indigenous partners and communities to preserve, restore, and promote our natural and cultural heritage sites. Bill C-374 will build on those achievements for the good of all Canadians.

Reconciliation demands that we recognize two fundamental facts: first, for centuries, indigenous peoples have been prevented from fully participating in society and benefiting from prosperity like everyone else; second, indigenous peoples have so much to contribute to Canada economically, socially, and culturally.

Canada's network of national historic designations should encompass all aspects of this great country's history and cultivate a sense of wonder at the people, places, and events not only of past centuries but also of past millennia. To better appreciate Canada and this country's defining moments, as well as its cultural and creative traditions, we need a wider lens that enables us to peer further back in time. We need to take steps to achieve that goal.

[*Member spoke in Cree*]

• (1145)

[*English*]

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise today to close debate on my private member's bill, Bill C-374, which seeks to amend the Historic Sites and Monuments Act and provide the much-needed inclusion of indigenous representation on the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada.

I would like to thank my hon. colleagues on both sides of the House who have risen to offer their perspectives and support for this legislation, including members for Saskatoon—Grasswood, Kootenay—Columbia, Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Richmond—Arthabaska, Yukon, Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, North Vancouver, Yellowhead, and Winnipeg Centre. In particular, I would like to thank Senator Murray Sinclair for his work at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

I would like to acknowledge that we are on the traditional territory of the Algonquin people. As my hon. colleagues know, this recognition is a small but important way in which to advance reconciliation. Similarly, Bill C-374 seeks to advance this very same goal of reconciliation. Drawn from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's call to action 79(i), this bill would enshrine first nations, Métis, and Inuit perspectives on the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada. These perspectives are crucial to ensuring that our designation of historic places, persons, and events reflects and incorporates the perspectives of indigenous peoples.

In their summary of the final report, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission discussed the assault on indigenous memory, reflecting the implications of the presence and absence of indigenous voices in commemorations and history telling:

One of the most significant harms to come out of the residential schools was the attack on Indigenous memory. The federal government's policy of assimilation sought to break the chain of memory that connected the hearts, minds, and spirits of Aboriginal children to their families, communities, and nations. Many, but not all, Survivors have found ways to restore these connections. They believe that reconciliation with other Canadians calls for changing the country's collective, national history so that it is based on the truth about what happened to them as children, and to their families, communities, and nations.

Our government has been steadfast in its commitment to advance reconciliation and build a renewed relationship with indigenous peoples based on recognition, rights, respect, co-operation, and partnership. As the Prime Minister put it in his remarks on a new legal framework with indigenous peoples, "To truly renew the relationship between Canada and indigenous peoples, not just for today but for the next 150 years...we need a comprehensive and far-reaching approach. We need a government-wide shift in how we do things."

Private Members' Business

That process is taking place, with progress having been made on two-thirds of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action under federal and shared responsibility, including \$2.6 billion in first nations education, collaboration for updated language to the newcomers' citizenship guide, and full support and steps taken to implement UNDRIP. However, the work does not end there. In fact, it is only a beginning.

Reconciliation is a journey. It is a Canadian issue and it requires each and every one of us to make a conscious and meaningful effort to advance it. That is why I have brought Bill C-374 before the House, to hopefully make a small but not insignificant contribution toward advancing reconciliation with indigenous peoples.

Through my 32-year career with Parks Canada working in commemorations, I witnessed first-hand the implications that the absence and presence of indigenous perspectives had in capturing the way in which we recognize historic people, places, and events. We cannot hope to repair and strengthen our relationships with indigenous peoples unless we take a new approach that moves beyond the colonial and paternalistic approaches of the past and allows us to more authentically commemorate our collective past.

Bill C-374 would provide the opportunity for us to advance meaningful reconciliation with indigenous peoples. It would implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's call to action 79(i) and ensure that indigenous perspectives are more directly considered in our commemorations process.

Members in this place no doubt recognize the critical importance of reconciliation and the need for us to move beyond outdated colonial structures and better integrate indigenous perspectives into government decision-making processes. When it comes to the involvement of indigenous peoples in commemorating our history, we must do better and we can do better. Bill C-374 offers the opportunity to do just that.

I would like, once again, to thank my hon. colleagues for joining me in the debate and consideration of this bill. I am hopeful that all members in this place will join me in supporting Bill C-374 and send it to committee for consideration.

• (1150)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

SITTING SUSPENDED

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): We will now suspend until noon.

Business of Supply

(The sitting of the House was suspended at 11:53 a.m.)

• (1200)

[Translation]

SITTING RESUMED

(The House resumed at 12 p.m.)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—PHOENIX PAY SYSTEM

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP) moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government committed a gross error in judgement when it operationalized the previous Conservative government's Phoenix pay system over the clear objections of both the affected unions and departmental staff, and that the House call on the government to: (a) pay all employees correctly and on time, every time, for the work they do; (b) exempt those who have been overpaid by Phoenix from having to pay back the 'gross' amount, despite actually receiving a substantially lower 'net' amount; (c) compensate those in the public service who have experienced damages from Phoenix, both financial and otherwise; and (d) publicly apologize to all of those who have endured hardship as a result of the government's error.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to be sharing my speaking time with my colleague from New Westminster—Burnaby, to talk about a problem that has been plaguing hundreds of thousands of public service employees for months now. This is a colossal administrative scandal and an unprecedented financial and social drain.

The government committed an error in judgment when it green-lighted the costly second phase of the Phoenix pay system despite clear objections from the unions and affected departmental staff. The NDP is moving this motion to secure the future and heal the past.

First, we call on the government to:

(a) pay all employees correctly and on time, every time, for the work they do;

It is not normal for employees who work all week, some of them for more than 40 hours, and for contract workers to not be paid properly and in full for the hours they worked.

I worked at a convenience store when I was a student. I have fond memories of those days. Whether the store was busy or not so busy, I always got paid for the number of hours I worked.

It is unacceptable that we have to move a motion in the House to ask that federal public servants be properly compensated.

To come back to our motion, secondly, we are calling on the government to:

(b) exempt those who have been overpaid by Phoenix from having to pay back the 'gross' amount, despite actually receiving a substantially lower 'net' amount;

Unfortunately, the long and the short of it is that many people, including regular employees, contract workers, and even retirees keep getting payments they should not be, or overpayments. Some have received upwards of \$50,000. That boggles the mind.

For example, a worker receiving a gross monthly overpayment of \$1,000 will end up with \$600 in their bank account after all the deductions have come off. We do not want that employee to be required to pay back \$1,000 because that is not what ended up in the account. We want those who have been overpaid to have all the time and latitude they need to pay back only the net amount.

Third, we are calling on the government to:

(c) compensate those in the public service who have experienced damages from Phoenix, both financial and otherwise;

It is unfortunate, because many people have been and continue to be impacted because of the problems with the Phoenix pay system. We, as members of Parliament, are all being paid. We all had careers in the past and we will still have one when we are no longer MPs. When we receive our pay, it has to cover certain expenses. We have to pay for expenses related to our cars or our homes, and we have to buy food for our children.

When people do not receive the pay they were expecting for the hours worked, and they have to take an advance from their credit card, skip mortgage payments, and get into debt, they are seriously impacted both psychologically and financially.

We can name a number of people who now have a bad credit score. They have lost their sense of pride.

Blaming the former Conservative government no longer works. The Auditor General's report is clear: the current government failed to do what was required to fix the Phoenix pay system. I am not the one saying it. Public Services and Procurement Canada as well as Treasury Board did not recognize early enough the scope and severity of the problem with Phoenix.

• (1205)

That is why we are asking the government to accept responsibility for its poor management of the situation and to publicly apologize to all of those people who have endured hardship as a result of this situation. Unfortunately, there are many of them. Today, more than 193,000 public servants are affected by the government's failure to resolve the Phoenix pay system problems.

In my riding of Jonquière, no less than two-thirds of public servants have been impacted by the Phoenix fiasco. I could spend all week sharing the stories that I have unfortunately heard, or have had the misfortune of hearing, in my office. I was able to spend time with these people in order to understand their situations, and today I am proud to be their voice and I hope to bring about change.

One example is a young contractor who came to see me and who is owed more than \$8,000. This job was perfect for him, since he could continue his studies and work at the same time, but the debt started piling up when he did not receive his pay. He has been owed \$8,000 for two years, to the day. Although this young man should have had access to EI, since he is a contractor, the Phoenix pay system messed up his work hours and EI asked him to pay back the money. This whole situation is like quicksand, and, at the end of the day, workers are the ones paying the price. This is just one of so many examples.

Business of Supply

I also heard from civilian employees on the military base who do not want to join the summer team because they cannot get paid on time. They have to talk to their employers to ask questions, and it never ends. These people go without income all summer.

I also had the opportunity to meet a woman while I was at the hair salon. She has been a victim of the Phoenix pay system for the past two years. She lives alone, her husband is deceased, so she is alone to pay the bills. She has no idea when she will get her money and be able to pay them.

The government is unable to tell these contract workers when they will be paid for their hours of work. When people have to accumulate credit card debt and are unable to pay their mortgage, it has a major impact on their family, the people around them and their financial situation.

The government promised public servants a good pay system that would allow them to manage their own requests through the wonders of technology. Now, it is threatening those workers to try to force them to pay back the costs associated with problems for which they are not responsible by a certain date. Workers are once again getting the short end of the stick.

For months, public servants have not been receiving their proper salaries, retirement pensions, and overtime payments because of Phoenix. Thousands of government employees are living with the financial stress of not being paid properly. Some workers are even turning down promotions because they know that they will not receive the pay increase associated with their additional duties. The worst part is that they do not even know when they will get paid. We are all worse off because we are depriving ourselves of high quality workers.

Thousands of government employees are living with the financial stress of not being paid properly, but that did not stop the senior executives responsible for overseeing Phoenix from receiving nearly \$5 million in bonuses and performance pay over the past few years. That is ridiculous, when we know that many families are having trouble putting food on the table. The Liberal government continues to defend these executives who are receiving public funds when they did not fulfill their obligation to ensure that workers are paid for their hours of work each week.

In closing, it is high time that the Liberals give us a date by which they will fix this financial and human disaster.

• (1210)

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech. The minister and members of our parliamentary group will obviously have a lot more to say over the course of the day, but I will begin by asking my colleague from Jonquière a question.

As her motion states, the government committed a gross error in judgment when it operationalized the Phoenix pay system over the clear objections of departmental staff. I would ask her to provide any evidence she might have on the matter, since she did not do so in her speech.

Ms. Karine Trudel: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question and for listening so closely to my speech. It is quite simple.

The unions and departmental officials issued a number of warnings. There were countless newspaper articles. This is documented. There were investigations.

I would also say to my colleague that it was his government that implemented phase two. February 28 will mark two years already. It was his government that pushed the red button before any testing was done, before listening to the unions and departments.

It is easy for them to wash their hands of this and say they had nothing to do with it, but they were in charge. Just look at what happened in Australia. There were warning signs, and testimonies. A 30-second search on Google will spit out all the failings and the fiasco of the Phoenix pay system. It is not complicated. The government should have stopped for five minutes before pushing the red button. It should have researched the situation properly and not implemented the system before doing all the proper testing.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I sincerely thank the hon. member for Jonquière for her excellent speech and for being there for public service employees across this country. I think that is extremely important. She is fighting hard for the rights of those workers.

I would like her to tell us a little more about Australia. The same debacle happened in Queensland, and the Liberals should have known that. The Queensland government had everything fixed in four months. I would like the member for Jonquière to tell us why this situation has been dragging on for two years. The Liberals have done nothing, and yet when similar problems occurred in other places, they were able to fix everything in four months.

Why are the Liberals dragging their feet?

• (1215)

Ms. Karine Trudel: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. I mentioned Australia earlier. According to several documents, Australia unfortunately had the same problem and warned Canada to not go ahead with the system, because it does not work. A number of steps were taken.

My advice to the government would be to listen to the unions. The unions are ready. We also have public servants who specialize in computer science who could work on this and help. We need to listen to the solutions they are proposing. Maybe we need to scrap the Phoenix pay system and build a new one with specialists on the ground, people who are in the best position to make changes, improvements, and even introduce programs that are more suitable. Based on what we are seeing now, this system is a complete failure. We need to listen to those people.

I urge the government to follow the example of Australia, where a similar problem was fixed in four months. In Australia, people pitched in and worked hard to resolve the situation. That is what we are asking the government to do. This is not about passing the buck. We want the situation to be resolved and ask that workers be paid for the hours that they work each week. If public servants want to volunteer, they will find a charity that needs their help. Here, we are asking that they be paid properly.

Business of Supply

[English]

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member of Parliament for Jonquière gave a very eloquent speech. I will say that I was very disturbed by the questioning coming from the Liberal side, but I will come back to that in a moment.

I will start, as I think all members of Parliament need to start, by paying tribute to the incredible diligence and dedication of the public servants who run our government and provide services to our citizens right across the length and breadth of this land. They are incredibly dedicated. They are people who give their lives to public service. In the national capital region, in my riding of New Westminster—Burnaby, in every part of the country, they make sure that citizens receive good, quality services. Public servants are an incredibly dedicated group.

We are now facing a situation in this country that has no parallel in any other industrialized country. We see a situation where public servants, working with such dedication, do not receive the paycheque they so richly deserve at the end of the week all because of government mismanagement. It is hard to find a parallel. It is only in terms of warfare or insurrection that public servants end up in the situation such as we have here. We have a government that simply refuses to take responsibility and refuses to take the important measures that would actually lead to fixing the system.

On February 28, 2016, the Liberals had been in power for a number of months, and they made the decision to operationalize the Phoenix system. Now, we just heard a very disturbing question from a Liberal MP trying to say that it was not their fault. I find that deplorable. The heart of our democratic system is governments taking responsibility for the decisions they make. Yes, of course, the Conservatives should not have started down the path of putting Phoenix in place, but the Liberals had the choice to make, and they chose on February 28, 2016, after months in power, to operationalize Phoenix.

What should they have done? As my colleague the member for Jonquière just pointed out, people in the public service had pointed out the problems that would arise with Phoenix, but the Liberals ignored them. It would have taken a 30-second Google search for them to find out what had happened in Queensland with a similar system.

In Queensland, they did not have the benefit of a debacle occurring with a similar system before, and they moved forward with IBM and put in place a system that was catastrophic. Within weeks they realized that public servants in the Queensland area were not getting their paycheques. Within weeks the Queensland government realized it had to take action. Paradoxically, for a system that was supposed to save them money, they ended up paying over \$1.2 billion to fix the boondoggle that was the Phoenix-like system in Queensland.

We should have learned from that error. We should have had maybe one Liberal MP just do a Google search and find out if they should have put the system in place. The Liberals had been in power for months, and they had this important decision to make: move forward with the Phoenix system on February 28, 2016, or take a step back, the way so many public servants requested they do, not

put it in place and save the public money, and save the public servants the heartache of working as hard as they do and yet not receiving a paycheque at the end.

The Liberals made that choice. In this democratic system, they are the government. They made the decision. They put Phoenix in place, and today we are saying that they have to fix it. They have to fix the problems with Phoenix.

What has the impact been? The Liberals could have avoided it. They could have learned from the Queensland example. They could have rapidly moved once it became evident that Phoenix was a debacle, that public servants were not getting their paycheques, that there were catastrophic personal and family impacts for the bad decision they made on February 28, 2016.

• (1220)

In the Queensland case, they were able to fix it in four months with the investment of money. Here with Phoenix, it is two years later and the system has not been fixed. The government does not even seem interested in fixing it. The Liberals love to point fingers at the Conservatives. I would too, if the Conservatives were at fault. The Liberals made that operational decision, and the Liberals have to fix what they broke.

What has this meant? I have had public servants visit me in my office in New Westminster—Burnaby with tears in their eyes. They are so dedicated to the country. They believe so strongly in public service. They want to give to the population and serve our citizens, yet they are going deeper and deeper into debt because they are not getting a paycheque. Some have lost their homes, as we know. There is the embarrassment of public servants who are working full time going into a grocery store and not being able to buy food for their children because their credit cards are maxed out. The government has done nothing to fix it.

In each one of those cases, and there are thousands of these tragic cases, the emotional stress takes a toll on the family and on the individual. It is not a little thing to work full time and not receive a paycheque. Then to compound this, when there are occasional overpayments, the Liberal government made the decision to start doing what most loan sharks do across the country. It is not a laughing matter. When a public servant receives a paycheque that is a little higher than it should be, instead of asking to be paid back for the amount that the public servant actually received, the Liberal government has vastly inflated that amount. Yes, in some cases the public servant was overpaid, but is now facing the stress of having to pay back far more money than was actually received. That again was a Liberal decision. That again is something that is addressed in our motion. We say very strongly that this kind of activity has to stop.

It is not just the toll on the individual; it is also the toll on communities. As we know, cities like Prince Albert have written to the government saying that it is not only the toll on families and public servants but the toll on the whole community. Businesses are impacted because public servants are not getting their money. Local businesses are struggling now because of the government's refusal to fix the system. The impact goes all the way down the line.

Business of Supply

I would encourage people who are listening today to contact their city councillors and have them write, as Prince Albert did, to the federal government and say that it has to fix this system. The impact has been tragic on so many Canadians who are of good faith, hard-working, and go to work every day and want to serve the country. All they ask for in return is a fair paycheque so they can take care of their family, pay their rent, and put food on the table. That is not asking too much.

For two years now this has festered, with the government refusing to take the actions that the Queensland government did. It fixed it in 120 days, albeit with a significant investment. However, as the Auditor General has mentioned, the Liberal government failed public servants in this country. Yes, that bad decision will cost us \$1 billion or possibly more, but it needs to be fixed and those public servants need to be compensated.

Liberal MPs will have to make a decision when this comes to a vote. I am encouraging public servants across the country, who work so hard, to take time to phone or email their local member of Parliament and tell their MP to vote yes on this motion. We cannot have this become a partisan issue, where Liberals say, “We are not going to take responsibility, so we are not going to vote for the motion.” We have to fix this system. We have to respect our public servants. We have to respect the communities they serve as well. We have to respect them, and that means adopting this motion this week.

That means every member of Parliament will have to make a choice. Do they choose politics or do they choose to support the hard-working public servants who are the backbone of public administration in Canada?

• (1225)

[Translation]

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I did not have much of an opportunity to speak in my first language earlier, so I will now try to speak in the other official language.

[English]

This is a very serious charge. The motion says, “the government committed a gross error in judgment when it operationalized the... Phoenix pay system over the clear objections of...departmental staff.”.

The member for Jonquière has failed to produce any substantiation for that allegation. This is in the motion, a solemn motion, in front of the House of Commons.

I would ask the member, like I asked the member for Jonquière, could he produce for the House documented evidence of the very serious charge and the serious allegation that his party is making in the motion?

Mr. Peter Julian: Seriously, Mr. Speaker, that is unbelievable. I hope that member is not representative of his party. If he is representative of his party, what he has just shown public servants right across this country is a profound lack of respect.

The member wants evidence that Phoenix has failed. He wants evidence that it failed in Queensland. He wants evidence that unions

spoke out about Phoenix before his government implemented it on February 28. Is he serious?

I expected the Liberals to try to weave out of this, but I did not expect them to deny the problems with Phoenix, to deny the problems in Australia, to deny that unions came forward and said there are problems with Phoenix, and to deny that the Liberals operationalized what has led to catastrophic repercussions for public servants across the country.

I would hope that Liberal MPs disavow what was just said in the House. I hope that Liberal MPs will vote for their constituents and vote yes for the motion when it comes up for a vote later this week.

Hon. Tony Clement (Parry Sound—Muskoka, CPC): Further to that, Mr. Speaker, and to support the hon. member in his response, if the hon. member opposite on the Liberal benches wants evidence, it is called the Auditor General's report, which those members solemnly said they agreed with and would support and are now denying.

Would the hon. member think it would be germane to the NDP motion if he were to hear that the minister in charge of the file on the Phoenix pay system during the Conservative rule, the hon. member for Haldimand—Norfolk, had a presentation made to her in July 2015, wherein the people in the bureaucracy responsible for the pay system said, “We are ready to go. Please press the start button.” She refused to press the start button because she realized there were still problems with the system and it was not ready to go.

It did not occur during a Conservative government, because the minister responsible did the right thing and did not press the start button. The Liberals did press the start button when they were not ready and when there were still problems in the system. Is that germane to the motion?

• (1230)

Mr. Peter Julian: Yes, of course, it would be, Mr. Speaker.

However, I am still stunned by the lack of remorse from members on the Liberal side. I did not expect this. I expected some weaving back and forth. The Liberal government generally does not take much responsibility for its own actions. I expected that, but I did not expect an outright denial of Liberals being involved in the decision-making process, pushing the start button, operationalizing the system, while knowing that it was going to have catastrophic results. All of that is on the record, as the member pointed out by mentioning the Auditor General's report. The Auditor General said that the Liberal government failed public servants. The evidence is there. I did not expect to hear Liberals basically say, the way that Donald Trump would say, “Well no, you are all public service or inventing your facts.”

This is not fake news. This is a tragic reality for far too many public servants. The Liberal government has to make right what it broke, and that is why Liberal MPs have to vote yes on the motion this week.

Business of Supply

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in the debate on the motion put forward in the name of the hon. member for Jonquière. I thank the hon. member for her initiative, which gives us all an opportunity to discuss this very important issue with respect to the problems with the Phoenix pay system and their impact on the everyday lives of hard-working public servants and their families.

I have said this before and I will say this again: It is completely unacceptable that our hard-working public servants are not being paid properly. Every day, I am troubled by stories of hardship, anxiety, and stress caused by the failings of the pay system. I hear from and speak regularly with affected public servants from across the country. I read their stories in the news, and I hear regularly from unions about the personal toll that this is taking.

I hear about the family who has a hard time making ends meet during a maternity leave, of the parent who had to tighten his belt during the holidays to buy gifts for his children, and of the young professional who is worried about accepting a promotion in case she will not get a paycheque. These stories remind me daily of the impact on the lives of Canadians, and they are heartbreaking.

I want to assure every public servant and their families that our government is doing everything necessary to resolve this intolerable situation. We recognize that we have lost their trust and realize that they have been more than patient.

Since I have been named the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, I have put a renewed focus on clear communication with employees, in a genuine effort to be open and transparent. As we work toward stabilizing the system and resolving outstanding transactions, it is important for public servants to understand the nature of the issues, the work being done to address them, and, most importantly, the support that is available when experiencing Phoenix-related pay issues.

I will take this moment to call on public servants who are still experiencing pay issues to contact their manager directly to discuss the situation. Managers should be the first point of contact when experiencing Phoenix pay issues.

We know that the strain of pay issues is also being felt by the numerous public servants working hard to resolve this issue. I want to acknowledge the employees at the pay centre in Miramichi, satellite offices, and the departments and agencies across the public service who are working hard to help their fellow public service colleagues. I deeply appreciate their tireless efforts.

Resolving employee pay issues has been the most important file on my desk since my appointment as Minister of Public Services and Procurement six months ago. The challenges are complex and numerous. The project was a long time in the making, and the problems run deep.

[*Translation*]

Public Services and Procurement Canada is responsible for administering the pay of more than 290,000 federal public servants in the over 100 departments and agencies that make up the federal public service.

The need to modernize the public service pay system was raised in 2008 by the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates. Shortly thereafter, in 2009, the Conservatives began to make plans to transform the administration of pay services. In 2011, the Conservative government acquired the PeopleSoft pay system from IBM and decided to centralize front line pay services for the entire government in a new public service pay centre in Miramichi, New Brunswick.

The goal was to acquire a cost-effective, sustainable pay system. However, it goes without saying that this transformation was an utter failure.

An independent review conducted by Goss Gilroy in 2017 provided a detailed analysis and some 17 lessons learned in six different areas. According to the report, the project failed because the government underestimated its complexity.

Why can the government not now, in 2018, ensure that its employees are paid properly and on time?

• (1235)

[*English*]

The implementation of such a complex business transformation initiative across the entire Government of Canada was a massive undertaking that I believe history will record was set up to fail. The reality is that the Harper Conservatives botched the Phoenix pay system from the start. They chose the high-risk, cost-cutting route that has landed us in this present situation.

To put it bluntly, this project was designed to save money. It should have been focused on serving employees. As we have seen, it accomplished neither. Technology was stripped of important functionality to meet budgets and timelines. The Conservative government chose not to purchase expert training and change management support, and instead tried to handle this internally as cheaply as possible. It ended up being ineffective and insufficient.

I cannot overemphasize the extent to which the lack of proper governance oversight, business processes, technical and human resource capacity, and change management in the early stages of this initiative have contributed to getting us to where we are today. The Harper Conservative government spent \$309 million to create an unproven and flawed pay system, and prematurely booked savings of \$70 million per year.

The design and implementation were rushed and staff were not trained. It was so rushed that in the summer of 2015, the function of supporting retroactive transactions was postponed indeterminately. Years later, the decision to descope this feature still has a significant impact on employees accepting acting positions, and on pay advisers processing collective agreements.

Business of Supply

There was no change management strategy in place. In fact, 700 specialized compensation staff were fired before Phoenix was launched. Many were given notice as early as April of 2014. Perhaps the former president of the Treasury Board, the hon. member for Parry Sound—Muskoka, will help us understand the decisions that were made under his watch. It seems that he made decisions about slashing the back office without understanding the full impact of what they were doing. The second report of the Auditor General, which we expect later this spring, may provide further information and insight into these decisions and their impacts.

When Phoenix was launched, the existing pay system slated for decommissioning was in poor shape and at high risk of failure. Senior officials advised that Phoenix was ready to go. Let me be clear: there was no other option. The employees responsible for delivering pay service using the old system had already been informed that their positions were cut, and many had already left.

Once launched, the Phoenix problems ran so deep that it took time to understand what was wrong and identify solutions to stabilize the system. In addition, there was a backlog of 40,000 existing employee cases that were unresolved from the previous system. To make matters worse, the learning curve associated with Phoenix was underestimated, so transactions were not processed as quickly as planned. More importantly, there was inadequate capacity. The public service no longer had enough experienced and knowledgeable pay experts in its ranks to help transition to the new system. Those 700-plus compensation advisers would have been a game changer had they not been cut by our predecessors.

How did our government respond? We opened satellite offices and hired over 200 compensation staff. These were critical first steps in helping to make some progress in reducing the backlog. We shifted resources, at the request of the union, to prioritize transactions involving parental and disability leave. As a result, those transactions have been processed on time.

However, as the 2016 tax season approached, employees were rightfully concerned with the implications of overpayment for their tax returns. The resources required to handle the overpayments and issue accurate tax slips meant that the backlog of outstanding transactions increased.

Last spring, the department shifted its attention to implementing the 21 collective agreements that our government had signed with public service unions. I should note that these agreements had been ignored by the Conservatives. When we took office, the Harper Conservatives had let all 27 public service union collective agreements expire. Some had been expired for several years. Our government made negotiating these agreements a priority, and, as we said, we have successfully negotiated 21 agreements, which will cover over 90% of represented public servants. This is a great news story, one that has been lost in the shadow of the irresponsible behaviour of the previous Harper Conservative government.

The job of implementing these collective agreements further exacerbated the strain on the pay system. Implementation added hundreds of thousands of transactions to the pay system. We had to calculate retroactive payments going back several years in some cases, and this required data to be pulled from the government's now decommissioned pay system, as well as requiring significant manual

calculations. These agreements should have been dealt with much sooner. The Harper Conservatives' adversarial relationships with unions created an added pressure on the new pay system. Again, the department reassigned compensation advisers to process these agreements. The number of outstanding pay transactions continued to rise.

As the government has needed to respond to pay problems, Public Services and Procurement Canada has also been looking at the root causes. One of the major causes for pay delays was the inconsistencies between Phoenix and the patchwork of 32 HR systems in place across government. It is because pay is directly linked to human resources processes that we saw that an integrated pay and HR approach was necessary to address issues. It was also clear that one department alone could not identify or implement all the solutions. A whole-of-government approach was needed.

● (1240)

Addressing those challenges is front and centre in our approach. In November, the President of the Treasury Board and I outlined a series of measures focused on bringing the pay system to a point of stability. Our efforts to stabilize the pay system fall into four broad areas: governance and informed decisions; improved processes and technologies; increased capacity and service; and partnership and engagement.

We know that a whole-of-government approach with strong governance and oversight is crucial. We are addressing mistakes from the past, but the solutions remain imperative today. This is why the Prime Minister established the working group of ministers to ensure that all ministers and deputy ministers were focused on addressing the issues of paying public servants.

We have all hands on deck. An integrated team of senior officials from my department and Treasury Board Secretariat is leading an overall effort to stabilize the pay system, both at the pay centre and across the government. A strong governance model that brings together views and realities from across the public service is supporting the work of the integrated team. It is supported by a deputy ministers oversight committee and interdepartmental working groups.

Our government is also undertaking significant initiatives that underlay the stabilizing of the Phoenix pay system and will improve payroll processing for our employees. These measures include: implementation of legislative changes to deductions and tax rates; improvements to system functionality to process and manage retroactive payments; stabilize payroll processing and HR to pay integration, among others.

Business of Supply

We have also signed a new application manage service contract with IBM to shift to outcome-based management on key functional streams. To improve process and technology, we are addressing the root causes of human resources-to-pay system problems, especially the way Phoenix interacts with these 32 HR systems.

Our current human resources pay and finance processes and practices do not align with Phoenix, resulting in many time-consuming manual calculations and delays for employees waiting for their pay. Solving these issues means looking at how pay requests are generated in departments, the HR processes to enter, approve, and send transactions to Phoenix.

This whole-of-government approach to examine and adjust these processes and practices should have been done well before the implementation of Phoenix. The integrated team is putting in place much-needed changes in how we manage our business processes from human resources to pay. We have to ensure the pay system is aligned from start to finish, from the initial staffing action to pay request to pay receipt.

We are also redesigning the HR processes that are creating many of the pay issues employees are experiencing, such as transfers in and out, termination, and pay for acting positions. We are also looking at how work is organized so transactions can be handled more efficiently. For instance, at the pay centre, we have piloted a new approach that organizes compensation experts and support staff into pods that specialize in specific departments on transaction types. Early results are promising and suggest that this approach can help reduce our backlog.

[*Translation*]

There is no question that the previous government's decision to lay off 700 experienced pay advisers had massive consequences. We are rebuilding that capacity, and I want to thank the public service unions for their valuable support for our efforts. Last May, the government invested \$142 million in capacity and technology. An additional \$56 million in new funding is included in this year's Supplementary Estimates (C). The bulk of this funding is being used to add capacity to the pay centre and satellite offices.

We have provided a suite of measures for recruiting and retaining pay advisers to help us do the work that needs to be done. We have more than doubled the number of pay advisers since Phoenix was launched, and we continue to seek out new ways to serve our employees better.

My department has also partnered with Veterans Affairs Canada to set up new temporary pay offices to process transactions in Charlottetown and Kirkland Lake. From day one, our focus has been on helping employees, in marked contrast to the approach taken by Mr. Harper's Conservatives. That is why there will soon be 100 people in our client contact centre who will have access to Phoenix, which means they will be able to respond directly to employees calling about pay problems and provide them with more details.

Lastly, we are reinforcing our partnerships and mobilization. Opinions and feedback from the unions, departments, and experts in human resources, pay, and technology are essential for getting this right.

● (1245)

A union-management committee on Phoenix meets regularly to discuss problems and potential solutions. We also provide departments and organizations with monthly dashboards to better orient decision-making. We are committed to implementing lessons learned as mentioned in the Goss Gilroy and Auditor General reports so that we will never again find ourselves in this kind of situation.

[*English*]

We are going forward with these measures, but it will take time and concerted efforts across all departments. There is no easier quick fix for the problem to fix the system. To think otherwise would see us repeat the mistakes that got us here: poor planning, rushed analysis, and an overly narrow focus driven by savings not service to employees.

The well-documented history of this file provides the reasons why we are having this debate, but I am not offering it as an excuse. To be clear, we did not create this problem, but it is ours to fix, and we will.

As a responsible employer, we will do right by our employees. Nowhere is this better demonstrated than on the issue of training.

We may never know how many pay problems could have been avoided had the previous government made proper investments in training. I will let the former president of the Treasury Board Secretariat explain why training was not a priority for his government. Better training is a key solution moving forward, and we are also looking at other ways to help employees. One of the most vexing problems being faced is overpayments, more specifically, how repayments are being handled.

One of the particularities of federal tax law requires employees who were overpaid in one tax year to repay what they received plus tax withholdings in the following tax year. This is complicated and unfair for employees who are already under strain and stress. We are working with the unions to address the situation so we can ensure no employees are out of pocket because of pay issues.

Clearly, public service pay is complex and issues with Phoenix have only made things more difficult. Understandably, many employees want to know why we did not simply scrap Phoenix and implement a new pay system. We are drawing from lessons learned, expert advice, and are exploring longer-term options to ensure we have a sustainable, reliable, and efficient pay system.

Business of Supply

While we explore other options, we must forge ahead on addressing the Phoenix pay system issues and backlog. Public servants deserve a modern, state-of-the-art pay system. Our immediate goal is to stabilize the pay system, but we are exploring longer-term options to ensure we have the system. We have to keep paying close to 300,000 public servants every two weeks, so we have no immediate choice but to bring Phoenix to a point of stability, where pay is being provided accurately and on time. This is my number one priority.

We will get through these pay problems, but there is much hard work ahead. As I have said many times, we will leave no stone unturned.

With regard to the motion at hand, our government supports the spirit of the motion. This being said, the motion contains elements that are factually inaccurate. The NDP claims that our government made a gross error in judgment in implementing Phoenix. This is not the case. The die was cast when the previous government sacked hundreds of compensation advisers and the previous pay system was slated for decommissioning. There was no system to go back to.

The NDP also states that the system was implemented against the advice of our employees. With all due respect, there is conclusive evidence that demonstrates officials advised in favour of moving forward with Phoenix.

• (1250)

[Translation]

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her recap of the Phoenix pay system. I would just like to remind the Liberals that they have been in power for two years and that they were in power when the system was launched on February 28, 2016. They can blame the Conservatives for initiating the process all they want, but they are the ones responsible for launching phase two. We do not need to argue over who is at fault because they are the ones who gave it the green light. So much harm has been done, and I encourage them to read what public servants and unions have written in condemnation. There have been several press conferences. Public servants have appealed to the government to find solutions and figure out how to pay them what they are owed.

I would like to know if the minister has any plans to compensate people whose credit score has been affected or who have suffered psychological distress because not getting paid has cost them everything.

[English]

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Mr. Speaker, make no mistake. The choice that our government faced was not between going to a new system and keeping the old system; it was a new system or no system. At that point, we forged ahead and very quickly realized what we were dealing with.

With respect to the question, I cannot overemphasize how much we sympathize with public servants, how committed we are to resolving these issues for them, how apologetic we are that we, as a government, partisanship aside, have put them and their families in an untenable situation. I encourage public servants to speak with their managers. We have provided compensation for out-of-pocket expenses and there are emergency pay services. We are working with

unions on discussing compensation because of all of these other factors.

However, let me assure everyone that we have literally left no stone unturned. If anybody has a suggestion, I am completely open to hearing it.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is very clear that the minister has not read her government's released ATIPs and OPQs, so I will point out a few items.

She blames the previous government for Phoenix and she mentions the backlog. Her government received on December 23, as part of the transition activities checklist, a note saying to clear the backlog before going live. About a year ago, the minister's deputy minister sent a letter to her, stating that one of the main problems with the Phoenix disaster was the backlog not being cleared.

The minister talked about capacity issues and layoffs. Here is an OPQ from her parliamentary secretary saying that there were internal project assessments and independent third-party assessments done and both assessments came to the conclusion there was sufficient capacity. The minister blames the layoffs of staff, but her own department says that is not the issue.

A further OPQ shows that between the Liberals pulling the trigger on Phoenix in January and July of 2016, when they were finally forced to agree to an emergency committee meeting, guess how many job postings they had for pay advisers? They had one, and they had it for 10 days only. I do not place any merit in what the minister has been saying.

When the minister appeared at the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates in November, the Conservatives asked, in a non-partisan way, along with the NDP, for help for MPs and their constituency offices so they could help their constituents with Phoenix. At that meeting, she promised that by December 15 she would get back to us on this issue. December 15 came and went. We have written letters and sent emails to her, and there has been nothing.

When is the minister going to get back to us in providing the constituency support she promised us in November?

• (1255)

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Mr. Speaker, I can assure everyone that when Phoenix was implemented, the 40,000-case backlog existed because there was no other choice but to move forward with that pay system at the time. There was simply nothing to go back to and we did not have people to run it, even if there was. There were 700 people who had retired, been laid off, or moved on to other positions.

Business of Supply

With respect to the offer to provide help for MP offices, I can assure the member we are working on this. We are trying desperately not to divert resources from the backlog of transactions. We are intentionally trying not to interfere with existing processes, whether they be union grievances or existing relationships employees have with managers. We recognize we have to support MPs and give them the most up-to-date information. In the very near future, I look forward to advising MPs of what we have come up with.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since taking over the reins of government, we have had to build upon a faulty system, as well as deal with a number of non-union agreements. In fact, there were no union agreements under the Harper government. We had to deal with that, and that had to be factored into the Phoenix system. At the end of the day, as the minister has pointed out, we are very concerned about ensuring civil servants are treated in the best way possible with regard to pay and benefits.

If a civil servant is frustrated by the system, what would the minister recommend that individual do?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Mr. Speaker, with respect to collective agreement implementation, it was a very exciting time for our government in making good on our promise to work with public servants, to renew our relationship with unions, and to negotiate long outstanding collective agreements. We negotiated in good faith. We attempted to implement these collective agreements in good faith, but as I said, it added hundreds of transactions to an already laboured and clunky pay system we had inherited.

If public servants are experiencing pay system problems, I encourage them, first of all, to speak with their managers. I encourage them to access emergency pay, to access payment for out-of-pocket expenses, to speak with their pay advisers in Miramichi, and to take any step they think necessary. They should talk to their unions. There are a number of avenues of recourse for our public servants. Once again, I apologize that they even have to take them.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, this whole disaster reminds me so much of Cortés in 1519, who took a fleet of Spaniards to the coast of Mexico and on arriving, before they found the golden treasures, burned all the boats. There was no going back.

The Phoenix pay disaster was set up like that, so partisanship should be set aside. This was a bomb left to us by the previous government. The Liberals have not defused it.

Why are we not talking about suing IBM? We had a system that worked. Federal civil servants were paid on time all the time, and no one thought it was a big success when it happened. How did we privatize paying our civil servants in such a way that we keep paying the people who have ripped us off because the contract says every time we go back for more, we pay through the nose. Sue IBM and get our own civil servants to fix this mess.

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the member that this was an unequivocal disaster and a bomb that was left to us by the former government.

We have to understand the scope. It is imperative to understand that the contract with the provider was extremely narrow in scope,

and we have been holding the provider to task on everything it was supposed to deliver. I can assure the member that Phoenix will be fixed by public servants. It will be fixed by the hard-working experts in our midst who are working tirelessly to resolve this issue.

We have an ongoing relationship with the vendor. The sole purpose is to ensure that we hold it to the terms of the contract, and it is very willing to help us as much as it possibly can. It is partnership, whether it be with unions, public servants, vendors, or other parties, that will get this resolved.

I encourage, once again, that we all work together, because we are all impacted by this issue.

● (1300)

Hon. Tony Clement (Parry Sound—Muskoka, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Edmonton West.

I want to thank my NDP colleague from Jonquière for bringing this motion forward. It is important that we recognize that public servants across the country are still suffering as a result of the Liberal government's inability to address the mess it caused by prematurely hitting the start button on the Phoenix pay system. Like many of my colleagues in this House, my office has heard those terrible stories of families and retirees, hard-working citizens of our nation, who have had their lives severely damaged by the government's implementation of the Phoenix system before it was ready for rollout.

This is a basic issue. As the member for Jonquière herself said, surely one of the basic tenets of the administration of government, which the Liberal Party claims to be good at, is that it pays its people on time for the work they do. Surely that is one of the basic things one can expect from a government, yet for year one of the government, for year two of the government, and now for year three of the government, this has been an abject failure of the party and the government. The failures of the government have played havoc with people's lives and their finances. We know now that this problem will be compounded for years to come as employees' retirement situations are left in the lurch, thanks to the mistakes being made and not rectified today.

As my colleague's motion addresses, the government was completely oblivious to the warnings sent out by departmental staff and the unions to not move forward with Phoenix. In fact, the previous Conservative government, as I mentioned in my questions and comments, held off on hitting the start button more than once because of similar warnings. After starting the system prematurely, the Liberal government continued on its clueless path, and that has now created this runaway train.

Business of Supply

There is plenty of evidence to bear this out, much of it in the Auditor General's report released before Christmas. The Auditor General reported that it took the Liberals four months to recognize that there were serious pay problems, and it took about a year to have a better understanding of the situation. By the time the Liberals woke up to the mess they had made, the number of public servants in departments and agencies using the Miramichi pay centre who had outstanding pay requests quadrupled to more than 150,000.

Until about a year after Phoenix was launched, the government was still responding to pay problems willy-nilly as they arose. The Auditor General reported that by last summer, which was almost two years into the Liberals' mandate, the Liberals still had no road map to deal with the problems they themselves had created. The problems grew to the point that as of June 2017, unresolved errors in pay amounted to over half a billion dollars. That is half a billion dollars of unresolved pay amounts.

The evidence does not stop there. Let us look at the Liberals' ineptitude in reviewing the system-related issues with Phoenix. The system has about 200 custom programs to handle some of the 80,000 federal government pay rules and to work with departmental human resources systems to process pay. The government determined that it needed to analyze all 200 of these programs to identify the system-related sources of pay errors. However, the government started its analysis only in March 2017, more than a year after the pay problems started to be reported, and by last fall, it had analyzed only six of the 200 custom programs. That is not good enough. It is not good enough at all.

• (1305)

To make the situation abundantly clear, I will cite from the Auditor General's report:

Public Services and Procurement Canada and the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat did not recognize early enough that they needed a comprehensive governance structure to resolve pay problems and develop a sustainable solution. Public Services and Procurement Canada initially responded to pay problems on its own and did not fully involve departments and agencies in developing a plan to resolve pay problems.

The Auditor General found that 16 months after the pay problems first arose, there was still no comprehensive governance structure to resolve the underlying causes of the problems. In contrast, as my hon. colleagues in the NDP have indicated, Queensland Health, a government department in the Australian state of Queensland, which had similar problems with a pay system, put in place a comprehensive governance structure within four months of the pay problems arising. There were 16 months of non-response from the current Liberal government versus a four-month response in Queensland, Australia.

The Liberals' lack of awareness and the complete lack of willingness to address this mess is not only astounding but is a complete and utter failure of competency that is hurting many thousands of public servants and their families.

Today's motion is a reminder that the Liberals are still, unfortunately for this country, floundering on this file, while public servants' lives and the lives of their families continue to be irreparably damaged. So many of them have reached out to their members of Parliament for assistance, really as a last resort. However, I must report in this place that our offices have received

little by way of support from the government. In November, as my hon. colleague for Edmonton West has already indicated, the minister said that she was willing to help MPs' offices by providing specific resources for the Phoenix cases pouring in every week. However, after months of no response, we learned that the additional resources amount to Liberal staffers taking down details in the minister's office. That is not good enough by a long shot.

We still have these outstanding cases, and I am sure that if we were to add the cases of our NDP and Liberal colleagues on top of what my Conservative colleagues know, that number would rise significantly. There are 300 cases among the Conservative caucus alone. I daresay that it is the tip of the iceberg. It is another example of how the Liberals promised more support but failed to deliver.

Therefore, today, in the spirit of holding the government to account on this file and not letting the voices of Phoenix victims go silent in the House, I and my colleagues will be supporting this motion, and I sincerely hope that members on the government side do the same.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

I will not be asking him or his party for any personal recommendations for software or anything else, but I will admit that he made an excellent point in his speech that the Liberals are the ones who hit the start button.

Does the member sincerely believe that we can get this blue-blooded government to admit that it is responsible for this problem?

When the government agrees to pay financial compensation, can this be considered to be a fine and that the government is acknowledging its mistake?

• (1310)

Hon. Tony Clement: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is correct. The current government is the one that hit the start button on the system. The government decided to implement this system, even though it was not ready.

[*English*]

It is very clear that all the warning signs were there, the warning signs that meant the previous government, which did initiate this process and that is something I want to be clear on, declined to start the implementation because it knew better based on the warnings of experts and public servants, yet the current government does not show a scintilla, not a speck, of responsibility taking or apologizing for its mistakes. It apologizes for what it says are other people's mistakes, but not for its own mistakes. This is classic Liberal government subterfuge.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as parliamentary secretary, I am proud that the Prime Minister has given me the opportunity to work on solutions to this problem. I have a question for my colleague from my perspective as a resident of the national capital, as the member of Parliament for Gatineau, and as a citizen of this city.

[English]

Does my colleague across not understand that he sounds like the arsonist who complains when the fire department shows up? Does he think residents of the national capital region do not remember his dreary DRAP program, his steadfast refusal to negotiate with public sector unions for three years? It was three years without a collective agreement.

Does he not remember the order from his office that \$70 million in savings must be realized from the pay system? I sat here and listened to this member moralize and lecture the House for 10 straight minutes. Does he not realize that the citizens of Gatineau and the national capital region, as well public servants all over this country, expect, want, and demand that this person take responsibility for the problem and time bomb he left them?

Hon. Tony Clement: Mr. Speaker, that was vaguely not Churchillian.

I am proud of my record in government. I am proud that I led the program that put the budget in balance, which the Liberals squandered in five seconds flat as soon as they had the reins of power.

I ask the hon. member to consider his words carefully. The hon. member is on the side of the chamber that means he is in government and responsible for activities. The Liberals are in their third year of being in government and they are still saying that things are other people's fault or happened before their term. When are they going to take responsibility, show leadership, and pay employees on time?

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, normally I start by saying it is a pleasure to rise to talk about a bill, a subject, or a motion, but I cannot say that this time. As we have heard repeatedly, it is well into two years of the Phoenix fiasco. It is a disgrace that we are still chatting about it.

Earlier, in a question, I brought up a commitment made by the minister, which she promptly blew off, to provide resources to the constituency offices to help people with the Phoenix disaster. She waxed on eloquently, saying that employees should talk to their managers, their supervisors, or this person or that.

I want to give a personal, human example of why we need the assistance and how the government continues to let down Canadians and public servants.

There is a lady in my riding, whose name is Sebastienne Critchley. I will read part of her letter. She says that on April 2016, she took leave without pay for medical reasons. She says that her pay should have been stopped and was not, and she received an overpayment. She notified her manager, as was requested, to try to resolve the issue. She returned to work in June, reduced her hours, and

continued to be paid full time. She took additional leave without pay in July 2016, and continued to be paid.

She took the right steps. She told her manager and supervisor. Nothing happened.

In October, she did not receive a paycheque. There was no notice, just no pay one day. It had been clawed back for the overpayment.

In November 2016, she went on maternity leave and had her son, Logan, who she brought in to my office. I realize Logan is probably only about a year old, but I would like to say hello. She said they had spent over three weeks in neonatal care. The time she should have spent with her son was instead spent in a hospital bed and later in the hallway of intensive care calling and trying to get a record of employment so she could receive an income during this stressful period.

She was told at the time that it would take six months. She went on and talked to a different pay adviser about the overpayment, and he suddenly stopped responding to her. She called back again, and she was told it was \$7,500 that she was overpaid, and then \$22,000, so approximately \$30,000 in total. Then she was told she was just a category three, the lowest priority, and therefore, they would not even take a message to have someone call her back.

In February 2017, she received a T4, followed by an amended T4. Now those who have been following the Phoenix saga for so long will remember that in the emergency committee, which the Conservatives forced in July 2016 and the Liberals fought against, Conservative members brought up the T4 issue. We were told by the deputy minister to not worry because it was all in hand. Apparently, it was not all in hand.

Her letter continues, saying she began working with a compensation adviser who advised her that her overpayment was now \$30,000 because Phoenix had generated additional payments of roughly \$15,000, which were never actually paid to her. Because her T4 was so low, she had credits she was not able to use so she passed them over to her husband. Then her child tax credit was calculated incorrectly, because of the T4 issue.

She estimates she has spent over 200 hours attempting to resolve this, taking time away from caring for her children, having late nights, attempting to analyze the information. She has had depression and a lack of sleep. She decided to review her pay stubs. Imagine her surprise when the pay stubs she had printed off with each pay, compared to the new ones available to her, did not match.

Business of Supply

The letter goes on and on. She says she lays awake at night fearing that she will end up repaying \$30,000 when it should have been \$21,000. She went on maternity leave and indicated that she wanted to pay her benefits coverage in advance with post-dated cheques. She tried, and so did her team leader and manager, to find out how much she needed to pay. She finally went on leave without that information. When she came back, she had a letter stating that if she did not pay in advance, her benefits coverage would not cover the period she was off and she needed to repay any benefits. It was several hundred dollars she did not have, because she is currently being asked to pay back approximately \$9,000 she never received.

She said she went back to work September 5, and on September 26 she received an email from the agent who was actually working on the file saying he would have information for her later that week. On October 3, she followed up and there was no answer. On October 5, she received an email asking if she had reviewed her pay stubs, as if it was somehow her responsibility. On October 12, she sent another message asking for this information. Then on October 16, she said that despite numerous requests, she had no response whatsoever.

Ms. Critchley came into my office. I saw this letter and she was called to my office so that we could meet face to face and try to help her. I realize this is a disaster and there are lots of other people trying to get their pay fixed, so I took it upon myself to say that we were going to have the deputy ministers in committee and I would personally ask them to take this on.

• (1315)

We actually had to filibuster at committee to get the minister to show up to talk to us about Phoenix and about what the plan was going to be to fix it. We got no information out of that, but we did get a commitment from her in November that, by December 15, they would have a plan on how MPs could help victims of Phoenix. Now we have seen the minister stand up and say that MPs should not do that as it would be interfering and that they should let the managers do it. However, we have seen very clearly that the managers are not capable.

I want to continue on with Ms. Critchley's case. I went to Deputy Minister Lemay and Deputy Minister Linklater who were in charge of the Phoenix disaster, for lack of a better word. I asked them to please help this one person. There are 150,000 people affected by Phoenix. I realize I cannot help them all, but I wanted to help this one lady in my riding because she was not getting help. I went to the very top and was promised that someone would get in touch with her.

This letter has four pages of issues. She spoke to someone and the email back from the government department said that she should speak to her manager to request the overtime that she was owed. It came back to me. That was enough for me, so I went back to the deputy minister. I asked Ms. Critchley to keep me copied on all correspondence. I have them here. It is about 58 emails back and forth. We are into another year and the T4s are still incorrect, and now I have more emails.

This just goes to show that we cannot fluff it off and tell people to go to their managers. The MPs are here for a reason. They are here to help those affected by Phoenix. It is not enough to make a promise

and say that they will get back to us on how they will support the MPs and then just take off, ignore emails and letters sent to the minister, and have the minister stand in the House and say it is interfering if the MP is trying to help someone else. That is disgraceful. The minister made a promise. She should keep that promise and give the resources to the members of Parliament to help their constituencies.

I want to turn to the Phoenix pay system itself. The Liberals will blame the former Conservative government. They look over the fact that they were warned in advance by the unions. We have documentation from January 2016 of the unions warning them that the pay system was not ready. Going back a few months to summer 2015, when the PSPC wanted to start Phoenix, the Conservative government said that it was not ready. We have seen the documents that said the training had not been finished, and that there were lots of errors in the pay system. The Conservative government said, "No. Go back and get it working properly." The unions said it was not working.

At committee, the current deputy minister told us that the government had never spoken to the union, and then backtracked when presented with the facts.

Of course the Liberals are going to blame the Conservatives, even though the Liberal government knew that it was not ready and went ahead. They are going to blame the bureaucrats. We heard it today that the Liberals were told to go ahead. However, the Gartner report that went to the Treasury Board very specifically said the pay system was not ready. If we wanted a smoking gun, that is the perfect example because it went to the Treasury Board. The Liberal government said it did not pass it on to PSPC, as it did not know. However, the government knew about it.

They are going to blame the vendors like IBM and PeopleSoft.

It is very clear that the blame for the Phoenix fiasco sits with the Liberal government. The Liberals talk about the backlog, but we have documents showing that the government was told in advance, on December 15, as part of the pay process to clear the backlog. A year later, Deputy Minister Lemay writes a letter to the minister saying that the problems of Phoenix were caused by not clearing the backlog.

Also, we have documents to the government stating very clearly all the issues, such as problems with pay changes and problems where the Coast Guard said it was having a 50% failure rate in December. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans stated the same thing, very clearly, right to the government. The Liberal government knew it was there.

When the Phoenix problem started rolling out in January, which was the first wave, in February at committee we warned the government. The minister at the time said there were only 77 cases. We knew it was a lot bigger and the problem still continues.

Business of Supply

The biggest problem is that the government will not take it seriously. The current government will not make a plan to help Canadians and to help MPs help their constituents. The government is doing nothing and that is the problem.

• (1320)

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I look forward to asking my colleague from Gatineau this same question. After all, he asked for proof that the government was aware of the problems with the Phoenix pay system.

[English]

I have a memo provided by the Treasury Board, dated January 13, 2016, a little more than a month before the Liberals pressed the metaphorical big red button. It is a readiness assessment of Phoenix, and it has such gems as “System readiness is questionable out of our 25 outstanding defects 10 are still critical and not fixed”; “Increase in overpayment at the moment without the Phoenix implementation, what will be the impact later”; “On the fix there will not be any testing before go live”; “What is the contingency plan, not serious of not having this.” Here is another gem, from Public Safety Canada, which says, “Testing results issue: 30% errors not satisfactory. Issues with conversion.”

Members get the picture. I am sure this access to information request is a great long read in *The Ottawa Citizen* for the member for Gatineau.

At the risk of posing a rhetorical question, I am wondering if the member who just spoke can explain why the government refuses to do what governments should do, which is take responsibility and fix the problem.

• (1325)

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Mr. Speaker, that truly is the question of the day. I remember posing the question about a year ago to the previous minister and making the statement that if she had spent half the effort on fixing Phoenix as she did on blaming others, we would have had the Liberal Phoenix fiasco fixed by now. We have seen it from day one, when we brought this up. Previous Minister Foote stated that there were only 77 issues and there was not a big worry, even though we knew it was much higher. We have documents showing there were 40,000 outstanding backlogs.

At committee, we saw the Treasury Board president, with his deputy ministers, say that it was a great success, and that the Liberals would not go with the February 26 rollout unless it was 99% ready. They ignored the warnings. Then, when Phoenix blew up, they denied there was an issue. It took an emergency committee meeting in July for them to actually act. It looks like that meeting was the emphasis for them to start hiring some staff. It boggles the mind why the government ignored the problem and still, to this day, is more intent on blaming others than taking responsibility and fixing the problem.

[Translation]

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to my friend opposite from the Conservative Party of Canada. The pay transformation initiative began in 2008. It

moved through many steps until 2015, when it was recommended that we implement it. That much is clear and I want my NDP colleague to know that.

For two years we have been working on the mess they left us. For two years we have accepted the very serious responsibility of fixing the problems we inherited with the Phoenix pay system. We have never shirked our responsibility to fix the Phoenix pay system. We have accepted it.

The question I would like to ask my colleague is the following: what share of responsibility is he willing to accept? Since he is speaking on behalf of his party, is he prepared to accept any responsibility for developing the Phoenix pay system? Is he prepared to accept some responsibility and, if yes, to apologize?

[English]

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Mr. Speaker, this goes to the crux of the issue. We are looking for a plan to help our constituents. We are looking for a plan to help the thousands affected by the Liberal Phoenix fiasco, and all we get from the government is, “Will you accept the blame?” It again goes to the question that if the Liberals put half the effort into fixing the problem as they do into blaming others, we could have solved this issue a year ago.

The evidence is clear. The Liberals went ahead when it was not ready. They knew it was not ready. They have a problem, and instead of fixing it, it appears they are intent on blaming.

This is no different than the issue with inviting a convicted attempted assassin to meet with the Prime Minister. It is someone else's fault. Maybe they should make that person the head of Phoenix. Maybe that person would get a bit more work done.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Before resuming debate, I want to remind the hon. members not to talk too loudly because it makes it difficult to hear the question or the answer, regardless of which side it is coming from.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for North Island—Powell River.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie.

I hope that the House will have the patience to indulge me for one short moment. This past week in my riding, I was honoured to spend a few moments at two stops of the Wounded Warrior Run in B.C. These folks ran all the way from Port Hardy to Victoria to talk about the challenges that so many veterans and first responders face. They are fundraising to make sure that they can provide immediate support. I deeply appreciate their dedication, their vigorousness in the run, and their commitment to the people who rush in when others are rushing out. I just want to take a moment to express my appreciation for them.

Business of Supply

Today, we are talking about something that is really a fundamental issue. It is about paying employees on time. It is about making sure that employees get the pay they deserve for the work they do. The most important thing we must do in this debate today is recognize that our public service workers are still doing their work every day, and this is a tremendous testament to their dedication to this country. They are still showing up, often not knowing whether they are going to get paid, and whether they are going to be paid less or overpaid. I just cannot say enough about all those people. I thank them for continuing their amazing work even in this very precarious environment.

I am hearing a lot of partisanship in this place today, and we need to let go of that. We need to let go of blame. We need to get moving on action.

The reality is that people in this country are refusing position changes, promotions, or parental leave because they are afraid they will not get paid. Think about that, Mr. Speaker. There are people in this country who are making decisions on whether or not to have children. People are afraid they will not get paid if there is any change to their employment.

This system was put in place because it was meant to save \$70 million a year. Now we are over \$400 million in trying to fix it, and 73% of federal employees are struggling under this issue. That is close to 200,000 workers in this country. At the end of the 2017 audit period, 49,000 employees were still waiting to have pay requests processed, after having waited more than a year.

The reality on the ground is that often there is no compensation for shift work. Overtime is being recorded or paid improperly. Income tax is being calculated incorrectly. Delays are happening in pension payments. Employees are getting overpaid, underpaid, or not paid at all.

I remember one constituent telling me about working in the same position for over 20 years and suddenly that full-time job is being paid as a part-time job. This person keeps showing up and hoping that this will get fixed.

The result is incredible stress for workers and their families. We cannot leave that out of this conversation. Families are in incredibly precarious positions because they are not getting their compensation.

I am thankful that we are having this important discussion today. I want to talk about some people in my riding. This is so important, because it is a human issue. People in this country are struggling.

I want to talk about my constituent Graham. He worked with DFO for over 32 years and retired in 2016. He was expecting to be paid his severance pay, and he has been asking for it since 2016. He was told it was being processed. He called again in early 2017 and was told that he was supposed to fill out a form that he had never heard of before, and he had to fill it out online. Graham is not really comfortable working online and was very distressed that nobody had even spoken to him about this form. He finally figured it out and on May 4, 2017, with the help of a local financial adviser, he submitted the form. It is now February 2018, and Graham is told that it is still being processed. This is somebody who dedicated 32 years of his life to this job and to this country, and he is now being told that he still has to wait.

● (1330)

Then there is David, who worked for DFO from 2001 to 2016. David received a pay increase in 2014, but it never appeared on his pay. Now he is owed for the two-year period and still has not received that. He has called numerous times since leaving in 2016, and he has always been told that his file is being processed. He just called again last week and was advised that no one has been assigned to his file yet, nor has anyone looked at it. He is to call back in the next few weeks for yet another update.

The reality is that this is causing him and his family significant emotional and mental stress. It is important to recognize that people who are trying to do their job are being forced to not only do their job, but try to fight for their pay. I am pretty sure that this is not what they are supposed to be doing and they should not be asked to do that. David just wants to see this resolved and move on. There is over two years of money owed to him for that pay increase.

Then we have Scott, who worked for DFO for 36 years. When I started here, we knew that the Coast Guard station in Comox was going to be shut down. We fought hard not to have that happen, but unfortunately it did. After all those years of service, Scott was asked to go to Victoria and help change it over. He did all that work, and then he went back to Comox. He is now working for the Department of National Defence.

It is important to know that Scott is still being paid as an employee of DFO. That has not been fixed yet. He also earned a small pay increase, and that is still not being given to him. Recently, Scott went online to track his case and noted 26 outstanding items needing to be processed under his employee number. This is two years of dealing with this pay system. He gets zero earnings sometimes, and other times he gets huge lump payments. His child tax benefit has been hugely impacted by this, because he was overpaid and then underpaid. This is incredibly stressful for his family.

Then there is Stacey, who has a mortgage. She is a single mom supporting her family and doing the best she can. She is now two annual increment payments behind. That was a large part of how she was going to pay the mortgage, and she still has not received it. Again, she is going back and forth between the HR team and the pay centre, and being told to go back again. She is trying to find time in her busy work schedule, where she is dedicated to working for the people of this country, and she does not have time for calling, fighting this fight, and filling out numerous forms. She lives off debt, as she does not have the money to support her family because the government has not fixed this.

These are the realities on the ground. I want to make sure that people in my riding of North Island—Powell River know what our party is asking for today, which is this:

Business of Supply

That, in the opinion of the House, the government committed a gross error in judgement when it operationalized the previous Conservative government's Phoenix pay system over the clear objections of both the affected unions and departmental staff, and that the House call on the government to: (a) pay all employees correctly and on time, every time, for the work they do; (b) exempt those who have been overpaid by Phoenix from having to pay back the 'gross' amount, despite actually receiving a substantially lower 'net' amount; (c) compensate those in the public service who have experienced damages from Phoenix, both financial and otherwise; and (d) publicly apologize to all of those who have endured hardship as a result of the government's error.

This is a reasonable request. This is a request that honours the realities on the ground of families that have lost so much. I have had constituents tell me stories about having to borrow a tremendous amount of money just to meet their basic needs. Constituents have had to eat at friends' houses, and communities are coming together to support these people, but it is completely unacceptable that they are being asked to do this.

Many business owners have said that if they ever did this, they would be charged and held accountable. How is it that there are two sets of rules for small businesses and for the government?

We ask the government to do the right thing, honour the people who work for us every day, make sure they are paid, and fix this fiasco.

• (1335)

[Translation]

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, where this motion succeeds is in identifying what we need to do to solve the problems created by the system the previous government left us.

However, what we find so troubling and absurd about the wording in the motion moved by my colleague from Jonquière is the presumption that there is any evidence whatsoever that the government acted against the recommendation of those responsible for the Conservatives' system.

I will ask the NDP member the same question I asked my colleagues from Jonquière and New Westminster—Burnaby: can she produce any evidence whatsoever that the government acted against the advice it got from the public service? Her colleagues could not.

• (1340)

[English]

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Mr. Speaker, just so the member knows, my riding is called North Island—Powell River. It is a beautiful riding with amazing people who work for the Department of National Defence, who work for DFO, and are not getting paid. If that is not evidence enough for this House to step up and do the right thing, then I am really shocked.

The member referred to the motion as absurd. This is not an absurd motion. This is a motion based on the realities that workers are facing in this country. People are losing their homes. That is not absurd. That is outrageous. This House and the government are not standing up and getting this fixed. One constituent said to me, "Where are the people who just write the cheques? I understand that the system is broken, but we just need to be paid."

When children are not getting fed, when houses are being lost, there is something significantly wrong. The government can say as much as it likes that it is putting systems in place, but I have people who have not been paid for months. That is totally unacceptable.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been to Powell River several times. It is a beautiful area.

I spoke previously about the work done in committee by me and her colleague the member for Regina—Lewvan. We had a commitment from the government in November to have resources by December 15 for members of Parliament so they could help those affected by the Phoenix issue. The government said that is not a priority and people should just call their managers. I wonder if my colleague believes that these people affected by Phoenix should simply call their manager, or the government should fulfill its commitment stated in November to have resources by December 15 for members of Parliament to help those affected by Phoenix.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Mr. Speaker, I absolutely agree that we need to do something fundamental. In my office alone since this started we have had over 50 cases. That may not seem like a lot but I know of offices that have had well over 200 cases. The reality is that we need to be providing the resources so that people can get the help.

When I talk about the stories in my riding, this is the challenge. We have workers who are being told to go to this office, that office, this other office. They are trying to work the offices off each other so that they can get their issues put forward a lot faster. That is a lot of time for workers to have to engage those different places and try to get them to leverage one another so that they can get action on their file.

We have to take a moment here to recognize that we need to serve the people who are facing this challenge, not serve the people who are incredibly responsible for it.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for that spot-on speech based on facts and the real-life experiences of the men and women who work for our country but get no respect from this Liberal government.

I would like to begin by saying we can all agree that the government's and the state's primary purpose is to ensure public safety. As the people responsible for the common good and communal harmony, the most important thing we can do is ensure that our fellow citizens live in safe communities, can send their children to school, can go to work, and can be safe, at work and on the street. I think we can all agree on that.

A government's second responsibility is delivering public services. What do people in our cities, towns, and villages need? They need doctors and nurses, schools, universities, and professional training. They also need people to ensure public safety, including police officers, military personnel, public servants who inspect food to make sure we do not get sick, and scientists who conduct research to make sure our medications are safe. All such people who provide these public services are part of the civil service.

Business of Supply

Public service employees are of course at the core of our actions and our mission as a government. Once the objectives of that mission are set and we have determined how we want to live as a society, what kind of justice system and equality we want, and how we can tackle poverty, we adjust our taxes accordingly to figure out how much we need to meet those objectives. I would say that this is one of the fundamental differences between the left and the right. On the left, we set social goals and then we make sure we have sufficient tax revenues to meet those needs, not the other way around, as people on the right tend to do.

Once the objectives have been set and public services have been put in place, the government needs to treat those who are working for society as a whole, its public servants, properly. Right now, those workers are not getting the respect they deserve. The rights of those that the government put on the front lines to make sure that it is taking positive action and moving society forward are currently being violated. These people are dealing with horrible situations. They have been under stress for years because of the incompetence of government officials, the incompetence of successive governments, and today because of the incompetence of the Liberal government. It is important to recognize the scope of the problem caused by the Phoenix pay system.

I thank my colleague from Jonquière for putting this issue on the agenda in an NDP opposition motion in order to remind the government of the urgent need to act. This situation has been going on for far too long. A total of 193,000 people across the country are affected. Nearly 200,000 people are not being paid properly for the work that they do. In some cases they are not being paid enough, while in others they are being paid too much. It may seem strange to say that it is a problem that people are being paid too much, but I will come back to that. The fact that this issue has not been resolved is a real problem, and it is getting worse as time goes on. It is extremely problematic, particularly at tax time, which is coming up soon. This can lead to a lot of extremely problematic situations.

Nearly 75% of members of the federal public service are victims of the Phoenix pay system. I say “victims” because these people are actual victims. They serve us all. They are following the orders of this government to carry out work that is important to us and we are incapable of paying them correctly. Canada is a G7 nation, but we are coming across as a banana republic. There are people who have to remortgage their home because they are not getting paid. There are people who have to max out their credit cards because they do not know when their next paycheque will come or whether they will get paid enough or paid properly for the number of hours worked. Collective agreements are being breached even though the federal government has a legal obligation to pay its employees on time and for the hours and work that were completed.

• (1345)

What will happen to all those people who have taken out bank loans to pay their rent and buy food and who must repay them and pay interest on their loans and credit cards? Why should they have to pay for the government's mismanagement and incompetence? Why are we asking the men and women who serve us to continue dealing with these absolutely appalling situations? This has been going on for two years. The government continues to tell us that things are coming along.

Last June, \$520 million in remuneration was not paid out because of Phoenix pay system errors. Last June, we owed public servants \$520 million, and this amount keeps growing. The problem is not being fixed. The ministers have changed, but there is still no solution. This is a monumental farce. We were supposed to save \$70 million a year with the Phoenix pay system, but we have wasted \$1 billion trying to solve the problem. Everyone agrees that it will take years to fix. The Auditor General himself said so.

How much will this cost Canadian taxpayers? How much will this cost Quebec taxpayers? Some people are saying \$4 billion to \$5 billion.

How can we calculate that figure? We can calculate it because there is a precedent. Surprisingly, this precedent comes from another Commonwealth country. In 2010, the health department of the state of Queensland in Australia decided to use a pay system invented and run by IBM to pay its 80,000 health workers. It was an instant catastrophe. They ran into the same problems we are seeing here with the Phoenix pay system, including pay errors, missing pay, incorrect amounts, underpayments, and overpayments.

It is mind-boggling that before implementing and launching the Phoenix pay system, the Canadian government never contacted Queensland state officials in Australia to find out what happened and what problems they encountered. This was reported by CBC/Radio-Canada this week. The people of Queensland are utterly stunned and bewildered to hear that the Canadian government forged ahead blindly, without performing any checks or calling the Australian government or the Queensland government. The head of the Queensland nurses' union said she could not believe that a Google search was not done on “IBM” and “payroll”. She is shocked to see virtually the same fiasco playing out a few years later in Canada.

In Australia, there was a public inquiry into this disaster, which threw the lives of public servants and their families into turmoil. The public inquiry was led by Richard Chesterman, who made a similar observation. He said, “[I did a] quick Google search before you came this afternoon and [in] 30 seconds the search turned up a reference to my inquiry.” This means that the Canadian government did not even think to see whether this had been done elsewhere and whether it had affected public servants before it decided to launch the Phoenix pay system. I would call this gross incompetence.

I would call this gross incompetence because the Phoenix pay system was launched in February 2016, which is four months after the Liberal government was elected. The Liberals are the ones who hit the start button. The Liberals are the ones who launched the system, so they are responsible for ensuring that public servants are properly paid.

The NDP is calling for action and compensation. I hope that the Liberal government is familiar with the words “responsibility”, “respect”, and “accountability”.

Business of Supply

•(1350)

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if there is one party that took this situation seriously from the very beginning, it is the Liberal Party of Canada. I would ask my New Democrat colleague—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Order. It is very difficult to hear the member's answer when people are yelling. I ask members to keep it down. I suggest that they whisper to each other instead of yelling.

The hon. member for Gatineau.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: Mr. Speaker, today, the NDP has drafted a motion to blame the government, the same government that is mobilizing technological, human, and financial resources to defuse the time bomb we inherited from the Conservative Party. Our NDP friends have drafted a motion on the Phoenix pay system that the Conservatives can support by trying to pin the blame on us.

We have heard some stories. I myself represent the riding with the biggest proportion of federal public servants in Canada. I am therefore well aware of the problems associated with the Phoenix pay system. The issue strengthens my motivation every day. I am constantly asking the NDP members if they can provide a single shred of proof showing that the government has failed to follow its officials' recommendations on Phoenix to the letter. They cannot do it. This is the fourth time I have asked them for proof. They cannot provide any.

Can the member provide any proof?

•(1355)

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Speaker, what a pathetic comment from my Liberal colleague opposite. He is trying to play partisan politics by linking the former government with the NDP, but his responsibility is to ensure that public service employees get paid. That is what we are asking for.

Who is going to pay the interest charges on the credit card bills run up by the men and women who serve this government, which is not lifting a finger to fix the situation? He is trying to blame the opposition parties, but the Liberals are the ones in power.

When are they going to stand up and pay public servants properly?

[English]

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Gatineau keeps asking where the proof is. He should maybe look at the thousands and thousands of pages of ATIPs that are available on kellymccauley.ca, or perhaps he should google the Gartner reports.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his constructive suggestions. I would be happy to verify the various sources and the information that will add to the debate and show that the Liberal government is partly responsible for this situation and that it has failed to take action. The Liberal government has still not

fixed the problem, which is not only the result of past issues, but is also related to the ongoing collective bargaining process.

I recently spoke with members of the Canadian Association of Professional Employees. They are government analysts, economists, and professionals whose new work contract will not take effect for 220 days, even though the legal timeframe is 90 days. Why can the government not respect the agreement that it signed? The reason is that it is unable to get rid of a completely obsolete pay system.

Thirty per cent of these government professionals have not yet received the back pay they are owed under the collective agreement that they signed. One-third of these professionals did not receive a penny of the back pay they are owed. As for the 70% who did receive a payment, they have no idea whether they received the right amount. That is gross incompetence on the part of the government.

If the Liberal government and Liberal members take this disaster seriously, I invite them to support the NDP motion, to stand in solidarity with government employees, and to promise a compensation fund for people who have been suffering for far too long.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Beloeil—Chambly on a point of order.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Gatineau has been asking for evidence all day. I therefore seek the unanimous consent of the House to table some evidence. It is a memo written by the Office of the Comptroller General, addressed to the Treasury Board, and dated January 13, 2016, or one month before the Liberals implemented this system.

[English]

It is a readiness assessment of Phoenix that says things such as “Unknown if collective agreements are well coded into Phoenix”, “Testing results...unknown”, “less than 50% success” rate, “30% errors”.

Mr. Speaker, I think you get the picture. This is proof enough for the parliamentary secretary to show that Liberals knew full well this system did not work, and I would ask for unanimous consent to finally give the parliamentary secretary the information he ignores.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to table the document?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: Mr. Speaker, I ask for the unanimous consent of the House to table a document dated February 18, 2016, from the Department of Public Services and Procurement, which states, “Are we ready on technology? Ready to go. Are we ready on process? Ready to go. Are we ready on people? Ready to go.”

The Speaker: Does the hon. parliamentary secretary have the unanimous consent of the House to table the document?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

PARKS CANADA

Hon. Hunter Tootoo (Nunavut, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, in my riding there is a monument in Resolute Bay of an Inuk man looking out across icy Arctic waters. Many do not know, but this man faces another monument over 300 kilometres away. It is a monument of a woman and child in Grise Fiord. Both stand as a tribute to those Inuit families who were split up and forcibly relocated by the federal government in the 1950s.

I know I do not need to explain to this House that Canada's history with Inuit has not always been pretty. Although recognizing the mistakes in our past is difficult for many, I believe that these tragic acts must serve as a lesson for the future and should never be forgotten or repeated.

Canada's national historic sites are areas that tell a unique story about our history. I believe that the locations in Resolute Bay and Grise Fiord, where people were left on the beach, tell a unique story and should both be national historic sites. I, and the residents, feel that this designation is the least that we can do.

* * *

• (1400)

SIR WINSTON CHURCHILL COLLEGIATE AND VOCATIONAL INSTITUTE

Mr. Don Rusnak (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak about Sir Winston Churchill Collegiate and Vocational Institute in Thunder Bay, which will be closing in June of this year after 52 exceptional years.

Since 1966, Churchill has been providing high school students in northwestern Ontario with top-quality education and a huge range of extracurricular activities. Earlier this year, the boys football team, the Trojans, brought home the OFSAA Northern Bowl championship, while the boys volleyball team won the NWOSSA tournament and went on to play the best teams in all of Ontario. These are huge accomplishments, but they are just two on a list of many.

I was at Churchill Collegiate last week, and I was honoured to be there in person to thank the teachers, administrators, volunteers, support staff, and students for all they have given to our community. They have made Thunder Bay and indeed all of northwestern Ontario proud, and I thank them.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as chair of the Canada-Azerbaijan Friendship Group, I rise today so that we may collectively pay our respects to the civilians who lost their lives during the Khojaly tragedy and in the broader Nagorno-Karabakh War. It has been 26 years since this tragic loss of life occurred, and I invite the House to reflect on the consequences when nations abandon reason and diplomacy and resort to violence and war to resolve disagreements.

Statements by Members

The history of innocent civilians caught up in armed conflict is heartbreakingly a long one. The distinction between combatant and civilian can be complicated. However, this does not discharge governments from their duty to protect the innocent.

As a nation of peace, Canada has a vital role in helping nations like Azerbaijan and Armenia resolve their disputes. The Nagorno-Karabakh region remains a fractured one, where people still live under the daily threat of renewed conflict. I therefore invite my colleagues, in the name of humanity and in memory of the innocent lives lost, to help promote peaceful relations between the people of Azerbaijan and Armenia.

* * *

PORT SAINT JOHN

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the home of Canada's third-busiest port, and eastern Canada's largest port by volume, Saint John is the beating industrial heart of the New Brunswick economy.

The port of Saint John has a diverse cargo base, handling an average of 28-million tonnes annually. With global connections to 500 ports worldwide, the port of Saint John has easy access to central Canadian inland markets by rail and road. I am proud to say that our government recognizes this, which is why it has invested over \$68 million in infrastructure improvement for the port that will ensure its long-term viability and competitiveness.

I would like to commend port president and CEO, Jim Quinn, for his tremendous leadership and advocacy for this project. This investment will create thousands of well-paying jobs in my riding in the near and long term. This project will be truly transformative for Saint John—Rothesay.

Investments like this are key to strong economic development, helping to eradicate poverty in my riding. This is what real change looks like.

* * *

[Translation]

INTERESTS OF QUEBEC

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as the representative of Longueuil and Saint-Hubert in Ottawa, I cannot help but notice the contempt that this government seems to show for Quebec. Last week, official sources stated in a press release that, when he was playing dress-up in India, the Prime Minister of Canada spewed a bunch of nonsense about Quebec. What a disgrace.

That is the same Prime Minister who, with the complicit silence of the Liberal and Conservative members who are supposed to represent Quebec, has spent the past two years ignoring the consensus in Quebec on tax unfairness, on Netflix deals, and on our culture. I guess he too takes us for a bunch of hot dog eaters.

Statements by Members

I am very proud to say that it is the NDP members from Quebec who have stood up to this contempt. While the quiet nationalism of Quebecers reaches a level of consensus at the National Assembly, members representing Quebec here in Ottawa have a duty to defend the Quebec nation regardless of their personal or partisan convictions.

Quebeckers are calling for nothing less than Quebec's voice to be heard, listened to, and respected in Ottawa.

* * *

• (1405)

[*English*]

WORLD JUNIOR CURLING CHAMPIONSHIPS

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, B.C.'s Team Tardi will represent Canada for its second time at the World Junior Curling Championships happening in Aberdeen, Scotland, from March 3 to 10. This honour comes after winning the Canadian Junior Men's Curling Championship in Shawinigan, Quebec in January.

Team Tardi consists of skip Tyler Tardi, third Sterling Middleton, second Jordan Tardi, lead Zachary Curtis, and coach Paul Tardi.

During Canadian's, Team Tardi was one loss away from elimination but scored a victory over Northern Ontario in its final round robin game. The team then beat Alberta and Manitoba to secure a spot in the finals.

In the championship match, our boys stole single points in the first two ends and took a deuce in the fourth. Three points in the eighth proved to be the decisive blow to Northern Ontario, ending 8 to 4.

I invite my colleagues to, and as all good curlers say, "Hurry, hurry hard", to join me in wishing Team Tardi all the best at the World Juniors.

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2018 PARALYMPIC WINTER GAMES

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Olympic Winter Games have come to a close, but the Olympic journey continues for many athletes competing in the Paralympic Winter Games commencing March 8.

Wallacetown, Ontario will be represented at the games in South Korea. Seventeen-year-old James Dunn will be leaving this week to compete in sledge hockey, representing Canada.

This story has a happy ending, but hard work and determination is truly what this story is about. In 2011, James was diagnosed with cancer and had part of his leg amputated. In 2012, cancer had spread to his chest, but now, five years later, he is cancer free. His determination and inner strength is what took a young man who started playing ice hockey at age six to jumping on a sledge while he was still having treatment after someone in the hospital mentioned it to him.

James is the youngest member of the 2018 Canadian Paralympic sledge hockey team. Last week, at West Elgin Secondary School, the community had an official send off for this amazing young man.

From all the residents of Elgin—Middlesex—London, and his friends and family from Dutton/Dunwich, we wish James all the best. Go for the gold.

* * *

DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES AWARENESS MONTH

Mrs. Deborah Schulte (King—Vaughan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, March is Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month and to kick it off, the Reena Community Residence team, the Intentional Community Consortium and Community Living Toronto, are holding a reception tonight to share with us their plans to increase housing and supports for those with developmental disabilities.

Last November, our government announced a national housing strategy, with a priority of helping the most vulnerable Canadians access safe and affordable housing. As a result of this new strategy, communities will be able to access funding to build units across the country for people with developmental disabilities.

I have had several opportunities to visit the Reena Community Residence in my riding. It provides housing, employment services, and a vibrant community for adults and seniors with a range of special needs, such as developmental, physical, and/or mental health.

I invite everyone to join me tonight in the Speaker's lounge, from 5 to 7 p.m., to meet with the representatives doing transformative work in our communities supporting those with developmental disabilities.

* * *

KAY LIVINGSTONE

Mr. Marco Mendicino (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to pay homage to Black History Month and to black Canadian leaders across the country who have contributed so much to a proud and essential part of our heritage.

One such Canadian is Kay Livingstone. Always with her heart focused on others, Kay was a renowned actress, journalist, and community activist who helped found the Congress of Black Women of Canada.

[*Translation*]

In her work with the congress, her career in journalism, her work in the public service and with the many other organizations she was involved in, Kay was a pioneer.

[*English*]

With her legacy in mind, I was proud, along with the member for Whitby, to unveil a Canada Post stamp, as well as a historic plaque, in Kay's honour. That plaque now rests in my neighbourhood.

In every aspect of life, Kay broke down barriers, treated people with respect, and promoted equality for all.

Statements by Members

As Black History Month comes to a conclusion, her contribution as a woman, as a member of the black community is truly something to celebrate.

* * *

MENTAL HEALTH

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to share the story of local hockey player and mental health advocate, Kendra Fisher.

Kendra grew up in Kincardine, played minor hockey there, and made it all the way to Team Canada's Olympic program. Issues with mental health ended her dreams of Olympic gold, but with strong family support and true Bruce County grit, Kendra made a comeback to win numerous medals playing in the women's inline world championship.

In her own words, Kendra best describes life since being diagnosed with mental illness, "It has been 12 years since I chose life....I didn't cure it. My mental illness is not gone. It's as much a part of me as is being a goalie, a wife, a daughter, a sister, a mother, a professional speaker."

Kendra now shares her story to help end the stigma surrounding mental illness with her organization, Mentally Fit.

I thank Kendra for sharing her story. She chose life, and others can too. God bless.

* * *

• (1410)

LIVE WELL CHALLENGE

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan (South Shore—St. Margarets, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to talk about the inspiring fishers in my riding of South Shore—St. Margarets, and the "Live Well Challenge".

The Live Well Challenge was created by Captain Todd Newell of Cape Sable Island, as an effort to raise money to help the families of the tragic fire in Pubnico Head, where four children lost their lives.

Todd challenged other captains to follow his lead by jumping into the icy cold waters of the wells in their boats and donating \$1,000 to local charities of their choice. The challenge has raised almost \$900,000 and counting, with participants jumping into their live lobster holding tanks or even doing backflips off the stern of their boats into the harbour.

I thank all of those involved. For Captain Newell, I accept the challenge and I look forward to my jump in the freezing water.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADIAN FEDERATION OF MEDICAL STUDENTS

Mr. Yves Robillard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on February 12, over 75 medical students from across Canada were on the Hill to talk to a number of parliamentarians about mental health support for indigenous populations. Vast disparities in mental health, including alarming suicide rates, persist. The medical

students are calling for greater self-determination for indigenous communities with respect to funding allocation.

I congratulate the Canadian Federation of Medical Students for its work and its support of this important issue in collaboration with indigenous communities. This situation deserves our attention. The students' commitment to this cause will certainly help advance it.

* * *

CANADA SUMMER JOBS PROGRAM

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is always talking about respecting diversity. Once again, the Liberals are not walking the talk, since organizations must now endorse the Liberals' ideological positions if they want to receive any money to hire a summer intern. This approach flies in the face of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which protects freedom of conscience from this type of excessive government intervention. Canadians deserve to have the right to apply to participate in a government program without fear that their applications will be rejected simply because they have values or beliefs that differ from the Liberals' doctrine or dogma.

The Prime Minister must immediately remove this ideological requirement and restore the Canada summer jobs program to what it should be: a program to create jobs; not a Liberal ideological propaganda tool.

* * *

[English]

2018 WINTER OLYMPICS

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I stand to highlight two Olympic medal winners who call London, Ontario their hometown: Tessa Virtue and Alex Kopacz. Both secured gold for Team Canada in Pyeongchang and Londoners are beaming with pride.

Alex Kopacz and his partner Justin Kripps tied the German team to win gold in two-man bobsleigh. It was Alex's first Olympics, making the accomplishment that much more special.

The performance by Tessa Virtue and Scott Moir was nothing short of a masterpiece. From being flag bearers at the opening ceremonies, to helping Canada win a gold medal in the figure skating team event, and securing gold in their final ice dance competition, Tessa and Scott are now the most decorated Olympic figure skaters in history.

Though Scott's hometown of Ilderton is just minutes away, Londoners see him as one of our own.

All in the House share pride and admiration for the athletes of Team Canada. Their dedication and heart is not forgotten and will always be celebrated.

*Oral Questions***HOWARD MCCURDY**

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today with a heavy heart to honour one of our recently passed former colleagues, Howard McCurdy.

Howard, an Order of Canada recipient, was an impressive man who devoted his life to social justice with conviction and grace.

Howard was the first African Canadian New Democrat to be elected to sit in the House and the second to be elected to Parliament in our history. He was a brilliant man, holding a Ph.D. in microbiology and chemistry, published over 50 times for his academic work.

Social justice, however, was his true calling. He never stopped advocating for people and a more equal Canada. He was a leader in every sense and was a founding member of the National Black Coalition.

Howard was an incredible orator, equal to anyone who was ever to sit in this chamber. He was an inspiration to many and a true icon of the Canadian civil rights movement.

Black History Month reminds us that people committed to equality and justice like Howard McCurdy made Canada a better country.

I offer sincere condolences to his family and friends and to all those affected by his passing from our Canadian House of Commons.

* * *

• (1415)

GRAIN FARMERS

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government has failed Canadian grain farmers with Bill C-49. According to Ag Transportation Coalition, CN and CP supplied only a combined 38% of hopper cars ordered in grain week 29. Week 29 was the worst week to date during the 2017-18 grain year.

This is a crisis for grain farmers. They need to get their product to market and pay last year's bills. Guess who pays the penalty for delayed delivery for shipping the wheat at the port in Vancouver? It is not the port facility, not the shipper, and of course not the railway. It is the farmer who pays the penalty.

We urged the government to split up the omnibus Bill C-49 so we could pass the interswitching provisions quickly and protect the grain farmers, and the Liberals failed to do so. Now Canadian grain farmers are feeling the consequences.

The government needs to act quickly. We have winter in Canada every year and the Liberals need to quit using that as an excuse. It is time to get it done. Let us fix it for the grain farmers.

* * *

BECCA SCHOFIELD

Mrs. Alaina Lockhart (Fundy Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I stand today, with the hon. member for Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, to honour an incredible young woman who impacted lives around the world with her simple yet profound wish.

Becca Schofield of Riverview of New Brunswick was just 15 when she began her battle with cancer. She found clarity, meaning, and purpose during her battle and had a simple wish to spread kindness in the world. Becca's inspiration led to a global online movement to do something to make someone smile and to share it with #BeccaToldMeTo.

Becca touched people's hearts and inspired acts of kindness from Riverview to Iqaluit to Kuwait. Humankind responded with thousands of acts of kindness.

Last week, we said goodbye to Becca, but her story does not end here. Becca reminded us and then showed us how easy it is to be kind to each other.

I thank Darren, Anne, and Gabrielle for sharing her precious time here on earth with us. I want them to know that Becca will be in our hearts forever.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, is it the Prime Minister's belief that the Government of India conspired and manipulated events in order to ensure the attendance of Jaspal Atwal, a convicted terrorist, at a reception in India last week with the Prime Minister?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, I cannot discuss security details on the floor of the House. However, I can tell her with absolute assurance that all Canadians can be assured that our police and our security agencies have done their job in relation to this visit, and they have done it very well.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, according to multiple media outlets, a briefing was organized by the Prime Minister's Office with a high-level national security adviser who suggested that the Government of India's own intelligence service orchestrated the ability for Mr. Atwal to be in India at the same time as the Prime Minister's visit.

This is a very serious allegation. What proof does the Prime Minister have that the Government of India did this?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can say that the invitation that was issued to this particular individual, Mr. Atwal, should never have been issued. Indeed, as soon as it was discovered, it was rescinded by the Government of Canada.

• (1420)

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, according to a Global News report, the PMO organized a briefing where one of the most senior members of the civil service advanced the following theory:

That Jaspal Atwal, the terrorist invited by the Liberals to Mumbai, may have been planted there by the Indian government or maybe by Indian security agencies or perhaps by factions in the Indian government.

Oral Questions

The media did not make this up. This briefing happened. The Prime Minister needs to tell Canadians if this allegation against the Indian government is believed to be true, and if so, where is the proof?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, I make the very strong point that all of the police and security officers and agencies of the Government of Canada in dealing with this issue have done their job in the national interest, and they have done it extraordinarily well.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I understand the minister's answers, but what we saw last week was a three-ring circus. The Liberals went to India and put on a real show. The problem is that the Prime Minister came across as having a soft spot for terrorists. He even invites them to dinner.

I am not asking whether the security agencies did their job. I have no doubt that they did an excellent job, but does the Prime Minister listen to those security agencies, and why was that person there? The Liberals need to stop blaming India.

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again let me make the point that as soon as the invitation to this particular individual was discovered, it was rescinded by the Government of Canada. Let me also quote the headline from *The Times of India* on Saturday, which reads, "Canada's tough stand on terror soothes India".

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Public Safety is giving answers, but he is not telling us what we want to know.

Mr. Atwal's invitation has been problematic since last Thursday. First the member for Surrey Centre was blamed, and now India is being blamed. We want proof. If India issued the invitation, the Liberals need to table documents in the House that come from India. Otherwise, the Prime Minister needs to accept responsibility and say he made a mistake by allowing that individual to be invited.

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the record is clear. When this invitation was discovered, it was in fact rescinded by the Government of Canada. I would also note a quote from the Prime Minister of India that the talks with the Prime Minister "were fruitful. Our discussions focused on closer India-Canada co-operation in various sectors, including investment, trade, energy, and stronger people-to-people relations."

* * *

[Translation]

TAXATION

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, while the Prime Minister was embroiled in this fiasco last week, the coalition against tax havens was trying to meet with the Minister of Revenue.

No such luck for this group led by Vincent Graton, Marwah Rizqy, and Alain Deneault, which was only able to get a meeting with senior officials of the Canada Revenue Agency. However, they did learn some interesting things, including the fact that KPMG was not touched by the agency, which is doing a cost-benefit analysis to determine whether it will or will not enforce the law.

How can the minister defend this two-tier justice system?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was at the OECD last week.

Our government is committed to ensuring that the tax system is fair for all Canadians. We are working with our international partners to fight tax evasion abroad by improving the exchange of information and improving these practices.

In the context of this collaboration, I was at the OECD last week, as I mentioned, and I announced that Canada will host a Large Business and International Programme meeting of tax experts from around the world.

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the question speaks to the fact that we have a law and that the agency is trying to determine whether it will or will not enforce it based on how much that will cost. That makes no sense.

[English]

Canadian KPMG officials went scot-free for the Isle of Man scheme while the U.S. KPMG officials were convicted of criminal charges for setting up a similar scheme. While KPMG executives here were treated with kid gloves, we know that everyday Canadians get persecuted to the full extent of the law.

In tomorrow's budget, the government will have a chance to start fixing what is wrong with our tax system. Will we see measures to ensure that everyone is treated the same way no matter the size of people's bank accounts?

• (1425)

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, access to data is key in the fight against tax evasion, and we are making considerable progress in that regard thanks to our investments.

Through collaboration with our international partners, the Canada Revenue Agency now has access to better data, and, this year, the introduction of the common reporting standard has enabled us to more easily access information on the bank accounts of Canadians living abroad. This new standard will allow Canada and nearly 100 other countries to share data, something that was completely unheard of three or four years ago.

*Oral Questions**[English]***CANADA-INDIA RELATIONS**

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am sure the Prime Minister is glad to be home from his trip to India. Canadians were certainly getting tired of reading the bad international press. While we all have a number of questions for him, they will go unanswered today, it seems. However, I am wondering if somebody on that side might be able to explain what the whole point of the trip was. He spent eight days in India, with over—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Science.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan (Minister of Science and Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is disappointing the opposition cannot recognize the importance of the Canada-India relationship. India's growing economy offers significant opportunities to strengthen Canada's middle class. The Prime Minister welcomed more than \$1 billion in investments between Canadian and Indian companies, which will lead to the creation of almost 6,000 good, well-paying, middle-class jobs for Canadians. We know our deep Canada-India ties create high-quality jobs in both countries.

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am sorry, but companies in India have not invested \$1 billion in Canada. The figure is actually \$250 million, and those investments would likely have been made anyway.

The government sent a huge delegation to India for eight days for that, not to mention the fact that the trip was a diplomatic disaster. I cannot understand how this government thinks that the trip was a success. We would have liked to see the Prime Minister talk about trade, security, the situation in the region, and how tariffs on chickpeas and lentils have gone up from 30% to 40% this year.

Between photo opportunities and costume changes, did the Prime Minister raise these important issues for Canada?

Hon. Kirsty Duncan (Minister of Science and Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is disappointing that the opposition cannot recognize the importance of the Canada-India relationship.

[English]

India's growing economy offers significant opportunities to strengthen Canada's middle class. The Prime Minister welcomed more than \$1 billion in investments between Canadian and Indian companies, which will lead to the creation of good, well-paying, middle-class jobs for Canadians.

We know the deep ties between Canada and India create high-quality jobs—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Durham.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on his sightseeing trip last week, the Prime Minister saw a lot of India, and

it is clear that after a week, India had seen enough of our Prime Minister.

After scrambling to lay the blame at the feet of many people, the Prime Minister's Office trotted out the national security adviser to come up with a conspiracy campaign with respect to the trip. The Canadian Press is reporting that the Prime Minister's Office set up a briefing with the national security adviser to raise the conspiracy theories. Can the Prime Minister confirm this fact?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me again say that the security officers of the Government of Canada, all of our police and security agencies have done their job in relation to this trip and they have done it extremely well in the Canadian national interest.

• (1430)

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the public safety minister is answering these questions, so the government knows how serious this security breach was.

My question is very simple. Can the Prime Minister confirm that his office set up a media briefing with the national security adviser, where the Indian government conspiracy idea was floated?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, let me repeat for the benefit of the hon. gentleman that Canada has very strong, very proficient national security and police agencies. They are well trained in what they need to do to protect and advance the Canadian national interest, and they have done their jobs in relation to the trip to India. They have done that job exceedingly well to make sure the best interests of Canadians are served and protected.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during his taxpayer-funded family trip to India, the Prime Minister sparked controversy by, of all things, inviting a known terrorist convicted of attempted assassination to dinner.

Initially, the Prime Minister blamed a Liberal MP for inviting him. Then he blamed the Canadian High Commission, and now he is saying that the Indian government invited the terrorist to derail Canada-India relations.

Is the Prime Minister really suggesting that India is trying to sabotage its relationship with Canada?

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is very clear and the government has said for a number of days that as soon as this invitation became identified, it was rescinded by the Government of Canada. That invitation should never have been issued in the first place.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): What a bunch of malarkey, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Questions

First the Prime Minister blamed his MP, saying it was poor judgment. Now he is saying it is a plot by the Indian government, and apparently he asked his national security adviser, his chief adviser, to spin an explanation. That is just unbelievable. What is the Prime Minister thinking?

Is the Prime Minister saying that India wants to sabotage its relationship with Canada? If so, let us see him table some evidence here in the House.

[*English*]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the security interests of Canada are extremely important. Those interests need to rise above any partisan considerations. The government fully respects that all of our security officers and agencies perform and behave in all circumstances in a completely non-partisan fashion, and that is what happened in this case.

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is not good enough. We are still looking for some straight answers on the Liberal blame game. First, the Prime Minister's Office blames our high commission in India. Then the PM blames a backbench Liberal MP. Then the Prime Minister forces the national security adviser to pitch a conspiracy theory to selected journalists, blaming India for trying to embarrass Canada by giving a visa to a convicted terrorist.

When will these Liberals give some straight and honest answers to Canadians?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the insinuations and accusations from that member and other members of the opposition today are absolutely and utterly false. We respect our national security agencies and we respect their non-partisan public service. We respect in particular their ability to provide non-partisan advice to the government, and that is indeed what happened in this case.

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's Office forced a non-partisan public servant, the national security adviser, to plant unattributed stories in the mainstream media to try to influence and redirect stories about the Prime Minister's embarrassingly disastrous trip to India.

Does the Prime Minister have any evidence at all of this conspiracy theory, or was this tale concocted to protect the Prime Minister's political interests?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. gentleman is wrong.

* * *

• (1435)

[*Translation*]

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Phoenix pay system has been wreaking havoc in Quebec ever since it was implemented.

More than 44,000 public servants in Quebec have suffered financial consequences, and this saga is far from over. This has been going on for two years. It is simply unworthy of a 21st-century

government. It is time for the government to take responsibility and stop blaming the Conservatives.

Can the Liberals assure us that they will find a solution quickly, offer an apology, and provide compensation to the people affected by their poor decisions?

[*English*]

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, of course we sincerely apologize to public servants for everything we have put them through as a government. It is unacceptable that these public servants, who continue to come to work and work on behalf of all Canadians, are not being paid regularly. We are leaving no stone unturned in order to fix this problem. We are on it every day. Our hard-working public servants in Miramichi and in our satellite offices will be the people who fix this.

With all due respect, it sincerely was the former Conservative government that did this.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government has to take responsibility for the Phoenix fiasco. It was its decision to proceed on February 28, 2016, that has led to this debacle. Dedicated public servants are losing their homes. Communities are being devastated.

The government should have done its due diligence. The Phoenix system in Australia was a fiasco, and the Liberals did not even bother to check. It took four months to clean up in Australia. Here it has been two years, and the government has done nothing. Why such a profound lack of respect for Canada's public servants?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we certainly have the utmost respect for our public servants, certainly more than the previous government, that is for sure.

We had a choice in February 2016, and let me tell the House what that was. We had a choice between the new system or no system. The previous Conservative government had fired compensation advisers, had decommissioned the former system. As an aside, we were being advised that it was okay, by our officials, to proceed.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Hon. members seem to have forgotten the rule against interruptions, and I have to remind them of that. I would ask them to listen, despite what they may or may not like in what they hear. I am sure members on all sides have things they do not like, but most members on all sides are able to control themselves.

* * *

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on August 24, 2015, the Prime Minister made this pledge to veterans:

If I earn the right to serve this country as your prime minister, no veteran will be forced to fight their own government for the support and compensation that they have earned.

Oral Questions

That was when he was trying to get elected. Now that he is in power, the Prime Minister says veterans are asking for too much, but he has plenty of money for his pet projects, including a disastrous trip to India.

Will the Prime Minister do the honourable thing and quit breaking his promise to veterans?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, an increased pain and suffering award; increased income replacement; an increased estate exemption for veterans' funerals and burial; an education benefit of up to \$80,000 that will come in with the new budget; redesigned career transition; a recognition benefit for caregivers; a centre of excellence for PTSD; 460 more staff hired; 10 offices; a pension for life.

The Prime Minister has kept his promises.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadian veterans are tired of being left in the cold by a Prime Minister who cannot spend a dime on them but has money to burn on luxury travel.

Canadian veteran Roger Perreault wants the Prime Minister to tell him why he has \$10.5 million for Omar Khadr but not a crumb for soldiers who were critically injured by roadside bombs in the line of duty.

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): First, Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the hon. member on winning her nomination.

As everybody in this House knows, I also very much welcome the opportunity, in any instance, to compare the record of this government in two years to the record of the previous government. I commend the other side for the vim and vigour it brings to this debate. I only ask, where was it for 10 years?

• (1440)

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the last 10 years, we increased all benefits. That is the story the Liberals do not want to tell.

[*Translation*]

Today, the Prime Minister has a golden opportunity to show that he still respects veterans. This evening, he can vote in favour of the opposition motion.

A prime minister simply cannot claim that veterans are asking for too much when his own government has been spending money recklessly day after day for three years.

Will the Prime Minister do the right thing this evening and vote in favour of the motion moved by Her Majesty's official opposition?

[*English*]

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for everything the Conservatives took away over 10 years, in two years we have replaced, in two years we have made better: an increased pain and suffering award; a pension for life; an education benefit of up to \$80,000. I would be happy to occupy more of this House's time with the accomplishments of this government in two years.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Whoa, Mr. Speaker.

Later today Liberal caucus members, including some who are veterans, will vote on a motion asking the Prime Minister to apologize to veterans and live up to his campaign promises. Four weeks ago, a veteran in Edmonton said, "I was prepared to be killed in action. What I wasn't prepared for, Mr. Prime Minister, is Canada turning its back on me."

The Prime Minister's response that veterans are asking for more than he can give them right now was appalling. Actually, what veterans are asking for, Mr. Prime Minister, is what you promised them.

Will the Liberals support this motion, yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. member for Barrie—Innisfil is an experienced member and I am sure knows that in this House, members direct their comments to the Chair and do not use the word "you", unless, of course, they are referring to the Speaker, which I am sure he was not in this case.

The hon. Minister of Veterans Affairs.

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the diagnosis is in, and the amnesia has set in very thick.

Ten years. I am going to assume that the hon. member forgets the protests that occurred over 10 years protesting his government. If Conservatives had gotten it done, it would have gotten done. It did not get done, and we are doing it.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the pulp and paper industry on Vancouver Island is facing a severe crisis from grossly unfair U.S. trade practices. The U.S. Department of Commerce demanded that Catalyst Paper pay a 6% countervailing duty, and more anti-dumping duties are expected in two weeks. These unfair duties could cripple this industry and put hundreds of good-paying, family-supporting jobs on Vancouver Island at risk, and possibly thousands more indirectly.

What is the Liberal government going to do to stand up to unfair U.S. trade practices?

Hon. Andrew Leslie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Canada-U.S. Relations), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Department of Commerce decision on supercalendered paper did not comply with the NAFTA panel's decision. We have therefore requested that a NAFTA panel review the determination by the Department of Commerce, and we will be challenging this decision on the World Trade Organization rules. We will always defend our industry and its workers against protectionist trade practices.

*Oral Questions***FOREIGN INVESTMENT***[Translation]*

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, from softwood lumber to supply management, Canadian industries are under attack by the United States.

In January, the U.S. Department of Commerce decided to impose countervailing duties as high as nearly 10% on Canadian paper imports, and additional anti-dumping duties are expected next month.

Quebec is one of the world's biggest pulp and paper producers, and a good many jobs depend on that sector, including jobs in my region, the Eastern Townships.

Will the government stand up and defend the thousands of jobs that depend on this key industry?

Hon. Andrew Leslie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Canada-U.S. Relations), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Department of Commerce decision on supercalendered paper did not comply with the NAFTA panel's decision. That is why we have requested that a NAFTA panel review the determination by the Department of Commerce as soon as possible.

We will also be challenging this decision before the World Trade Organization. We will always defend our industries and our workers against protectionist trade practices.

* * *

●(1445)

TOURISM INDUSTRY

Mr. Michel Picard (Montarville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the riding of Montarville knows that tourism is important to its economy. For example, an average of 750,000 people visit Mont-Saint-Bruno provincial park, and another 300,000 visit Ski Saint-Bruno.

[English]

As Canadians and visitors from around the globe celebrated Canada's 150th, it is my understanding that in the province of Quebec alone we set a new record of almost 3.1 million. Can the Minister of Small Business and Tourism update this House on last year's record-setting tourism year?

[Translation]

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as my colleague from the riding of Montarville said, I am very proud to announce that last year was a banner year for Canadian tourism. We welcomed more than 20.8 million international visitors, with record numbers from all over the world.

[English]

This success belongs to the 200,000 tourism operators, most of which are small businesses, and to the 1.8 million Canadians who work in the tourism sector.

This year we celebrate the Canada-China Year of Tourism, and I am certain that the amazing news will continue for the tourism industry and for Canada.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last June I asked the Prime Minister why he approved Anbang's billion-dollar takeover of B.C. care homes. "If the company dissolves, who will gain control of our seniors care facilities? Are seniors in my riding going to find out that their landlord is the People's Republic of China?"

On Friday we learned the answer. It is yes. Communist China is now their landlord. How could they ever have thought that this was an acceptable outcome for our seniors? How will the minister explain this mess to our vulnerable seniors?

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we do with all investments under the ICA, we are actively monitoring Cedar Tree, because it has made a number of commitments in its takeover of the seniors homes. We are monitoring those commitments. Our officials remain closely engaged with Cedar Tree, the Canadian operator of the homes, to verify that its investment continues to be made under the conditions under which it was allowed to do it.

Due to confidentiality provisions in the Investment Canada Act, I cannot comment further than that.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Anbang Insurance is a massive Chinese corporation that is mired in corruption and scandal. The Conservatives warned the Liberal government not to allow Anbang to buy up B.C. seniors homes, but they rubber-stamped the sale anyway. Now the Chinese government has seized control of the company. That means that the Communist regime in China will now be collecting rent cheques from B.C. seniors.

When will the government apologize for allowing that to happen and for allowing Communist China to become the landlords of B.C.'s vulnerable seniors?

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while the opposition might engage in scare tactics and fearmongering, let us talk about the facts. The day-to-day operations of the seniors homes remain under the control of Cedar Tree. They continue to be managed by Retirement Concepts, the same management that was there before. The residences continue to be subject to the same provincial health regulations they have always been subject to. The residents and health care workers will continue to be protected under the same legislation and regulations as before.

As we have said before, we continue to actively monitor Cedar Tree and its compliance with its legal obligations.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while the Prime Minister and six of his ministers were traipsing around India, the situation of western grain farmers deteriorated. Because the Liberals decided to play partisan politics instead of taking care of government business, they refused to split Bill C-49. A whole season's crops cannot be delivered by rail for partisan reasons, and the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food is doing absolutely nothing.

When will the Prime Minister finally do his job and take action so Canada's grain producers can access the market and sell their crops?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, unlike the former government, which for 10 years did absolutely nothing except introduce a temporary bill, we are here for Canada's grain producers.

We have farmers' interests at heart. That is why we introduced Bill C-49. I hope that the other chamber will pass this bill as soon as possible.

• (1450)

[English]

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we had that provision in place so that we would not be facing the crisis that we are facing right now.

Grain farmers are facing a crippling rail backlog because the Liberals ignored our advice to pass a separate grain transportation bill. Now Canadian farmers are literally paying the consequences for Liberal inaction with the sunset of important provisions like extended interswitching, a rail company meeting just 17% of its grain-car orders, and now demurrage costs being passed directly to producers.

Will the Liberals commit to reinstating extended interswitching immediately so that our Canadian farmers can get their product to market?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me correct the hon. member.

For 10 years, the previous Conservative government did absolutely nothing for the farmers in this country except to put in place a band-aid temporary bill. We put in place Bill C-49 to give our farmers, shippers, and railways a modern freight rail legislation. We certainly hope that the other chamber is going to pass this bill as quickly as possible.

I would encourage my fellow member across the way to encourage his fellow Conservatives to pass the bill as quickly as possible.

* * *

JUSTICE

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Tina Fontaine was 15 years old. Her 72-pound body was found in the Red River. She was brutally murdered. The system failed her every step of the way, including seeking justice. Canadians are heartbroken. There is no justice for Tina. However, this is not the

first time Canada's justice system has failed indigenous women and girls.

How can families have any hope in the face of another heartbreaking injustice for indigenous women and girls?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our hearts go out with deepest sympathies to the family, the friends, and the whole community of Tina Fontaine.

Tina's death put a face to the ongoing tragedy of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. Her story underscores the important work now being done by the national inquiry. The families and all Canadians need answers to the systemic and institutional failures that led to her murder and those of far too many other indigenous women. We can and must do better.

* * *

PENSIONS

Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week I took our pension theft campaign to town halls throughout British Columbia talking to people about their pensions. One thing that was clear was that people are worried that they will not have enough to live on in their retirement.

They were shocked that the Liberals continue to allow big companies to claim bankruptcy and shortchange their pensions. They want their government to do more than monitor the situation. They want the government to fix it.

When will the Liberals actually come to the table with real solutions to end pension theft?

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our heart goes out to all those affected by the closure of Sears. We note that we are monitoring the situation. The regulation of the Sears pension is governed by the Province of Ontario, and we are following that. We have done outreach with Sears employees across Canada.

We are open to listening to any good proposition that comes forward. We are working toward, hopefully, improving the situation for the pensioners in the future.

* * *

[Translation]

THE BUDGET

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, three years ago, the current Prime Minister offered up a never-before-seen tax theory when he said, and I quote, "the budget will balance itself". This airy-fairy theory has obviously not yet been implemented since these people came to power.

Tomorrow is budget day, which is serious business. Will someone in government, if not the Prime Minister himself, rise and tell us whether the budget will be balanced? Or, on the contrary, will the government continue to spend millions of dollars, as the Prime Minister shamefully did last week in India?

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with all due respect to my esteemed colleague, and I have a lot of respect for him, I do not think he understood the theory. The theory is that it is much easier to balance the budget when there is growth. This is what Paul Martin did, and this is what the International Monetary Fund supports.

Ten years of Conservative policies resulted in anemic growth and slow job creation. In two years, we have created more than 600,000 jobs by making smart investments, being fiscally responsible, and lowering the debt-to-GDP ratio. This was the fastest growth rate in the G7. My colleague should be taking notes.

• (1455)

[English]

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): There they go again, Mr. Speaker. Last election, they promised that the coming fiscal year would have a deficit of just \$6 billion. When we point out that they missed their last deficit targets by between 80% and 100%, they say not to worry because the international bankers are very happy with their policy. Of course they are. They are getting all the interest payments on that debt that middle-class taxpayers have to pay in return for nothing.

Will the Liberals keep their promise and keep the deficit below \$6 billion in tomorrow's budget?

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can reassure the member, as well as all Canadians, that we have always been very fiscally responsible, making sure that our debt to GDP ratio remains firmly on a downward track and that it will be at its lowest level in close to 40 years. We are in the best fiscal position in the G7.

However, in 2015, Canadians had a choice between the failed austerity policies of the Conservatives, which were also in the NDP platform, and a progressive agenda that invests in communities, in infrastructure, and in reducing inequalities in this country. The results speak for themselves.

* * *

TAXATION

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): The results do speak for themselves, Mr. Speaker. The wealthiest 1% are paying a billion dollars less. The wealthy lenders are getting billions of dollars more in interest payments from Canadian taxpayers. Who is paying more? Eighty per cent of middle-class taxpayers are paying higher taxes today than when this Prime Minister took office.

Will the government reverse course, give a break to the middle class for a change, and stop handing our money off to the wealthy international bankers?

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I understand the member opposite is eager to see what is in the budget. He will have to wait until tomorrow but I can assure him that we will continue on a path that

favours growth in this country and to work for the middle class, like we did when we reduced taxes for nine million Canadians and when we introduced the Canada child benefit, which is lifting 300,000 kids out of poverty with a more progressive approach, something that the Conservatives failed to do in the decade they were in power.

We have a record to be proud of and I look forward to tomorrow's budget.

* * *

[Translation]

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for all Canadians, from young people going off to university or college for the first time to people seeking to upgrade their skills or pursue a new career, access to affordable post-secondary education is essential.

[English]

It plays a direct role in strengthening our middle class and helping everyone working hard to join it. Could the minister update the House on what our government is doing to ensure more Canadians can afford to pursue post-secondary education?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada's prosperity does indeed depend on Canadians of all ages getting the experience and the education that they need to succeed. That is why we have increased the amount of support for Canada student grants by 50%. We have ensured that no graduates who apply will have to repay their Canada student loan until they are earning at least \$25,000 per year. We have expanded eligibility for Canada student grants and loans for part-time students and students with dependent children. Recently we launched the skills boost plan to give adult learners the support that they need to succeed in the workplace.

By making post-secondary education more affordable for everyone, all Canadians will have that chance—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Lakeland.

* * *

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, politicians from Newfoundland and Labrador, including the Liberal member of Parliament for Bonavista—Burin—Trinity, are concerned about the expropriation of the surf clam quota. Provincial fisheries minister, Gerry Byrne, says it is a loss to Newfoundland and Labrador worth \$100 million.

Can the Minister of Fisheries confirm how many jobs his decision will cost Newfoundland and Labrador?

Oral Questions

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are very proud of a process that we began last September to include indigenous communities in this very valuable offshore fishery. I would point out that the process to add a new entrant to this fishery was begun by the previous Conservative government in 2014 and 2015, except the Conservatives forgot to include indigenous communities in that process.

We are convinced that the decision that we took last week is good for the industry, is good in terms of benefits for indigenous communities, and will be good for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, and Atlantic Canada as well.

* * *

• (1500)

[Translation]

TAXATION

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on the eve of the budget, we would hope the finance minister and the heritage minister have been talking. According to *Le Devoir*, not only did the Minister of Heritage never answer a letter written to her last October by Quebec's minister of culture, but it also seems that the budget contains no measures that would finally require web giants to do their fair share. Furthermore, we hear that the Liberals are going to continue granting tax credits to Canadian companies that buy ads on these foreign platforms. The heritage minister has been hearing concerns about web taxation for almost six months now.

When does she think the Minister of Finance will hear her?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that the media sector is facing many upheavals because the way people consume content is changing. That is why we have made a commitment to modernize our policies so that they address digital issues.

The Prime Minister has been clear on the tax issue. We have made a promise, and we are going to keep it. We acknowledge that over the longer term, we will have to develop a comprehensive solution to the issue of taxing digital platforms, and we are not going to take a piecemeal approach.

* * *

SPORTS

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Olympic Games in Pyeongchang, South Korea, came to a close on the weekend. Like many of us, I had a chance to watch several events, and our athletes stood out among the world's best. I am very proud to be Canadian.

[English]

The games were, of course, very emotional. There were a host of great moments when we stood with each other and stood with pride for the contributions that all of our Olympic athletes made and for Canada's medal count.

Could the Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities tell us about Canada's success in South Korea?

[Translation]

Hon. Kirsty Duncan (Minister of Science and Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our team in Pyeongchang put in an outstanding performance, winning 29 medals. That is our best showing ever.

[English]

Beyond the medals, we have experienced countless beautiful stories and moments at those games that make us proud to be Canadian. Team Canada's success at Pyeongchang does not stop there.

On March 8, the adventure continues with the start of the Paralympic Games. Let us keep shouting, go Canada go.

* * *

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week the Liberal government awarded a quota to harvest Arctic surf clams to the company of the brother of a Liberal MP. This decision is worth millions for the company that received the quota.

Was the Minister of Fisheries aware that he awarded a benefit worth millions of dollars to the brother of one of his Liberal colleagues?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what we are aware of is a valuable resource that is a public resource, that belongs to the people of Canada, and that could be better shared with indigenous communities in Atlantic Canada and in Quebec.

We began an open and transparent process in September. After eight weeks, we were really pleased to have received nine proposals, which were carefully studied by the department. We selected the proposal that will bring the greatest economic benefit to indigenous communities and to the people of Atlantic Canada and Quebec. We are proud of that process and we are proud of the decision.

* * *

[Translation]

PRIME MINISTER'S TRIP TO INDIA

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's trip to India turned out to be a sham. With eight days of sightseeing, few diplomatic meetings, and no major deals signed, it seems like this trip was just an opportunity to take more selfies and strut around in traditional attire, making Indians very uncomfortable. This political spectacle looks a lot like vote seeking.

Can the Prime Minister tell us how much his pointless, all-expenses-paid trip cost, especially to Quebec taxpayers?

Routine Proceedings

[English]

Hon. Kirsty Duncan (Minister of Science and Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, unlike the opposition, we know it is important to Canadians that we deliver on the world stage. While we were in India, we announced more than \$1 billion in two-way investment; \$7.9 million to Grand Challenges Canada in support of women's empowerment, health, and rights; and \$11.5 million to the right start initiative to empower the world's poorest women and girls.

If the opposition members want to start criticizing on costs, they had better first check their own record.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when the Prime Minister plays dress-up for photo ops, he looks ridiculous and loses all credibility as a government leader. However, insinuating that Quebec's independence movement, a peaceful and democratic movement, is synonymous with violence tarnishes the international reputation of Quebec and the millions of Quebecers who support this movement for liberty.

Will the Prime Minister apologize for the disgraceful and ill-advised comments that were reported?

• (1505)

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister himself said, those reports are false. He never said any such thing. In fact, the Prime Minister has always been clear when it comes to Quebec. Fortunately, here in Canada, we respect diversity, and yes, we express differences of opinion from time to time, but we do so respectfully and peacefully.

* * *

[English]

PARKS CANADA

Hon. Hunter Tootoo (Nunavut, Ind.): *Qujannamiik*, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

In the 1950s, Inuit families were split up and forcibly relocated to the shores of Resolute Bay and Grise Fiord in my riding. Recognizing the mistakes in our past is difficult. However, I believe that these tragic acts should serve as a lesson and should never be forgotten or repeated.

Canada's national historic sites are areas that tell a unique story of our history. Will the minister consider recommending the sites where people were dropped off in Resolute Bay and Grise Fiord as national historic sites?

Mr. Jonathan Wilkinson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to working respectfully with indigenous peoples to ensure national heritage places recognize indigenous traditions, cultures, history, and contributions to Canada, and to fully implementing the call to action 79 from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

We would welcome a nomination to the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada to designate Resolute Bay and Grise Fiord as a national historic site. Canada's national historic sites and

national historic designations reflect the rich and varied heritage of our nation.

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, I would like to give this one more try.

I have some more documents for the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services, who is still asking for evidence that the Phoenix pay system was not ready on time. This time, I would like to table the record of a teleconference during which the following statement was made.

[English]

There are still outstanding technical issues, such as connectivity, 50% fail of EUAT, EDP issues that are now occurring, business transformation gaps, blackout impacts, and lack of morale and capacity at pay centres.

Once again, I would ask for not debate but unanimous consent to provide that proof to the parliamentary secretary.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House for the tabling of documents?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[Translation]

PARLIAMENTARY BUDGET OFFICER

The Speaker: Pursuant to subsection 79.2(2) of the Parliament of Canada Act, it is my duty to present to the House a report from the parliamentary budget officer entitled "Supplementary Estimates (C) 2017-18".

* * *

[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 to Standing Order 36(8), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to 17 petitions.

Routine Proceedings

● (1510)

[Translation]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Orders 104 and 114, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 52nd report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding the membership of committees of the House. If the House gives its consent, I intend to move concurrence in the 52nd report later this day.

[English]

The Speaker: Is the member for Malpeque rising on an issue related to committees of the House?

Hon. Wayne Easter: No, Mr. Speaker, it is interparliamentary delegations.

The Speaker: We have already passed that.

Does the House agree to go back to the presentation of reports from interparliamentary delegations?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, three reports of the Canada-United States Inter-Parliamentary Group. The first concerns the Republican National Convention held in Cleveland, Ohio, United States of America, from July 18 to 20, 2016. The second relates to the annual summer meeting of the National Governors Association held in Providence, Rhode Island, U.S.A., from July 13 to 15, 2017. The third concerns the 41st annual Conference of New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers held in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, from August 27 to 29, 2017.

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[Translation]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the House gives its consent, I move that the 52nd report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs be concurred in.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

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

That, at the conclusion of today's debate on the opposition motion in the name of the member for Jonquière, all questions necessary to dispose of the motion be deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred to Wednesday, February 28, 2018, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions;

and that, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, the votes deferred immediately before the time provided for Private Members' Business on Wednesday, February 28, 2018, be deferred anew to the end of the time provided for Oral Questions that same day.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

PETITIONS

ALGOMA PASSENGER TRAIN

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskaing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I am presenting a petition signed by people from Sault Ste. Marie, Sudbury, Searchmont, Ottawa, Prince Township, Dorchester and Goulais River.

The petitioners remain concerned that the Algoma passenger train is not yet back in service. We have been told that residents and businesses have been negatively affected since losing the passenger service and that it is affecting their economy as well.

The petitioners are calling on the Minister of Transport to put the Algoma passenger train back in service because this means of transportation is very important in northern Ontario.

[English]

PSYCHEDELIC-ASSISTED PSYCHOTHERAPY

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, almost 1,600 Canadians and petitioners call on the minister to acknowledge the clear promise and potential of psychedelic-assisted psychotherapies as interventions for treatment-resistant PTSD, major depressive disorders, end-of-life anxiety, and substance addiction.

The petitioners note that psychedelic compounds are derived from plant sources. There is no incentive for pharma companies to invest in the developments of these treatments, so robust public funding is required. They call for significant multi-year research funding at hospitals and universities across the country.

Routine Proceedings

● (1515)

PHARMACARE

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have constituents who have signed a petition calling on the government to recognize the importance of a pharmacare program, adding their voices to many others in terms of the need to look at the cost of pharmaceuticals that so many constituents are unable to afford. They are asking the government to look at that national pharmacare program and to work with the different stakeholders.

ASYLUM SEEKERS IN ISRAEL

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition from a number of residents of my riding of Dufferin—Caledon. They are concerned that Canadian refugee sponsorship groups have applications in progress at the Canadian visa office in Israel to sponsor refugees, and some of them have been held by the visa office for two years without any progress or notification.

They are asking for a number of things, one of which is for the Government of Canada to immediately act in response to the impending humanitarian disaster in Israel, as Israel plans to forcibly deport thousands of asylum seekers beginning in March 2018.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise to present a petition from residents on Vancouver Island, who call on the government to extend the legislated tanker ban on the north coast of British Columbia to the entire coast. A moratorium along the entire coast will protect wildlife, ecosystems, communities, and local economies.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise today to table a petition signed by hundreds of British Columbians from coastal B.C. who are concerned about the amount of plastic going into our oceans. They are calling on the government to create a national ocean plastics strategy to help mitigate plastics going into our oceans, and ongoing funding for marine debris cleanups. They want to regulate single-use plastics, stormwater outfalls, microplastic pollution, and, again, create a national strategy to clean up derelict fishing gear, extend producer responsibility, and address the root problem. They want us to redesign the plastics economy, which is necessary, and invest in education, outreach, and beach cleanups.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I present a petition from many Canadians who are concerned with the increasing hostility and discrimination of Christian beliefs in Canada. They are asking that section 241 of the Criminal Code be amended to provide Christians and their faith-based institutions with protections from provisions that are contrary to their religious and conscience beliefs. As well, they ask that a policy regarding any future new legislation be brought to the government to ensure it does not impinge upon the religious beliefs of Christians.

In the same vein, I have another petition from Canadians across this country, who are asking the government to amend section 241 of the Criminal Code to provide Christians and their faith-based institutions with protections from provisions that are contrary to their religious and conscience beliefs. Again, they ask to make sure there

is a policy enacted that would prevent any future legislation from being passed which would impinge on their beliefs.

EDUCATION OF GIRLS

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette (Winnipeg Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to table a petition today on behalf of citizens from Winnipeg Centre, whom I have had the opportunity of meeting with and discussing many issues relating to the education of girls around the world. There are currently 130 million girls who are out of school around the world. The people from my riding believe that these girls should be receiving a good education because it has benefits not only for increased wages later on in life, but there is return for the economy and is better for families.

They call upon the House of Commons to fulfill Canada's responsibility, as established by the international education commission, to ensure that girls everywhere have access to quality education. Specifically, they ask to increase Canada's funding on global education from its current \$302 million to \$592 million by 2020, an increase of only two cents per Canadian per day.

CANADA SUMMER JOBS PROGRAM

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I stand today on behalf of people in my riding to present a petition.

The petitioners are aware that the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms identifies, among other things, freedom of conscience, freedom of thought, and freedom of belief as fundamental freedoms. They are calling on the Government of Canada to defend the rights of all Canadians regardless of whether the current Liberal government agrees with specific views held by individual Canadians.

The petitioners believe that the current Liberal government's proposed attestation requiring applicants for the Canada summer jobs program to hold the same views as the government would contravene the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

* * *

● (1520)

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: I have notice of a question of privilege from the hon. member for Abbotsford.

*Privilege***PRIVILEGE**

ACCESS TO BRIEFING ON BILL C-69

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I bring before you today a matter of privilege that could more properly be characterized as an issue of contempt of this House. I accept that the complaint that I will present does not fall strictly within one of the specifically defined privileges or confines of a proceeding in the House of Commons, but it does constitute contempt of this House and its members by the Minister of Environment and Climate Change and her staff.

At page 81 of the third edition of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, it states:

There are...other affronts against the dignity and authority of Parliament which may not fall within one of the specifically defined privileges. Thus, the House also claims the right to punish, as a contempt, any action which, though not a breach of a specific privilege, tends to obstruct or impede the House in the performance of its functions; obstructs or impedes any Member or officer of the House in the discharge of their duties; or is an offence against the authority or dignity of the House...its Members, or its officers.

On Thursday, February 8 of this year, the Liberal government tabled in the House Bill C-69, an act to enact the impact assessment act and the Canadian energy regulator act, to amend the Navigation Protection Act and to make consequential amendments to other acts. In short, these were the government's long-awaited amendments to Canada's environmental impact review process and took the form of an omnibus bill running some 370 pages long.

The Minister of Environment chose to table the bill at 10 o'clock on the morning of February 8, and 45 minutes later, proceeded to hold a formal briefing by her officials, to which only the media and select stakeholders were invited. It was only at 4 p.m., some five-plus hours later, that officials held a briefing for members of this House.

When I became aware of those proposed timelines and circumstances, my office immediately contacted the office of the minister to express my concerns and demand that I be provided access to the first briefing, which was supposed to take place at 10:45 in the morning, to which only the media and select stakeholders had been invited. My staff was told by the environment minister's office that the first briefing was for invited guests only and that neither I nor any of my staff had made the cut. We were not on that approved list.

I did attend the second briefing at four o'clock that afternoon, when I was given a brief opportunity to ask some questions of the departmental staff regarding Bill C-69. Of course, during the intervening period, between 10:45 a.m. and 4 p.m., members of the media were already filing their stories and sympathetic stakeholders were spinning theirs. Opposition MPs were left scrambling to play catch-up to understand the import and consequences of a 370-page bill. Mr. Speaker, you will have no difficulty understanding how challenging it would be for the opposition members of this House to opine intelligently and engage with the media on a bill of that length, especially in the absence of a timely briefing from the minister and/or her officials. The result was that members of Parliament could not adequately respond to inquiries from the media and the broader stakeholder community because we were kept in the dark by the minister and her officials.

There is no doubt in my mind that the briefing of media stakeholders hours before members of this House received one was done with forethought and mischief in mind, if not by the minister, then certainly by her officials. What other explanation can there be for a denial of my specific request to attend the earlier briefing? There is no other conclusion. In so doing, the minister impeded every single member of this House.

• (1525)

The conduct of the minister and her staff is exactly why the tone and tenor of debate in this House has declined. Someone tried to be clever and tried to withhold information from the House, even if temporarily. Someone obstructed our access to public servants who had important information to share, but granted preferential access to the media and sympathetic stakeholders as part of a plan to place a positive spin on legislation that is critically important to Canada's resource economy. Such shabby treatment of the members of this House is unworthy of the government.

Speaker Milliken explained it this way in his ruling on March 19, 2001:

To deny to members information concerning business that is about to come before the House, while at the same time providing such information to media that will likely be questioning members about that business, is a situation that the Chair cannot condone.

In the case Speaker Milliken is referring to, the government briefed the media before the bill was even introduced. In the case before us, the minister at least waited to introduce the bill, but the principle is the same.

I would argue that with a 367-page omnibus bill such as Bill C-69, the minister's responsibility to this House does not end with dumping the bill in the laps of members and running off to brief the media ahead of members. Providing the media with access to information about legislation before members of this House receive it is, as Speaker Milliken ruled, a situation that the Chair should not condone. The minister deliberately withheld information from members, while providing information to the media. As Speaker Milliken also pointed out, that same media will likely be questioning members of this House about the bill. That is exactly what happened to me, and I expect other members of this House.

On page 213 of Joseph Maingot's *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada*, he states:

There are actions which, while not directly...obstructing the House of Commons or the member, nevertheless obstruct the House in the performance of its functions by diminishing the respect due it. As in the case of a court of law, the House of Commons is entitled to the utmost respect....

I could not agree more. We in opposition and the members of the Liberal backbench deserve more respect from the minister. We, not the media, are the ones tasked with reviewing and shepherding this bill through Parliament. It is not the media that does that.

Mr. Speaker, I would now like to draw your attention to the direction the Prime Minister gave to his ministers after the last election. In releasing these directions, the Prime Minister said:

The documents we are releasing today provide guidance on how we must go about our responsibilities as Ministers, and I encourage Canadians to read them and to hold us accountable for delivering these commitments.

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What did the Prime Minister direct his ministers to do? In the Prime Minister's guide to ministers, which is entitled "Open and Accountable Government", it states:

Clear ministerial accountability to Parliament is fundamental to responsible government, and requires that Ministers provide Parliament with the information it needs to fulfill its roles of legislating, approving the appropriation of funds and holding the government to account.

Did the Minister of Environment forget to read the Prime Minister's direction? Her actions clearly demonstrate that she believes that journalists take priority over members of this House. Someone should point out to her that journalists, although they play an important role in our democracy, are not the ones who will review and process her bill through Parliament. Effectively, she has failed to respect and support parliamentary process.

The Prime Minister also issued a mandate letter to the environment minister, which is public. In it he states:

We have also committed to set a higher bar for openness and transparency in government. It is time to shine more light on government to ensure it remains focused on the people it serves.... It is important that we acknowledge mistakes when we make them.

● (1530)

Just over a week ago, when the minister was in the House, opening debate on Bill C-69, I had the chance to bring this breach of privilege to the minister's attention. I reminded her that she and her officials had scheduled a briefing for the media well before MPs received theirs. I asked her in the House to acknowledge that her actions were wrong and to apologize to the House for those actions. The minister refused to do so, and in fact bridged into a completely unrelated answer, compounding the disrespect she had already shown toward the House.

She clearly has not taken seriously her mandate letter which says, "It is important that we acknowledge mistakes when we make them." She certainly made one.

The mandate letter goes on to say:

As Minister, you will be held accountable for our commitment to bring a different style of leadership to government. This will include: close collaboration with your colleagues; meaningful engagement with Opposition Members of Parliament...and identifying ways to find solutions and avoid escalating conflicts unnecessarily.

Again, the minister and her government clearly have shown no intention of upholding the purported higher standards that the Prime Minister claimed he would uphold. Sadly, quite to the contrary, he and the Minister of the Environment have regularly flouted the higher standards that the Prime Minister had set for himself and his cabinet.

Each day it becomes more and more obvious that the Minister of the Environment has very little regard for Parliament and its members. Providing the media and select stakeholders with confidential briefings that have priority over those given to members of the House is a profound act of disrespect for this institution, in fact obstructs and impedes the work of the House, and has in fact obstructed and impeded the members of the House in the discharge of their duties, especially as it relates to Bill C-69.

To that end, I believe, Mr. Speaker, you will find the minister's actions to have been within the meaning of contempt as defined as

defined on page 81 of the third edition of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*.

Mr. Speaker, I am sure you will agree with Joseph Maingot that this institution, Parliament, the House of Commons "is entitled to the utmost respect."

As I mentioned earlier, this matter could have been disposed of with a simple, heartfelt apology from the Minister of Environment and Climate Change and a commitment to treat her colleagues with greater respect. Clearly, she did not see fit to do so.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, should you find that there is a prima facie case of contempt or privilege, I am prepared to move the necessary motion to refer the matter to committee.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague, the member for Abbotsford, made some very interesting points in his intervention today on the question of privilege concerning Bill C-69.

We have at hand a very serious matter. I would like to take the time to review it and maybe come back to the House to comment further.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, like my New Democratic colleague, we, too, would like to look over what the member has stated. We know the minister tabled the bill. At that point of time, the member has access to the legislation itself but has concerns regarding the briefing.

We will look into the matter and bring it back to the House as soon as we can.

● (1535)

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Abbotsford for raising his question of privilege. I also thank the hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé and the parliamentary secretary for their brief comments. I look forward to them coming back in fairly short order with their comments on this question of privilege.

I would remind members of course that questions of privilege must be brought in a very timely fashion. However, I do appreciate the fact, and all members must remember, of the importance of showing respect for this place.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—PHOENIX PAY SYSTEM

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have another opportunity to participate in the debate on the motion moved by the hon. member for Jonquière.

I want to stress that these pay problems are unacceptable and that we deeply regret the challenges that public servants and their families are experiencing.

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As a member of Parliament from the national capital region and as a proud resident of Gatineau, I am approached by someone affected by this situation almost every day. I would even say that there is not a single person in this chamber who has spoken to as many federal public servants as I have in my role as member of Parliament for Gatineau. I speak to them on the bus, on the streets of Gatineau, as they go about their day-to-day lives. I am proud to do so.

I am also proud to see how dedicated these people are and how they give tirelessly of themselves as they work for Canadians. They do their jobs with pride, love, and passion, without necessarily receiving the recognition they deserve. This is one of the reasons these people ignited my own passion for public service. These people get up early every day. They take public transportation to work to serve Canadians.

Gatineau has a long tradition of public service. As I often say, the people of Gatineau helped build the Canada we know today. Thanks to them, our country has an international reputation for having many good qualities, including its professional public service.

Public servants are dedicated individuals who take great pride in their work. Like employees in every sector, they deserve to receive the proper pay at the proper time. We understand why they are so frustrated with the Phoenix pay system.

As members can imagine, I spend a lot of time explaining the problems with the system that we inherited. I always tell the local and national media that we are keenly aware that we have tried the patience of federal public servants across the country. We want to assure public servants that we are going to continue our efforts to solve the problems with the Phoenix pay system until every last public servant receives every last penny that they are owed. That is the Liberal government's promise, despite the problems we inherited.

I listen to my constituents and I tell them that the problems caused by the Phoenix pay system are our department's and our government's top priority. I also tell them that they can count on my colleague from Delta, the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, to be a strong advocate for their interests. They can also count on a departmental team, a team of ministers appointed by the Prime Minister, and a committee on which I have the honour to sit, which regularly has high level discussions on the development of a plan to repair the Phoenix pay system. We are determined to do whatever it takes to support employees and find a solution to their pay problems.

All members of our government have the utmost respect for federal public servants.

• (1540)

Once we have corrected and stabilized the Phoenix pay system, it will have been done for public servants, by public servants. We support the public service and the people who work within the federal government, including the officials who are helping us correct and stabilize Phoenix.

[*English*]

The Prime Minister expressed it best in the mandate letters he gave to his ministers. He wrote, "Each and every time a government employee comes to work, they do so in service to Canada, with a

goal of improving our country and the lives of all Canadians." It is fair to say that the previous government had a notably different attitude, especially about those who worked in the "back office", and that includes of course, fatefully, compensation advisers.

Time and again, the current member for Parry Sound—Muskoka, the former president of the Treasury Board, claimed that "back office" reductions, though significant, could be made without any impact on Canadians. As we know, the pay transformation project that he sponsored, that he initiated, and that his government accepted was conceived, and so cynically, as a cost-cutting measure. How disastrous was that decision? How fateful was that decision? Today we have asked explicitly for my friends in the Conservative Party, including that member, at the very least to own up and to stand in this place.

Public servants are very well aware of the history. They are very well aware of the reports. They are very well aware of the chronology. They do not want to see us fighting, but they darn well want someone to take responsibility.

Hon. Tony Clement: Well, you're the government. Take responsibility.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: We have taken responsibility, Mr. Speaker. We have apologized to public servants for what they are going through. We have taken responsibility for fixing this terrible mess. What we have not heard and what leaves public servants unfortunately very incredulous is that the party across, the party that initiated the system, if we look at the chronology, which started in 2008, of planning this system, has not chosen to stand and take any responsibility for this problem.

Let me talk a bit about that. Early planning and analysis was faulty. Corners were cut and the outcome has been predictably devastating.

[*Translation*]

The independent assessment conducted by Goss Gilroy, which I encourage my colleagues to consult, concluded that very few people apart from compensation advisers understood the degree of complexity associated with the day-to-day requirements to ensure accurate pay. It is important to remember that the system must comply with more than 27 collective agreements and apply some 80,000 pay rules.

The Goss Gilroy report goes even further. Given that pay-related transactions were executed by compensation advisers who are junior employees, the decision-makers might have underestimated the role of those advisors and their expertise. The report also found that underestimating the required skills, knowledge, and expertise to administer pay led to a commensurate underestimation of the value and importance of the change management processes necessary to support the change.

Implementing the Phoenix pay system was much more involved than simply implementing new software. It fundamentally changed how the human resources and pay systems operate within the federal government. A lot more should have been done to plan and prepare for this huge change.

The decision to eliminate over 700 pay advisor positions, basically firing them, as of October 2014 had serious consequences on the transition to the Phoenix pay system.

● (1545)

Payroll is not something that can be turned on or off with the push of a button. It is a continuum involving thousands of people and business processes that have to be developed and defined. It takes years of training to master this technology. Pay experts sometimes have decades of experience in their respective field of expertise, be it the Coast Guard, National Defence, Correctional Services, or others. These are people who have gained experience over decades of working in the government. The previous government decided to get rid of 700 of some of the most skilled and experienced people, tossing aside the experience that was gained by its employees.

This is not experience that can be acquired overnight. If anyone thinks otherwise, I invite my colleagues across the way to talk to public servants and truly listen to what they have to say for once. They will say that it takes years to train compensation advisors.

All these processes were abandoned, this technology eliminated, and these people laid off by none other than the person I just named, the hon. member for Parry Sound—Muskoka and his ministerial colleagues at Public Works, now known as Public Services and Procurement Canada.

It was not just a matter of pressing a button. This lengthy process was developed ideologically over many years and driven by motivations we find dubious. This certainly did not help to put the public service at the heart of the pay system. We are determined to fix that.

That is why we took immediate steps when it became apparent that the department's capacity was no longer sufficient to solve the pay problems. From the outset, as parliamentary secretary, I personally went to Miramichi to meet with the pay centre employees and thank them for their hard work and dedication in the face of an excessive workload. Of course, it was a pleasure to be accompanied by my colleague from Miramichi—Grand Lake, who strongly supports the Miramichi employees. I also want to thank all the employees across Canada, in every department, who are putting their hearts and souls into fixing this problem.

Our government acted swiftly and hired pay advisers and other additional staff. We opened another satellite office in Gatineau, among other cities, followed by more offices all over Canada. The public service unions supported our decision to hire workers to staff these offices, and they hailed our efforts to rehire former pay advisers.

From day one, we focused on building capacity to restore jobs the previous government cut. In other words, we hired more compensation advisors to help their fellow public servants. We also took steps to fix pay-related problems and better support employees. The

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department created a triage system to prioritize the most urgent cases, those where the employees were not being paid at all.

The Treasury Board Secretariat launched a claims process to reimburse employees for all costs they incurred as a result of Phoenix-related problems, such as penalties for missed or late payments. At the same time, Public Services and Procurement Canada continued to work closely with unions on several fronts and even signed an agreement to bring government IT specialists on board to help improve Phoenix. These measures helped reduce the incidence of the most serious problems, those where the employees were not being paid. They also helped reduce the time it took to make payroll changes related to parental and disability leave.

● (1550)

The unions asked us to prioritize those changes.

[*English*]

While we were dealing with pay problems, other significant priorities arose that also required immediate attention.

We have heard about overpayments and the extra effort needed to ensure employees have accurate slips for their tax returns. The question of repaying the overpayments is frustrating affected employees. I am pleased to note that we are working closely with the union to ease this burden, as we work closely with our public sector labour partners across the board.

The effort to deal with overpayments pales in comparison to the work required to implement 21 collective agreements. When our government came to office, and again ask a public servant, virtually every collective agreement we had was expired, some for as long as four years.

Our President of the Treasury Board, the member for Kings—Hants, was able to negotiate new collective agreements with public service unions, which meant that 21 collective agreements, representing 95% of the core public service, had to be implemented within a very short time frame. This has been a massive undertaking.

Imagine, we have to go back into the old pay system to calculate retroactive payments that have been negotiated fairly and are due to those hard-working public servants. We have to go back into the pay system, which the Conservatives buried with the people who were no longer there, and we have to recalculate the sums of money due to them all because, in some cases, four years have passed since a collective agreement expired.

Our compensation advisers were able to make important progress on most of the collective agreements, but given the complexity of the transactions, the numbers of years of retroactivity, and the sheer volume of work, a number of agreements were not fully implemented according to legal deadlines. We continue to process these payments on a priority basis.

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[Translation]

The public service is often described as a resilient organization. To me, that means that its employees are able to adapt to new priorities, focus on the tasks that need to be accomplished, and work together for the common good. This reflects the character of our public servants and their willingness to go the extra mile to meet their objectives.

It is important to emphasize that the pay centre receives nearly 80,000 new pay requests a month. As a result, while we are focusing on dealing with the most urgent pay problems, overpayments, and the provisions of collective agreements, the backlog of transactions at the pay centre continues to grow.

At the same time, information technology specialists have improved the system. When it was launched, some functions of the Phoenix pay system, such as the retroactive processing of acting pay, were not automated, because the Conservative government cut them from the project to save time and money. As a result, we have had to make significant technological improvements to the system that should have been tested and incorporated into Phoenix before it was launched. We have also learned that human resources processes are inextricably linked to payroll. That is why we must adopt a comprehensive approach that covers all aspects of the human resources and pay spectrum and that takes into account all departments and agencies.

In November, our government announced a series of measures as part of this approach. They are completely in line with the recommendations set out in the Auditor General's fall report and based on the lessons identified in the Goss Gilroy report.

We all want to be elected here to the House to do what is right for Canadians. I certainly did not expect to spend so much time and energy on solving problems that should not exist. We apologize to our public service workers. We apologize for how long this is taking. It is a huge challenge. Yes, it is going to cost some money and it is going to take some dedication. That is what we are going to do. Our government is committed to overcoming this challenge and making sure that all public servants get every penny they are owed, so that we can once again get on with the task of rebuilding Canada with a public service that is the envy of the world.

• (1555)

[English]

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals instigated the process that has now become the reality for people by agreeing to the previous plan that was developed. They cannot use excuse that someone else built the bomb but they just happened to push the button for the behaviour that has taken place. There were warnings. A series of different things took place about which the Liberals knew.

Another issue in which we again get this theme of trying to push it off as being the Conservative government's fault is that the current collective agreement with the Border Services workers, which has expired and is beyond the three years. The Liberals have been in bad-faith negotiations with these workers on a regular basis. They cannot continue to pass it off to the Conservatives again and again.

Since the member talked about inheriting a number of different agreements that were problematic, could he speak to this issue? The front-line men and women who serve every day at our borders and deal with all kinds of different issues are without an agreement because of the member's government. Since he has been in office, what is he doing about it and why is that the case, given the fact those workers are doing their job day in and day out?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: Mr. Speaker, our Border Services members are among the finest in the world. They do an incredible job and keep us safe. They do so all day, every day with a great deal of determination.

As I mentioned, we have concluded collective agreements with 98% of the public service. I will not comment on a specific negotiation or contract ratification process that may be ongoing, but the member can bet that the President of the Treasury Board, his colleagues, and the Minister of Public Safety are all working very hard to ensure these collective agreements get concluded, ratified, and implemented.

Hon. Tony Clement (Parry Sound—Muskoka, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I find it passing strange that the parliamentary secretary is explaining how much his government respects public servants and allows them to do their jobs. However, in the Atwal case, which involved inviting a terrorist assassin to a dinner, which the Liberal government did, the first thing the government did was throw the public servants under the bus. Where is the respect there?

However, my question for the hon. member is about the issue at hand. The Auditor General's report made it very clear that the Liberal government ignored the warnings. The Liberal government did not respond to the warnings for months. The Liberal government had no governing mechanism to deal with this issue for months and months. How can the hon. member stand in his place and say that it is all somebody else's fault when the Liberals ignored the warnings, did not set up the system to deal with the warnings, and now everybody is further into the mess on this?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: Mr. Speaker, if the member were to accompany me to my riding and if I were to introduce him around, I think everyone would understand very well where he had been, what he had done, what he was the author of, the things in his history that may characterize some of his actions, the things he did and the things he did not do. We remember DRAP, which we called dreary DRAP. We remember the layoffs. We remember the cost cutting. We remember the 700 public servants who were let go.

However, what leaves people incredulous, and what I very much like to earnestly try and explain for the member, is that no one is going to listen to recommendations or take lessons from the Conservative Party of Canada with respect to the Phoenix pay system. Until the member has the self-dignity, the self-worth to stand in his place and apologize and take responsibility for putting—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The hon. parliamentary secretary will come to order.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Longueuil—Saint-Hubert.

•(1600)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, things are getting a little intense here.

I heard the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement apologize a few moments ago. That is point (d) of our motion today.

I would like to back up to something before point (d) and talk about point (c) of the motion.

(c) compensate those in the public service who have experienced damages from Phoenix, both financial and otherwise;

Will my colleague not recognize that the right thing to do is compensate the public service employees who have suffered, financially or otherwise, as a result of the Phoenix debacle?

It seems to me that if we did this little by little, we might actually get somewhere, rather than throwing stones at one another and leaving the workers high and dry.

I know the Liberals often see themselves as bluebloods; they never do anything wrong.

In fact, mistakes were made. The Liberals need to show a little intellectual honesty and recognize at least something in the motion.

Returning to point (d), that is, issuing a public apology. They just did so, and we will remember that.

Now I want to go back to point (b), because I still have some time.

(b) exempt those who have been overpaid by Phoenix from having to pay back the 'gross' amount, despite actually receiving a substantially lower 'net' amount;

This makes sense to me.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: Mr. Speaker, we have clearly indicated that we support the four points in the motion.

The part drafted by the NDP to get support from the Conservative Party of Canada is the part of the motion we do not like. However, I have been very clear with my colleague from Jonquière that we support the four points in the motion.

We will work on points (a), (b), (c), and (d), and we will ensure that public servants receive every single cent they are owed at the end of this long process, which the previous government forced on us.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is important to emphasize that our civil servants play a critical role, and we appreciate the valuable contributions they make, not only when they are at work but when they are not at work. The minister has made very clear that we are doing everything humanly possible and that it is civil servants who, in essence, are resolving the issues civil servants have to endure today. Providing resources is something we have done.

In addition to that, I would like the member to provide further comment on how effective this government has been in getting new

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union contracts signed, when the former government was not able to do that, which is a demonstration of respect—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. We are running out of time. The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: Mr. Speaker, of course, that is absolutely the case. When we arrived in government, many collective agreements had been expired for three years, and in some cases four years. The core public service, the hard-working people who show up at the Rapibus station in my riding and come to work every day for the people of Canada, had not had a raise, in some cases, in four years. Now 98% of public servants have new collective agreements.

The problem, as I explained, is that to go back and properly calculate the money due to them, we have to go back into the old pay system, the one the Conservative government allowed to collapse, and manually retrieve the data that allows us to do the calculations of their retroactive payments and salaries and process them manually. That has taken an agonizingly long time. For that we apologize. I repeat that every public servant will get every penny due to him or her.

•(1605)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Windsor West.

I am pleased to rise to discuss, in greater detail than we have before in this place, the issue of the Phoenix pay system, because there are a lot of important lessons to learn from what happened. There are lessons with respect to governance and accountability and how important decisions are made and operationalized within government. There are also quite a few important lessons to learn about the very real human consequences of government decisions and what happens when those decisions are poorly made.

On the side of governance and accountability, to listen to the current government tell the story of Phoenix, one would think that when the Liberals came into government, all of this was, if members will forgive the IT analogy, a preset program. Everything was already locked in place, and there was really no way to stop this slow train wreck from unfolding. However, that stands against the evidence. It stands against what the Auditor General said, which was that there were a lot of early warning signs the Liberal government ignored and that it need not have pressed ahead in the way it did with the implementation of Phoenix across government. It also goes against some of the documents that show those early warning signs.

On December 21, 2015, there was a conference call to consult departments on Phoenix readiness. I offer some of the comments that came out of that call:

There are still outstanding technical issues such as connectivity, 50% fail...

departments lack evidence to support readiness and must trust results from other departments...

No real end to end testing, departments want a demonstration...

The Pay Centre capacity and morale is a concern...

Readiness of Miramichi—as the Pay Centre is currently experiencing workload issues, how will they cope with the implementations in February and April...

We agree that Phoenix should definitely be piloted and then a staggered roll out once the system is completely automated.

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That, of course, was not what happened. That was from December. Those were civil servants in charge, within their respective departments, of providing an evaluation of Phoenix and whether they believed it should go ahead.

On January 13, 2016, there was a readiness assessment of Phoenix. Some of the comments include:

Shift worker issue test with less than 50% success rate where shift worker represents 40% of our work force.

That sounds to me like a pretty major red flag. It is not the kind of thing one reads and then thinks it is obviously ready to go.

Test less than 50% success....

System readiness is questionable out of our 25 outstanding defects 10 are still critical and not fixed.

That is just a sample of some of the advice and concerns that existed within the world of government that was being fed back up to the minister. In light of warnings like that, one has to wonder.

The system is a product of two governments in a row, the Conservative government initially and then the Liberal government, which decided to press ahead in the face of evidence that showed that the system clearly was not ready. These are the parties that constantly want to talk about their business acumen and how smart they are and how they look to the private sector for examples. In what private company would a manager read reports like that about the implementation of the payroll system and think it should move ahead? How, in a private company, could that happen without the heads of that manager and those around him rolling? That is what we are witnessing. There is no real accountability for a terrible decision that was made to roll this out across government when the system obviously was not ready.

What is frustrating about this is the lack of real accountability we are seeing. We are seeing it from politicians from parties that would be the first to say, "That stuff would never pass in the private sector, and that is exactly the standard we are going to bring into government."

There is a fair lack of shame when it comes to talking about accountability and what it means when we hear comments like that and see it obviously not take place. Maybe they got into politics because their businesses were not very successful. One might judge that from the work that has been done on the Phoenix file.

• (1610)

That is part of the frustration. Calling for the apology is just a small part of the accountability piece. It is important in terms of respect for civil servants.

However, an apology is not enough. That is the consistent message we have been offering. When the Prime Minister broke the law, he apologized, and we said that it was not enough. There need to be some tangible consequences. Canadians can keep that in mind during the next election.

There should be tangible consequences for the people who made the error, but there also has to be tangible redress for the people who are the victims of that error. I am thinking of some people we have heard from who work as federal civil servants and live in Elmwood—Transcona. My office has worked on a number of cases

involving people who are facing serious injustice. They have faithfully gone to work and done their jobs and simply expect to be paid properly.

One person in my riding, and I will not name names, had to go on medical leave and came back and was not being paid properly so had to apply for a number of emergency salary advances to make ends meet and pay the bills. Before the government rectified the problem and paid the person for the time that was missed, for which the advance was needed, the government came back to collect the advance. The money is not there. The person cannot repay the advance until the government pays for the time the person was not paid for. This person has taken on debt, which otherwise would not have been taken on, and is concerned about mortgage payments and possibly losing the house.

We can say what we want about how we got here, who started Phoenix, and who made the decision to push forward. One thing that obviously falls squarely on the shoulders of the Liberal government is putting federal employees in the position of being asked to pay back money they were advanced, to make up for a lack of pay, before they have even been paid. It is an obvious injustice. There is absolutely no reason people should be made to pay back money they never really received in the first place.

I can think of another person living in Elmwood—Transcona who works for the federal government who, over the course of a year, was systematically underpaid, by the person's calculations, somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$15,000. Although we cannot really get answers or find a paper trail as to how, Phoenix has determined that there was an overpayment of about \$3,000. The person is in a position of being owed \$15,000 and potentially owing \$3,000. However, before the government figures out what it owes that employee, it is insisting that the \$3,000, which it is not willing to substantiate, be paid back before the person gets the \$15,000 the system owes. My office cannot get any answers.

There is a fundamental injustice there. It is incumbent on the Liberal government to make sure that when it goes after people to repay what it claims are overpayments, it shows evidence of the overpayment and ensures that it is holding up its end of the bargain and paying its employees what they are owed.

For many people, this is making the difference in whether or not they are able to make their payments at the bank for their houses. They are not going to get a second try. When that payment owed by the government comes back a year later, the employee cannot go back to the bank and say, "My employer screwed up after all, so can I have my mortgage back?" That is not going to work.

There is a serious issue when it comes to the timing of these payments. It is wrong for the government to insist that employees pay back money they never got in the first place.

Business of Supply

•(1615)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is really important that we recognize that opposition members, particularly the NDP, will talk about the system being broken and that all the Liberals want to do is pass the buck and blame the Conservatives. We concur that there was a significant flaw in the introduction of Phoenix. The Conservative government's intent was to save something like \$70 million. The Conservatives blew it. It was a huge mistake and today's civil servants are paying for it.

However, to try to give the impression that the government is not taking action to rectify the problem is false. The Government of Canada is investing tens of millions of dollars. We are asking civil servants to assist us in fixing the problem and we are moving forward. Is it fast enough? Absolutely not. We can never move fast enough in trying to get that money as quickly as possible to our wonderful civil servants. We are investing dollars and getting our civil servants to fix the problem.

Does the member across the way believe that the civil service is not capable of fixing the problem? Does he believe that we need to give more money in order to fix the problem? What does he believe is necessary to fix this problem that the government is not doing today?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, the member points out the problem we get when we have right-wing governments that do not actually understand good public administration for its own sake. They come to think that just throwing money at something and announcing a big number is good enough in itself.

If the member listened to my speech, he would have heard that one of the major injustices happening right now does not have anything to do with how much money a government throws at a problem. It has to do with demanding repayment before paying someone. The problem is that if employees were not paid in the first place, they do not have the money to pay it back and the government is asking them to pay it back.

That is not even about spending more money. The problem will not get fixed without spending some money, but the problem is that the thinking does not speak to what the problem is and how we fix it, or if we spend money, how we spend it effectively. It is just let us announce a number so that we can deflect criticism in the media and then pretend it is fixed.

It is not fixed for the people who are being asked to pay back money they never received in the first place.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I commend the NDP for bringing this forward. I see this as an extreme lack of leadership. When the system was originally reviewed, the previous government decided not to implement it because there were so many warning signs. I can list the pay modernization transition activities checklist. The government was clearly told to clear the backlog. The summary of the Phoenix testing results showed huge failure rates. The office of the comptroller general said there were huge failure rates. This was a month before implementation.

There were so many reasons for not moving this forward, but the government chose to do it. We see the Prime Minister travelling around the world. The Ethics Commissioner said clearly in her report that he sees himself simply as being in a ceremonial role, but we need leadership on this.

My colleague from Elmwood—Transcona was right when he said it is affecting people on the ground and every single MP because this is not fixed. We are hearing from our constituents and they are hurting.

What message is the government giving to Canadians by not giving our civil servants the respect they deserve, especially by not correcting this mistake that the government has made?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that what is happening with Phoenix and in all these particular cases where federal civil servants are being put in a really hard spot, and in some cases being asked to repay money that they did not receive in the first place, is that it undermines the government's own proclamations of respect for the civil service.

To the extent that the federal government ought to be an exemplary employer and set the gold standard across the country for the private sector, this sends a really terrible message, which is that somehow, despite what is in law, it is acceptable according to the government to limp along not paying employees properly. It is a terrible message. It is one we need to get fixed. We know that is going to take time. We heard that from the Auditor General, but in the meantime, there are issues of fairness in the way that the government is treating these federal civil servants. That is not something that needs to take years to fix.

The government could stop, today, demanding that employees who are owed \$15,000 by the government pay back \$3,000. That is ridiculous. Liberals should be writing off what they owe to the employee and then make sure that the employee gets the difference instead of demanding everything from the employee up front. That speaks to the issue of demanding gross pay back when the employee only received net pay. There are other things that could be done today to address the human side of the issue.

•(1620)

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately we have to talk about this issue here today in the chamber. It has been interesting to listen to the debate that has taken place, especially given that the parliamentary secretary has decided to represent the area, apparently, of Ridiculous, because that is the only way to explain the approach they have taken in this matter for the entire day.

The reality of what has taken place is that, surprise, surprise, the Conservatives decided to change the way the payroll process was going. They decided to attempt to modernize it and they outsourced it, something that was very predictable about the way they approached government, the way they approached the public service union, and the way they approached doing business. That system was then evolved and created, but it became problematic and identified as problematic during the process.

Business of Supply

What did the Liberals do, though, during the election and then subsequently since then? First of all, they dined out publicly, saying they were friends of the public service, friends of being fair with regard to social justice and pay equity, and with regard to a number of different things that they used for their electoral success. They used it as a wedge issue during the campaign to get the seats they have today. When they got here, they did exactly what their behaviour in the past had been. They basically pushed all that away and pressed the button to start this whole mess of Phoenix.

It was simply a case of the Liberals deciding the public service was expendable. It was worth the risk. It was worth the chance. It was worth what they could do politically to expedite. Unfortunately, it has turned into a half-a-billion-dollar boondoggle for them. More importantly, it has put people in the crosshairs of bad federal management of employees, and bad management of employees in general.

Hundreds of thousands of people are employed and required to run our democracy, and we deserve and should expect to have the best and the brightest. People want to get into the public service for a number of different reasons. It's not only just in terms of having a competent skilled force that is doing everything from negotiating international treaties to processing people's claims, to doing work related to our environment, our health care, science, research, a number of different things, that we want the best and the brightest.

People decide to come to the public service even from a sense of civic duty. Public service, whether it is municipal, provincial, or federal, is not filled with people who are settling on a career. It is filled with people who are making a difference, making sure that our economy runs well, our democracy is strong, and our civil society is moving forward.

I can tell hon. members that those people are the ones we are talking about in this motion, the ones who are trying to get some type of balanced, fair compensation right now. It could be done tomorrow. The government should not have to be dragged kicking and screaming to do this. It is about the fact that they are continually suffering repercussions under this current system.

Yes, we have to fix the new system that is in place right now because they decided to push the button on this and make it happen in the first place, but we also need to know what we are going to do about the injurious effects on all of those people who have been damaged during this process.

I have heard them say they are kind of sorry and so forth, but that does not take away from the fact that really, when the rubber hits the road, the Liberals' attitude during this process is full of intimidatory tactics that are known to go back to the Chrétien and Martin eras, if we look back at all the work that has been done to support people in whistle-blowing in the federal civil service and a number of different people who have paid the repercussions of speaking out.

When representing people in the civil service who are affected by this, we know from a number of different examples that people in those offices feel uncomfortable and have felt so for a long period of time, going back to the previous Conservative administration and going back to the days of Martin and Chrétien.

There is a series of problems. In fact, whistle-blower legislation at one point was championed by Pat Martin, the former member for Winnipeg Centre, for many years in the House, because it is good not only in terms of having a strong public service but, most importantly, for the accountability of the powers that be who think they can get away with stuff on a regular basis. People right now in our public service feel too intimidated to even be able to raise some of the things that are happening.

•(1625)

I will point to one particular example. There was a rally in Windsor, in my community, to support public servants through this situation. It was to support single mothers having numerous financial problems and families having trouble paying their mortgages and other things. Their pays were going up and down and all over the place. They were being told one week that they were overpaid and they owed money and the next week they were shortchanged. They did not know what their pays were going to be the next week or the week after that. Management came out to that peaceful assembly at lunchtime to intimidate people. Managers came out of their offices, to the streets, and watched the employees and I have a peaceful, democratic discussion about the issues facing workers because of the way this system is managed.

Not only that, now the Liberals have implemented a system where management and senior advisers make money fixing the problems they helped create. They are getting bonuses off the backs of the workers and their families who are injuriously affected by a number of problems. That is not a healthy environment. That is also, as I said, one of the problems right now in attracting people to the civil service.

It is interesting. I remember when, at the industry committee, the chief financial executives of Canada appeared and complained that there were not enough federal support staff for them to apply for grants for their businesses. They had the audacity, after all the years they whined and claimed they needed another large corporate tax cut because that is what makes the economy grow, to complain, after there were government programs, loans, and grant programs, that there was nobody to hold their hands and help them through that process. They were the advocates for dismantling the service supports that were necessary.

We have positions open that are very germane to how we spend our finances and run this country and democracy. People look at them and think, first of all, that they have to go into an environment that has been known historically to have some issues and, second, that they do not even know if they would get paid, when, how, or if it will be too much, and what would happen if they raised issues about that, if they are not compensated as per the legal agreements that they signed. There is no plan to even deal with that and that is the sad thing about the situation.

Business of Supply

However, the reality is that the amendments the NDP has proposed to the current process, as outlined in this motion, could help the situation and lead to results for people to get justice with some type of compensation for those who have been injured by this, and it is modest. We are not talking about massive payouts. We are talking about simple things that could be identified, such as, for example, the costs people have incurred from not receiving paycheques and having to borrow from their credit cards at a rate of 17% or 18% just to pay their rent. These things have become real to people who have been affected by this, and the government is responsible for that.

It is the government that decided to drive the car off of the lot when it was made, developed, and manufactured, and was a lemon from day one. It was wrought from the idea of saving money and making sure we get rid of pensions, public servants, and so-called legacy costs, all of those things. The government decided to drive it off the lot, yet it was told the test drives were no good, not only by the people involved but it was told by another country that the problems existed.

I will conclude with this. Currently, the Customs and Immigration Union and our border service workers are without an agreement again. This has been going on for several years, particularly with the current agreements. The Liberals say, today, that they have cleaned up so many messes that the Conservatives left behind with collective agreements and so forth. The Canada Border Services Agency's men and women are being made to go through legal hoops and hurdles to get a proper collective agreement. They are standing up for themselves because the government is attacking their benefits.

If the Liberals want to do something, they should lead by example, settle an agreement with our border service workers, and respect the men and women who are serving us every single day.

• (1630)

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his intervention, despite the playful language. I refer the member to my speech, where I outlined technology, human resources, certainly financial resources, and other areas of supreme effort on the part of the government to put together the stabilization of this pay system. Again, I direct the member to my comments. This is a pay system that started in 2008 as a cost-cutting measure, and after several weeks in government we were told it was ready to go. It is that simple.

Since then, the work of seven, eight, nine years of Conservative cost-cutting is slowly but surely being fixed. Again, I reiterate that we are determined that public servants get every penny owed to each of them.

The hon. member ignored much of what we reported to the House in terms of tangible efforts. I would also express that we quite agree with items (a), (b), (c), and (d) in the motion. However, the thing that has mystified us all day, and I am still incredulous about it, is that the New Democrats wrote this to attract the support of the Conservative Party of Canada. They turned down reasonable proposals of amendments from our party that would, in fact, have agreed with the spirit and substance of their motion, and wrote things they know

to be specifically wrong in order to attract the support of the Conservative Party of Canada, of all things.

I have asked this four times, and I will ask again. Can the member produce an iota of evidence that the government failed to listen to public servants in their assurances that the Phoenix pay system was ready?

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary is continually whining because he feels this motion was to appease the Conservatives. He feels so sorry for being put in this position today and feels so bad for the NDP for having to do this when it should have come to the Liberals or whatever. It is a motion. It is the spirit and the will of the House of Commons. One can act anyway.

Maybe that would be helpful to do. We would not have even needed this debate had the Liberals actually done that. Had there been some sense of humility and respect and just moving on with this, the first thing I would have expected the government to do would be to come in and agree with this and offer more support to get something done, not to have empathy for the situation of having to deal with the reality that he drove a car off the lot that was a lemon and has to deal with it.

The reality is that, in terms of ownership, the situation right now has been developed by the government, which needs to finish it by agreeing with the motion and moving on with practical results. Tomorrow we should actually see some tangible things the Minister of Finance can do, specific things. Will we see them?

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to say how disappointed I am with the parliamentary secretary for suggesting that the member for Windsor West is doing something just to appease the Conservatives. I have worked with the member for Windsor West and I respect that member. Guess what? We can have disagreements in the House and still have respect.

Just like the members over here, the member is hearing from his constituents. Members are hearing that people are hurting. They want action from the government, and the government is ignoring the pleas from the civil servants who are hurting from this.

I want to give my colleague from Windsor West the opportunity to answer a question about leadership, because that is what this is about in the House today. It is about leadership and the lack of leadership of the government.

We see the Prime Minister going on another vacation, to India, spending eight days there with his family taking photo ops, and spending tens of thousands of dollars on costumes. Instead of dealing with the issues that are important for constituents, he is going for the photo op.

How important is it for the government to come up with a plan? Instead of asking the NDP and the Conservatives to come up with a plan, the government needs to come up with a plan because people are hurting. What comments does the member want to make about that to this member, who is abdicating all responsibility for that?

Business of Supply

•(1635)

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, here is the thing. The people who came out to the rally we had in Windsor were people who go to work every day in a small office in a small city, who know each other, and who have to raise uncomfortable and personal issues about the fact that their paycheque is hurting them and their family. For the parliamentary secretary not to understand the personal grief of those individual situations and the humility involved in that is unacceptable.

That type of attitude is real. People feel it every day. They have to face each other across from the cubicle, and they have to deal with those managers every day. What have the Liberals chosen to do? They have chosen to give people bonuses at a time when what they should be doing is compensating the people hurt by this.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, in light of the repeated allegation that there is no evidence, I will again seek the unanimous consent of the House to table the documents obtained under the Access to Information Act. These documents indicate the dates the Phoenix pay system was not working after the Liberal government was elected.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the member for Beloeil—Chambly have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: No.

[*English*]

Mr. Nick Whalen (St. John's East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Vancouver Quadra.

Let me begin by saying that we have the utmost and deepest respect for public service employees. The work they do is vital to Canada's economic, social, and cultural prosperity. We deeply regret that they are experiencing pay issues, and that these issues are affecting them and their families.

All of us in government take very seriously our responsibility to ensure that employees are paid accurately and on time. From my time as a member of the government operations and estimates committee, I can speak to issues of employee pay that we inherited on election day and have been seized with ever since.

To that end, I welcome the opportunity to speak to our government's efforts to stabilize and correct the pay system. We can note that this issue has been around for quite some time. Even in the period prior to 2008, pay issues affected the public service. We have cases from Lapointe, Murchison, Bolduc, and Prosper, which all point to problems with government pay that need to be corrected and have not been for a long time.

Allow me to take each aspect of the motion in turn, beginning with the first clause of the motion, which calls on the government to “pay all employees correctly and on time, every time, for the work they do”. Let there be no doubt. Our government is committed to doing just that. That is why our government has been giving the matter its full attention and applying the necessary resources to fix the problem. Our priority is to get public servants paid accurately as soon as possible. We are listening to the concerns raised by employees, and we are working as quickly as possible to resolve

them. We will continue to work with all stakeholders, including union leadership, to find efficient solutions to the pay challenges for the short and long terms.

Since the launch of Phoenix, the government has dedicated significant financial resources to address the problem. The government has forgone \$210 million in savings booked prematurely by the previous government, leaving those funds with the 45 departments and agencies served by the pay centre to assist them with the pay issues within their organizations.

Let me explain. As part of the original 2009 implementation plan for Phoenix, the new pay system was supposed to generate savings across government departments. These departments were expected to transfer the savings they generated from Phoenix to the government. Given that employees need more support and departments need more resources to help resolve pay issues, our government decided to leave this money with those organizations so that the funds could be used to resolve the issues for employees.

That is not all. Last spring, our government announced \$142 million in investments in capacity and technology. This included hiring more employees to process pay transactions. Most recently, \$56 million was allocated to further help stabilize the pay system. These measures are part of our government's commitment to doing everything it takes to ensure that employees are paid what they are owed, on time, every time.

Let me turn to the second part of the motion, calling on us to “exempt those who have been overpaid by Phoenix from having to pay back the 'gross' amount, despite actually receiving a substantially lower 'net' amount”. I would like to report that the government is implementing measures to help ensure that employees do not experience any permanent impacts because of Phoenix.

First, the government is working with unions to ease the repayment burden on employees. Second, we are reimbursing employees whose income is being taxed at a higher tax bracket. Third, we are reimbursing employees whose Canada child benefit or other income-tested benefits are being reduced. Fourth, we are also offering to refund employees who need to consult experts to sort out their income tax because of errors in their pay.

In short, we are very aware of the potential tax implications and other implications of Phoenix, and are taking actions to mitigate any negative effects on employees. We are in fact taking the holistic approach advocated by the second part of this motion.

I would now like to address the third part of the motion, which calls on the government to “compensate those in the public service who have experienced damages from Phoenix, both financial and otherwise”.

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The Government of Canada is doing everything possible to ensure that no employee remains out of pocket because of errors caused by the Phoenix pay system. In July 2016, bargaining agents advised the government of employee concerns about the potential for inconsistent treatment of compensation claims for the financial hardships they experienced due to pay problems with Phoenix. The Government of Canada responded by establishing an out-of-pocket claims process. For example, if employees used their line of credit to cover regular payments while they were underpaid and have incurred interest charges, they can claim those expenses.

• (1640)

The process has been designed to resolve employee claims quickly, and each organization has a Phoenix claims officer who is available to answer questions and guide employees through the process.

Finally, I would like to address the final clause of the motion before us today, that the government “publicly apologize to all of those who have endured hardship as a result of the government’s error.”

The government has done exactly that. In November, the Minister of Public Services and Procurement sent a letter of apology to federal public employees. Let me quote from that letter:

This issue is the most important file on my desk, and I apologize to those of you experiencing pay issues that are affecting you and your families. Your stories of hardship caused by the backlog of financial transactions keep me awake at night.

It goes on:

I am working with dedicated officials as well as the Ministers’ Working Group to make sure that our government remains open and transparent, and that we take concrete action to resolve the pay issues that have very real consequences on your day-to-day lives.

As I have explained, the motion before us today calls on the government to take four actions that the government has already completed or that are under way. As my hon. colleagues have already highlighted, the government is taking extensive action to ensure that this unacceptable situation is cured as quickly as possible. The government is leaving no stone unturned, because we agree it is completely unacceptable that the proper pay for this country’s excellent public service is at stake.

I would also note in respect of what is before us today that, if not for the preamble, the government would be perfectly prepared to support the motion. However, as it stands, we cannot.

• (1645)

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his analysis of the motion and each of its parts.

We have been hearing outrage from members of the third party around the experience of our civil servants, which I know we all share on this side of the House. We have also been hearing allegations of neglect and an undermining of public servants and their collective bargaining agents and unions.

Would my colleague share his thoughts in terms of the kinds of efforts our government has made to show respect for and within the civil service, including their bargaining agents?

Mr. Nick Whalen: Mr. Speaker, in addition to the backlog and employment deficit within the data entry capacity of Phoenix that we found ourselves with following the election, there was also a massive backlog in negotiating of contracts with public service employees.

To implement all the new rules with the old contracts, the backlog of retroactive pay associated with the contract negotiations, and then the new contracts as they entered into force, was an extremely complicated and difficult task. No one on our side has anything but the utmost good faith in the work that the unions have done on this. We support their efforts to make sure the system is holistic and that it functions well, and that all the rules are implemented.

We place the blame squarely on those who failed to make sure we had a robust system. If we look at the Auditor General’s comments on what has happened since the June 2016 period and following, we can see there was a great gap in data entry. It points to the fact that they tried to do too much too soon, and took all the financial rewards before they had accrued to them.

This is a process that should have been broken up into two steps: one, getting a new functioning electronic pay system that worked within the confines of the systems that existed within the government departments; and two, had that proven correct, then looking at a process to possibly centralize it, if that had made sense.

However, the Conservatives did not, and this is what we are left with.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is easy to pass the buck, but the reality is that the warnings were there and they decided to proceed.

I want to talk about what we can do about another upcoming labour issue. The parliamentary secretary and others in the Liberal Party have bragged about how many collective agreements from the previous government they have signed. However, right now there is an outstanding one, for a number of years now, which also involves a court system, and that is the issue over CBSA workers and the fact that we still do not have an agreement despite there being a number of different attempts.

Could the member perhaps shed some light on the fact that our CBSA men and women on the front lines do not have a contract right now and that the government is using the courts as opposed to using process?

Mr. Nick Whalen: Mr. Speaker, I cannot necessarily speak to the negotiations at the bargaining table because I am not there. However, I will say that the problems related to employees not being under contract, or their pay not being appropriately accommodated, or the data not being properly entered, or the rules not existing in the electronic system, are all situations that existed before Phoenix.

I know that the member is interested in the CBSA workers in his riding. There are also some CBSA workers in my riding, as well as Coast Guard workers, who did not have appropriate pay. That issue predated Phoenix. It was only compounded by Phoenix. Without having the rules in place, without having the good data entry, it is garbage in and garbage out in any electronic pay system. That is what we were left with, garbage.

Business of Supply

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from St. John's East for his mostly factual comments. We served a long time together on the government operations committee and dealt with Phoenix in a mostly non-partisan way. I appreciate that.

I want to bring up an issue again. In November, when we had the minister in committee discussing Phoenix, we broached the idea of resources for the constituency offices to help people affected by Phoenix. The minister at the time committed to having an answer for us by December 15. Marie Lemay, her deputy minister, stated in that meeting, "What I understood the minister to say was that we would get back to you in two weeks as to what the process would be."

That was over two months ago, and we still do not have the process. I understand the gentleman's concern for his constituents as well. I wonder if he will stand up and say that he will pursue this issue with the minister that she will fulfill her commitment to have an answer for MPs on how the government is going to allow extra resources so that we can help our constituents affected by the Phoenix system.

• (1650)

Mr. Nick Whalen: Mr. Speaker, I acknowledge the wonderful time we had together working on not only this file, which was quite difficult, but also on Canada Post.

The government operations committee is a very cordial House of Commons standing committee. However, I have not sat on the committee since the break due to some scheduling conflicts that had me move, so I was not aware until just now that the answer had not been forthcoming to the committee. I will undertake to reach out to the minister to determine whether additional resources will be provided to MPs' staff in their constituency offices. Obviously some people have more federal employees affected than others. It is something that I am happy to get back to the member with offline.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am thankful for the opportunity to speak about the government's response to the problems with the Phoenix pay system. I personally share our government's deep regret that federal employees, so many people and their families, are experiencing pay issues that affect their lives. All of us in the Government of Canada feel the same way about this.

[*Translation*]

We have the greatest respect for public servants. We know and appreciate the work they do to ensure the economic, social, and cultural prosperity of Canada. We take very seriously our responsibility to negotiate in good faith with the unions and to pay our employees properly and on time. That is why we have worked diligently and will continue to do so to implement signed collective agreements as quickly as possible. We have teams of dedicated compensation advisors who are processing pay raises, benefits, and retroactive payments associated with collective agreements.

I would like to put this situation in context. In 2015, when our government came to power, all collective agreements that Treasury Board was responsible for had expired, which meant that we had to negotiate several collective agreements at the same time.

[*English*]

In response to this unprecedented situation of essentially all collective agreements having expired, we made it clear that we would work collaboratively with the bargaining agents and negotiate in good faith, restoring a relationship of respect after a decade of antagonism and animosity between the government and the representatives of the employees. We did that. We will continue on that track until the collective agreements with all the unions representing all of our employees have been signed. After just two years, thanks to hard work and good-faith negotiations, we have now reached 21 out of 27 agreements for the core public service. That means that more than 90% of unionized public servants for which Treasury Board is the employer now have collective bargaining agreements that were negotiated in good faith. As a result, there are many signed collective agreements that must be implemented.

We regret that despite our best efforts, we have not met our obligations to process a number of collective agreements within the agreed upon deadline. That said, we will not let up on our efforts to work with the unions to resolve our employees' pay issues. We are taking action on a number of fronts. When it comes to pay increases, allowances, and retroactive payments related to these collective agreements, I assure members that we are making every effort to process these outstanding payments as quickly as possible.

As we have worked with bargaining agents in good faith to sign the new collective agreements, we are also working with them to fix Phoenix. In fact, we are collaborating regularly with unions to help identify the fastest and easiest possible way to resolve all outstanding pay issues. We are doing everything possible to ensure that no employee remains out of pocket because of the pay system. This is not only our common goal, it is our moral responsibility as the employer to resolve these issues on behalf of public servants, and we will.

I would like to itemize the concrete actions we have taken to make this situation right. In December 2016, we set up a process to reimburse employees who have incurred out-of-pocket expenses, such as interest charges and late fees. We have made sure that they can request an advance while their situation gets sorted out. In addition, we will reimburse costs incurred by employees seeking tax advisory services during both the 2016 and the 2017 income tax years to address tax implications caused by problems with Phoenix. In fact, employees may seek up to \$200 in reimbursement for each of the two tax years.

For the 2017 tax season, we are implementing measures to help ensure employees do not experience any permanent impacts because of Phoenix.

Business of Supply

•(1655)

First, we will not seek reimbursement of any overpayments before summer 2018, to allow the Canada Revenue Agency and Revenu Québec to complete their tax assessments. Second, we are reimbursing employees whose income is being taxed at a higher tax bracket. Third, we are reimbursing employees whose Canada child benefits or other income-tested benefits have been reduced. Finally, employees who were underpaid in 2016 and who received greater amounts for social benefits and credits can rest assured they will keep those amounts as they were rightfully entitled to them.

Concerning compensation for hardship, we are committed to treating employees fairly and to compensating them for expenses they have incurred because of Phoenix. In fact, all the tools are in place for departments and agencies to support employees with emergency salary advances or priority payments if they are having pay problems. Deputy heads have been told to ensure they are aware of their options. In particular, they have been encouraged to issue payments where the amounts owed to employees have been accumulating over an extended period or have resulted in financial hardship.

As I mentioned, the government is working in good faith with the unions to address the issues and make sure employees' pay issues are processed and that they are receiving their correct pay. In June 2017, under the direction of the senior level Phoenix union-management consultation committee, a joint union-management subcommittee on damages was established to explore the issue of damages for all those whose compensation was affected by the implementation of Phoenix.

The pay problems experienced by too many Government of Canada employees are completely unacceptable. We understand that. We are taking responsibility. We are taking steps to fix the situation, and to do the right thing for federal employees. In fact, the Clerk of the Privy Council has made addressing employees' pay issues a top priority for all government departments.

In a country like ours, no one should have to worry about being paid for their work for their government. Our government is committed to positive and responsible relationships with our employees and the bargaining agents that represent them. From day one, we have been committed to restoring a culture of respect for, and within, the public service. We have accomplished a great deal together, and this will continue. We are focused on fixing Phoenix and the pay problems it has created, and we are pulling out all the stops to ensure our valued employees are paid what they deserve.

On a personal note, in a previous period of my political career, I was the minister responsible for the BC Public Service Agency. I had the opportunity to work closely with the agency that was responsible for the management, well-being, and training of British Columbia's public servants. I had the opportunity to award public servants the premier's excellence awards for their amazing innovation, hard work, and accomplishments.

I have a great deal of admiration for the work that public servants do in provinces across the country and for the federal government. I am personally committed to working with the Treasury Board

Secretariat, with our minister and other ministers to ensure the pay issues and inequities that are affecting our employees and their families are resolved as soon as humanly possible.

•(1700)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we can see just how ashamed the government is of its record on this file when the Liberals talk about how they negotiate collective agreements just to change the subject.

To echo the comments of the member for Windsor West, as the public safety critic I have often met with customs officers, who have not had a contract for quite some time. What the Liberals say they will do may be different, but what they bring to the table is not so different than what was proposed by the previous government.

I would like to thank my colleague for his speech, and ask him why the government refuses to take responsibility. It is odd because the parliamentary secretary tried to apologize, but I do not believe him. Instead of saying “we shortchanged you” or “we failed in our responsibility”, he said that he was sorry that they are experiencing these difficulties and that the system is not working. That is the opposite of taking responsibility.

Why is the government refusing to openly admit that it showed a lack of judgment, made a mistake, and is sorry?

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, I want to repeat what my colleague, the parliamentary secretary, already said. We accept responsibility for having taken the advice of the senior public service officials who said that everything was ready. We acknowledge that we took this advice. However, what I want to add is that the conditions were unacceptable. The number of public servants who had been laid off too soon came as a surprise. The conditions were not in place for this system to succeed. That is why we are working so hard with the public servants and unions to fix the situation and help those who have been affected by this problem.

[*English*]

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have been dumping on Public Services and Procurement Canada and the minister all day, and rightfully so, for the poor handling of the Phoenix issue, but I want to go to Treasury Board since the parliamentary secretary is here.

We have the Treasury Board note to file of January 13, 2016, setting out a lot of the issues with Phoenix, such as training issues and failure issues. There is the pay modernization project, which is addressed to the Treasury Board, very clearly stating to clear the backlog before going live. We actually have information from the Liberal government stating that not clearing the backlog was the main issue with the whole Phoenix fiasco.

Business of Supply

One of the glaring smoking guns with the issue was the Gartner report. That report very clearly laid out so many issues with Phoenix about not being ready, the training not being done, and the testing very clearly showed it was not ready. It went to the Treasury Board. Treasury Board sat on that report and did not pass it on to the public service. It apparently sat on the report from the office of the comptroller general about all the training failures and other issues.

I am wondering, so complicit is the Treasury Board with the Phoenix fiasco, what changes it has made to address the problems that it inflicted upon the Phoenix system. Can we be assured it will not continue with this level of incompetence?

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, this has been a learning experience for all. Those lessons are being put into a framework of accountability and oversight that this government was quick to move to when it became clear that the problems were growing and not being reduced.

I want to go back to the record of what transpired when the decision was taken to go ahead. Initially, the problems that were emerging, which in such a large change will always occur, were being managed, but gradually it became clear that there were additional problems. That ties into, among other things, the fact that there were no collective agreements signed under the member's government. Instead, the Conservatives were busy trying to change the law to undermine the collective bargaining process and to reduce the options that the unions had and to create situations where the President of the Treasury Board could unilaterally define issues around sick leave.

That is what the Conservatives were busy with, rather than actually negotiating the collective agreements. This meant there was a massive backlog of new collective agreements with all the changes in pay, the retroactivity, and the changes in rules. All of that was laid onto a new system that was in itself a challenge.

• (1705)

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with my most excellent colleague the member for Windsor—Tecumseh.

As the member of Parliament for Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, the view of this Phoenix pay crisis looks quite different from what we are hearing from the Liberals when we are actually on the ground. My office has been inundated with cases from federal employees whose lives have been turned upside down because of the Phoenix pay system implemented by the Liberal government.

Despite objections from public service employees and their union representatives, the Liberal government decided to roll out the Phoenix pay system in 2016, knowing full well that there remained a host of unresolved issues with the program, and as we have learned, they did so without looking at the case of Queensland where the government of the state bought a similar system from IBM and had already abandoned that system before the Liberals put Phoenix in gear. In fact, in 2013, a Queensland commission of inquiry put out a report detailing how a pay system that was supposed to cost the Queensland government \$6 million ended up costing it \$30 million to purchase and \$1.2 billion to fix. The Premier of Queensland called this “the worst public policy failure in the state's history”.

Why did the Liberals proceed when information about this cautionary tale was so easily available? Why, when it took the Queensland government just four months to get a comprehensive fix in place, albeit a very expensive one, two years later the Liberal government is still saying only that the situation remains unacceptable and it will do various things?

According to data that the member for Jonquière has been able to get from the government, 78% of the 22,375 federal employees in British Columbia have experienced pay problems since the Liberals decided to implement this system.

In my riding alone, over 1,000 federal employees have been overpaid, underpaid, or not paid at all. Many have been forced to max out their credit cards, dip into retirement savings, or incur late fees because they are waiting on their hard-earned paycheques. This is having impacts on real people in every community in my riding. I have asked some of those affected if I could share their stories publicly today. It is a stark contrast to what we just heard from the last speaker saying all the wonderful things the Liberals are going to do. They have not fixed these problems.

One of those people who agreed to speak publicly is Dayna Holley. She moved from Salmon Arm to Esquimalt for a new and exciting job as an addictions counsellor at CFB Esquimalt in March 2016. As a social worker who was considering a master's degree, this was an incredible opportunity to be of service and also seemed worth the move to a more expensive city.

The problems started as soon as she arrived. Within six weeks she realized that she was being underpaid hundreds of dollars on each paycheque and she was not receiving health, dental, or any of the other benefits she was supposed to be getting as a civilian employee. She began to struggle to pay for housing and living costs after moving to one of the most expensive places to live in the entire country. She also put her plan of enrolling in further education on hold as she had no assurances she would ever be able to save the money to pay the tuition fees.

Nineteen months later, Dayna finally received the nearly \$18,000 owed to her. Meanwhile, fellow employees had quit and their work had been added to her own workload, and her department was struggling to recruit to fill the vacant positions.

Dayna's story is emblematic of hundreds of others in Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke. It is important that as their member of Parliament, I do everything in my power to help those affected. I hope by bringing their stories here today in this debate we will finally get the attention of the Liberal government and prompt some real action to solve this problem.

Business of Supply

A Service Canada employee from my riding also agreed to share her story. Her name is Rosanne. Rosanne lives with her retired husband in Saanich and has been working for Service Canada as, ironically, a benefits officer for 17 years. She was thinking about retiring, so in 2016, she enrolled in a pathway to retirement program that was supposed to allow her to work for three days a week for her final two years of employment. That is when the problems began.

Very quickly she noticed that Phoenix was continuing to pay her at her full-time rate. Then, without warning, she received a paycheque with almost nothing on it as the system tried to collect the gross overpayment all at once, even more money than she had actually been overpaid. From one pay period to the next, she never knew what she was going to receive, and this in the months when she was trying to prepare for her retirement.

Rosanne was supposed to retire by the end of this month but she became concerned about finalizing the process as she knows that would put her at the end of the list of hundreds of thousands of Phoenix cases across the country, and that she might not get the pay that she is still owed before she actually retires. Today, I have to say that I do not know what decision she made.

• (1710)

Rosanne's story is emblematic of hundreds of others. Many have fallen behind in their rent or mortgage payments. Some have even had to quit because they could not continue to pay the bills while not being paid for work they were doing. Others had to pull their kids out of post-secondary education programs because they could no longer afford the tuition fees as they had not been paid what they had earned.

Today we hear that there are all kinds of provisions being made and that those people can apply for assistance. However, on the ground, that is not happening.

Another federal civil servant who has agreed to share her story is Nicole Gervais. She has been working for Service Canada as a benefits officer for old age security for 27 years. As a single parent, she has tried to work hard, manage her finances well, and was able to get a mortgage on a house in Sooke. In 2016, she agreed to take on a higher role at work temporarily. However, instead of getting a bump in pay, the Phoenix pay system actually decreased her pay and removed the bonus she received for being bilingual. From one pay period to the next, she never knew what she would receive. Every month she had to decide which to pay, her mortgage or her utility bills. Planned family vacations were cancelled.

Eventually, Nicole's daughter had to quit her languages program at Camosun College. Even though her daughter had a part-time job and she and Nicole were trying to make it work, they decided they could not keep going into debt if they did not know when or if they would ever be able to repay that debt. "It was a very difficult discussion to have with my daughter" Nicole said, "but we both agreed that first and foremost we had to keep the roof over our heads."

I do not think anyone who has been working in the public service for 27 years should have to be asking themselves these questions. It is clear that we are losing the talent and experience of many who are not able or who are prepared to survive the financial crises imposed on them by the Phoenix pay system.

Leroy Wade lives in Colwood and has had been working for the Government of Canada for more than 13 years. In 2016, he switched jobs and began working as a civilian employee for DND. However, Phoenix never changed his status. Not only was he never sure if he was being properly paid at his new rate, he was no longer receiving pay stubs, so he could not even check. Meanwhile, he never received a \$7,400 transfer pay he was supposed to get.

Leroy told me, "All the guys I was working with were facing similar problems....We would spend hours on the phone trying to reach a pay advisor instead of doing our jobs. And if you ever got a hold of someone they would pass it on to someone else or not be able to help you. It was like chasing a ghost." Eventually, Leroy had enough and quit. "I have a family and bills. I couldn't deal with their nonsense any longer. Who knows if I will ever see the money they still own me," he said.

Dayna, Rosanne, Nicole, and Leroy's stories are emblematic of hundreds of others. I have hundreds of stories from lighthouse technicians, DFO and DND employees, and Service Canada staff all trying to continue to serve Canadians while their lives have been upended because of Phoenix.

In 2016, the government claimed that the Phoenix pay system was going to save taxpayers \$70 million a year. Now the minister responsible for this file has not ruled out the possibility that the costs of this fiasco will surpass \$1 billion, and we still have no timeline from the government on when it will be fixed. We continue to see new problems arise every week in my constituency, new cases coming through the door.

It is not like this has been solved and we just have to take care of the old cases. New cases crop up each and every week.

Last November, I took three particularly egregious cases from DND civilian employees directly to the Minister of National Defence at the national defence committee. I was asking him to act to protect morale among DND employees, to end the time they were wasting on the phone trying to get a hold of someone to fix their pay, and to forestall impacts on retention and recruitment. After several months of hounding, including a question in question period last month, I finally managed to a minister's attention. That minister promised those three civilian DND employees would soon have their issues resolved, including a single parent who owed more than \$20,000 in back pay. The minister's office then called my office and asked me to give it all my priority cases. My staff laughed. We have 690 cases, so the minister was given the 12 worst cases. None of those have been solved yet.

Business of Supply

What is apparent is that this case-by-case approach is not one that will ever be able to address the over 1,000 more cases pending in my riding in a timely manner. It is time the Liberals recognize their failure and, in collaboration with employees and their unions, consider a plan B that either allocates significant additional resources to pay employees properly or moves to a different payroll system that does include Phoenix.

In the meantime, my constituency office will continue to do what it can for individual cases and the New Democrats will continue to demand that the Liberal government apologize to public servants in a meaningful way, not just with a few nice words but with actions that will help fix the disruption of their lives, compensate them for their losses, and take action to finally fix this debacle.

• (1715)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the last few minutes of the member's comments he made reference to how big the problem was. I do not want to do anything to underestimate the size of the problem. What I would rather do is emphasize that the government has invested millions of dollars more into fixing a problem, a problem no one is denying is there.

We have some of the best civil servants in the world trying to address this problem. We are working with union representatives. We are working with other stakeholders. Surely to goodness the member across the way recognizes that even when a mistake is found, it still needs to be worked through. It is not going anywhere near fast enough for the constituents who I and the member represent. The minister has said that her priority is to resolve this.

Does the member believe the government providing the resources it has and having trust and faith in our civil service to fix the situation as quickly as possible is not good enough? What would NDP members do differently? Would they outsource to different people to replace the civil servants who are trying to fix it? Would they give more money toward trying to—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon member for Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, I guess the incredible thing to me is that the Liberals just keep saying the same things, when on the ground what we see are additional cases appearing all the time. They clearly have not fixed this problem. They do not have enough resources assigned to pay properly those people who have to pay a mortgage and buy their groceries, and yet they are public servants. They still come to work each and every day, and do their work in good faith.

A woman we worked with had been paid zero for three months. We finally got her a cheque just before Christmas and she was quite relieved, except her January cheque was zero again.

Clearly something is not being fixed here, and we just pile up case after case after case. The government needs to apply adequate resources to get this fixed. It only took the Queensland government four months to get a system set up. The Liberal government has taken more than two years.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke for his caring thoughts. I appreciate him sharing the stories of his constituents. I also appreciate his constituents allowing their stories to be made public because we need to get this out in the open for the government to take it seriously.

I spoke earlier about one of my constituents, Sebastienne Critchley, who has probably the worst Phoenix problem I have ever seen. I have been dealing with the Phoenix issue for two years now at committee. We had to force the Minister of Public Services and Procurement to come to the committee to address the Phoenix issue in November. We had to force it by going through a filibuster, shutting the committee down before the minister finally showed up. I brought forward the issue of the Critchley family. At that meeting, the minister promised us that within two weeks she would get back to us with an answer on how the Liberals would deliver extra resources to the constituencies so we could help those people. Even with the top person in the government who is dealing with Phoenix and who is helping, I still have over 100 pages of emails back and forth.

We heard today from the Minister of Public Services . When I asked about that commitment, she said that the government did not want to give the extra resources to the MPs because it wanted them to go to their bosses and their supervisors for help. Is that the answer, to shut down services to people and just let people affected by Phoenix talk to their bosses?

• (1720)

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, the problem is this. When we tell people to go to their bosses, and we have 660,000 pay problems that the government admitted at the end of the year, how can the local bosses handle 660,000 pay problems?

I had a similar experience in late November. We took some of my constituents to see the Minister of Defence and the defence committee. He promised that he would get back to them and fix their problems by Christmas. They never got a phone call. They never got an email. This case-by-case, we will fix it, we will lend money, stuff does not work and it will not fix the problem. Until the government gets serious about either dumping this pay system or applying adequate resources, we are still going to have these problems that employees have to deal with each and every day in their families.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to rise on behalf of the constituents in my riding. I would like to thank Canadians who are tuned in to watch this debate. A strong democracy depends on an informed citizenry, even though it is extremely painful to watch the Phoenix saga unfold.

Earlier today we heard the Liberal Government of Canada offer its feeble response to our NDP opposition day motion, that it could not support fixing the Phoenix problem and pay people properly without an amendment that blamed the Conservatives more blatantly.

Business of Supply

The real problem is arrogance. We know this kind of immature squaring off is what the politics of the Liberals is reduced to time and again. However, this is the most egregious example of why we use such strong language as “epic fail” to describe this governance.

It has been two long years of bungled payroll implementation. Who in their right mind tells employees that they have to pay back overpayments in the gross amounts? Who in their right mind awards performance bonuses for that kind of out-of-touch performance? The Liberal government, the very people who can stop this whirling dervish are so dizzy with their own spin they cannot even do their jobs. This is darned scary.

I can establish that quickly with this anecdote from a civil servant on leave who keeps getting paid, impacting a variety of different issues in her income tax. Finally her income tax preparer suggested what she did do, and this was to close her bank account to stop the direct deposits. She changed banks, and still could not escape. A cheque was delivered by Canada Post. The government took the time to see the payment to her bank account bounced back, took the time to issue a paper cheque, but could not take the time to see she was on leave and should not be paid.

The Liberals were told that the system was not ready, but they implemented it anyway.

In February 2016, the Liberal Canadian government laid off some 2,700 payroll clerks, while the Phoenix payroll system went live across 34 government departments, serving 120,000 people. Problems that had been spelled out well in advance were blissfully ignored four months in, as this fatberg kept growing.

The Auditor General noted that a similar yet less complex system implemented by an Australian health authority took seven years and \$1.2 billion to get working. In actuality, the Australia system was scrapped after four months, and it engaged in a long-term implementation plan. It is five years into an eight-year plan right now.

Meanwhile, for us, first under the Conservatives and then the Liberals, the folks calling the shots did not listen to the experienced advisers who met weekly for over two years. If they had, much of this could have been avoided.

In media coverage on the Phoenix pay system crisis, this adversarial approach to advice on development was explored, about how pay files were cleaned out, and then consequently, at the Miramichi pay centre, the people had to spend so much time and effort in reconstructing a file. The fact is that decision-makers at the pay centre were the ones who provided these exhaustive lists of all the documents they would not accept, all the files still containing documents that would have to be returned to departments for further cleaning.

In the implementation meetings, the rank and file insisted, for over two years, that this was a really bad idea, but they were told there was no room to store the files. All those pension documents that were moved had to be shredded because there was no other option.

Now, as we dig deep into this issue, how many of these compensation specialists are wasting their time reconstructing files, when all that had to be done was for the government to remove its

arrogant blinders and use a culture of communication. That could be done right now.

There is absolutely no reason why the government could not apologize at the same time as it removes its arrogance.

• (1725)

It did not accept that criticism or advice at any level. That is what happens when it puts people in charge with no compensation experience but gives them that rhetorical arrogance. Even today, we hear we cannot move forward on this issue without more finger pointing.

This is a real human issue right now. It is not about economics or streamlining. Ultimately, people's lives have been affected. People cannot pay for funerals. They cannot pay mortgages. They cannot get mortgages. Like me, Canadians are asking what is wrong with those people. It takes more than a heartfelt apology. At the same time, it requires the minister and the Prime Minister to muster the strength and courage to stop Phoenix and hire an adequate number of compensation specialists to troubleshoot these botched files while an interim payroll that relies on human resources is engaged.

Not only has the Phoenix pay system created huge problems for payment of federal employees, but those payment problems have also created tax problems for them. I remind members of the colossal mismanagement of CRA that has forsaken human beings as well. We are just exacerbating one problem after another. That is because of the denial that what is needed is an influx of human resources, not cutting staff to expedite and save money.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès: Who are we cutting?

Mr. David Christopherson: A hundred and forty positions.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès: No, we will keep all of them.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle: Madam Speaker, I need to make a clarification here that 2,700 people were laid off when this was implemented. It is very difficult to stand here and listen today to some of the arrogance that shows me the research and information are maybe not being provided to the governing party's members. That is based on what I am hearing in terms of the quality of the questions and the heckling.

As noted by the NDP's defence critic, the hon. member for Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, this past November in committee, brought to the Minister of National Defence members who were Department of National Defence civilian employees. The Minister of National Defence promised to look at Phoenix pay issues that were brought forth by these three employees and to fix them before Christmas. These employees came to Ottawa to represent more than 1,000 federal employees in his riding alone with serious pay issues. Still today, as we heard from the hon. member, despite the personal assurances, no one has been contacted, and no one's pay problems have been fixed. Unfortunately, this failure of response has become an embedded pattern in the government, as it has chosen to continue to deal with this staggeringly mismanaged program.

Business of Supply

We have heard that the Government of Australia dealt with a similar crisis, and we have ignored its lessons learned. We have continuously ignored the recommendations and expertise inside and outside of government. We continue on this destructive path, because our minister and Prime Minister have not yet made themselves face the facts and mustered the courage to do the right thing. More than a heartfelt apology is necessary, and it can certainly be done in tandem, much like walking and chewing gum at the same time. As of June 30, 2017, as we have heard here today, there was over \$520 million in outstanding pay due to errors for public servants by Phoenix. Employees were paid either too much or too little, and the overpayment has resulted in harsh tax implications. People have until January 31 to return gross pay. This is the most utterly ridiculous aspect of this saga that I have heard. I think that part of my job here today is to create awareness and raise that advocacy.

• (1730)

Behind the numbers and statistics, there are Canadians who are suffering from chronic stress and anxiety, relationship breakdowns, escalating health issues, and more financial insecurity issues. Some people just want to be able to pay for their groceries. What we can do—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The time is up. I am sure the member will be able to incorporate anything that may be left over into her questions and comments.

Questions and comments, the hon. parliamentary secretary to the President of the Treasury Board.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the member opposite laying out the fact that this is a human matter. The impact on employees of the pay system and the cascade of complexities that have mounted is of deep concern to our government. Our government is doing everything it can to resolve pay issues as quickly as possible, working hand in hand with public servants, their managers, their directors, and their bargaining agents.

We have invested over \$140 million for training. We have opened extra processing centres. We have hired people. We have put in place changes in governance and processes. Does the member not believe that she is impugning the civil servants who are working so hard to correct this as she impugns the government and all of the work—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order, I have to allow for other questions and comments.

The hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle: Madam Speaker, I love how these snide passive aggressive comments get in when they know they have been caught.

In the 2017 budget, we were stunned, and public servants who are supposed to be giving advice were stunned, that there was nothing in that budget to address this issue properly. It took Australia four months to suck it up buttercup. It has nothing to do with the actions of civil servants. It has to do with the direction of the government. This government has to commit to more than it is doing now. You are getting your feet wet, so to speak, but—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. I want to remind the member she is to address through the Chair.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle: Madam Speaker, I know that we are capable of doing much better. Our civil servants do. They have had media releases. They have been to the press conferences here and expounded very responsible statements. We know we are capable, and I expect to see something in our budget now that shows the responsiveness of the government.

• (1735)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I have the great pleasure of sitting right near the member for Windsor—Tecumseh. It is very rare that I get a chance to compliment any other member on their superb conduct in this place. As you know, Madam Speaker, I hate the constant heckling, and I want to say, so her constituents hear me, I have never heard the hon. member heckle. Therefore, it was unfortunate that she was interrupted in her remarks.

I want to give her a chance to pick up where she left off in talking about the difficulty some of her constituents are facing in paying for their groceries.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle: Madam Speaker, I wanted to talk about how our constituency offices need to be able to work effectively with whatever moves forward. We do this for employment and we do this for immigration. Our 338 constituency offices are used as a point of contact, and we could be maximizing that when we are implementing a plan moving forward. That is some of the advice we need to include, to not forget that our offices also need to be maximized. They cannot be left out of a triage process.

[Translation]

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès (Brossard—Saint-Lambert, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Miramichi—Grand Lake.

[English]

I am pleased to have this opportunity to participate in the debate on the motion put forward by the hon. member for Jonquière.

First let me say that pay issues are unacceptable and we are deeply sorry for the hardship being felt by public servants and their families. Fixing Phoenix is our government's top priority.

Public Services and Procurement Canada is responsible for administering the pay of more than 290,000 federal employees in more than 100 departments, agencies, and organizations that make up the federal public service. However, a number of years ago, it had become clear that the federal government's then 40-year-old pay system was inefficient and at risk of failing.

Business of Supply

In 2008, a House of Commons government operations committee report recommended support for pay modernization. In 2009, the previous Conservative government initiated plans for transforming pay service administration by acquiring a PeopleSoft-based payroll system from IBM, and consolidating front-line pay services from across government to a new public service pay centre in Miramichi, New Brunswick. The goal of the project was to attain a functioning, customized, off-the-shelf pay system that would improve productivity and save money. Obviously, we failed to achieve these objectives.

Although PSPC, other departments, and IBM spent six years preparing for the deployment of Phoenix, we have learned some painful lessons about critical errors, false savings, and miscalculations. We now know that the original planning for this major transformation project failed to consider its full scope and complexity. In fact, the Harper government removed a key functionality, such as acting pay modules, and opted for a cheaper training option. Critical linkages between pay and associated HR processes and systems were not properly understood. Technology was stripped of important functionality, and training and change management were ineffective and insufficient. As well, important experiences in Australia, although different from our situation, were not carefully studied to inform decision-making.

[*Translation*]

Shortly after the full rollout of Phoenix, in February 2016, some pay problems were reported, but they were taken to be one-off issues related to the launch. However, by June 2016, it became apparent that there were serious problems. The increasing number of pay issues outstripped our capacity to respond. It must be said that this capacity had been significantly reduced when the Harper government cut more than 700 pay positions as part of its consolidation of compensation staff in Miramichi ahead of the launch of Phoenix.

As an initial response, the department hired additional staff in Miramichi, established satellite pay offices across the country staffed by more than 250 advisers, and opened a client contact centre to handle employees calls for assistance. Although pay problems continue to be reported, these measures helped reduce the occurrence of the most serious pay problems, namely employees receiving no pay at all, and reduced wait times for pay transactions related to parental leave and disability leave, the top priorities identified by the unions.

• (1740)

[*English*]

As efforts were under way to manage ongoing pay issues, we also examined the root causes of problems and the need for solutions. Two important realities emerged. First, because HR processes are inseparably linked to employee pay, it was essential to take an integrated HR and pay approach in addressing these issues. Second, it was clear that Public Services and Procurement Canada alone could not identify and implement solutions. We needed to take a whole-of-government approach, which is why the Prime Minister established a working group of ministers last spring. Last November, the Minister of Public Services and Procurement and the President of the Treasury Board announced a string of measures designed to bring the pay system to a point of stability and, in the short term, reduce wait times and late transactions for missing pay.

These measures in essence represent the foundation of the HR-to-pay integrated plan, which responds to the Auditor General's fall report and fully aligns with his recommendations. They also reflect lessons learned as outlined in the independent report prepared by Goss Gilroy.

Validated by employees, unions and departments, the measures are grouped within four broad areas.

First, we have strengthened accountability and informed decision-making. A joint PSPC-Treasury Board Secretariat team is now leading the overall stabilization effort, both at the pay centre and across the government. As part of our focus on accountability, we are committed to transparency. We provide all departments and agencies with monthly dashboards to track our progress, and we are improving our performance measurement reporting.

The second area of action is improving processes and technology. Pay processes and human resources systems are inextricably linked, and technical conflicts between Phoenix and the patchwork of 32 HR systems across government have contributed to slowdowns. Therefore, we need a comprehensive approach that covers all aspects of the HR-to-pay spectrum, and includes all departments and agencies. In addition to technology, I am pleased that Public Services and Procurement Canada is looking at how work is organized to become more efficient. The Miramichi pay centre has piloted a new approach that organizes compensation experts into pods that specialize in specific departments or transaction types. Early results are promising in terms of helping reduce the backlog of transactions.

Third, we are increasing capacity and service. We are adding more pay staff at the pay centre to address the backlog, and we are making improvements to our call centre, where agents will have access to Phoenix and be able to provide employees with more information about their issues.

Last, we are ensuring strong engagement and partnership at every level. Union-management committees meet regularly to share information and discuss the issues. Additional mandatory training on best practices, roles and responsibilities, and how to prevent pay delays is now available online to employees and managers.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

We promised to keep employees up to date on progress toward resolving pay issues. We release a monthly dashboard that shows how many transactions are pending at the pay centre. As everyone knows, the 21 collective agreements the government negotiated last year only complicated things. Many of those agreements had expired years before. Calculating several years' worth of back pay is complex and takes time. Pay advisors have to dig through the old pay system to find the original data.

We also have staff dedicated to dealing with overpayments to ensure that employees get accurate T4s for tax time. We are also taking steps to spare employees financial complications due to overpayments. Once those priorities have been dealt with, we will move on to processing the backlog more quickly.

Many people are wondering why we do not simply give up on Phoenix in favour of a new pay system.

A new pay system that can handle the complexity of the public service payroll would take years to develop. Let us not forget that we have to keep paying some 300,000 public servants. Although our immediate priority is to stabilize Phoenix so that accurate paycheques are issued on time, I applaud the minister's openness to exploring other long-term solutions that will provide public servants with a reliable, sustainable pay system.

• (1745)

[English]

We apologize to the many public servants who have suffered from pay issues. We are doing everything we can, as quickly as we can, to put an end to their frustration. To be clear, there is no quick fix. However, we will make steady progress until those who are missing pay receive it.

As we proceed, we are grateful to the dedicated employees at the pay centre in Miramichi, at the satellite offices, and those across the country who are working hard to help ensure their public service colleagues receive the pay they have earned.

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague and neighbour for her speech. One of our biggest concerns as members of Parliament is the way in which cases are resolved. It is a question that has been raised a number of times today. There has been a lot of talk in the House about all the measures that were put in place to help members help their constituents with specific cases. Unfortunately, in actual fact, all the resources that were said to have been put in place do not amount to much. For example, in my riding, people whose cases were particularly sensitive were directed to a hotline. These are people at risk of losing their house, for example, and they are not alone of course. They got no help in the end.

All members, regardless of their political stripe, are dealing with similar cases. I would like to hear how my colleague reconciles the government's claims of the resources in place with what is really going on, given that these files remain in limbo.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès: Madam Speaker, I share my colleague's frustration. I hear the same frustration from the people

in my riding who are asking for help. The long response times are not helping matters.

All I can say is that my colleagues and I will continue to talk about how we might provide the help that we as MPs should provide these people who are experiencing such serious pay problems.

[English]

Mr. Fin Donnelly (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Madam Speaker, if we listen to what my hon. colleague is saying, we would not think there is a problem at all with the Phoenix pay system.

I just have a simple question for the member. What would she say to the over 190,000 public sector workers who have had an issue with the Phoenix system?

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès: Madam Speaker, I would say what we have been saying for many months, that we are sorry and we know there is a problem. I do not think I said anything that presumed to pretend that we do not have a problem. We do. We acknowledge it and we are sorry. We are trying to work at it as best we can. We are taking proposals and solutions and ideas from people all around us, both from unions and from the employees themselves. We are very open to proposals to try to find a solution and it is not an easy one. It is not an easy fix.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to welcome my colleague to the operations committee where she will spend a lot more time on Phoenix, I am sure, than she has in the past.

I am glad that she is open to looking for solutions to the Phoenix problem on how we can help. One of them that we brought up to the minister was to allow resources for members of Parliament to help their constituents with Phoenix. The minister promised us that in November and it was supposed to be delivered by December 15. We have heard nothing from her. We did hear from the minister today that constituents with problems with Phoenix should not go to their MPs but they should go to their supervisors and bosses. That is not a solution.

Will my colleague contact the minister on behalf of all members of Parliament and everyone affected by Phoenix and ask her if she will stick to her promise of setting up those resources for MPs so that we can help our constituents affected by the Phoenix fiasco?

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès: Madam Speaker, as I told our colleague from Beloeil—Chambly, I will do my best to pass the message along and ask for solutions to the problem.

Business of Supply

● (1750)

IMPACT ASSESSMENT ACT

BILL C-69—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.): Madam Speaker, an agreement could not be reached under the provisions of Standing Order 78(1) or 78(2) with respect to the second reading stage of Bill C-69, an act to enact the impact assessment act and the Canadian energy regulator act, to amend the Navigation Protection 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.

* * *

FISHERIES ACT

BILL C-68—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.): Madam Speaker, an agreement could not be reached under the provisions of Standing Orders 78(1) or 78(2) with respect to the second reading stage of Bill C-68, an act to amend the Fisheries Act and other acts in consequence.

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]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—PHOENIX PAY SYSTEM

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Pat Finnigan (Miramichi—Grand Lake, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to take part in this debate. My colleagues who spoke before me have given a solid overview of this complex issue, the problems inherent to the pay system, and the measures the government is taking to fix them.

Let me be clear. It is completely unacceptable that public servants are not getting their pay at the appropriate time or in the correct amount. We have heard stories about the many negative consequences that have resulted from these pay problems. We fully understand the anger and frustration our hard-working public servants are feeling. The Minister of Public Services and Procurement has apologized for the extraordinary difficulties facing public servants and their families. As a former public servant herself, the minister is well aware of the valuable work done by public servants on behalf of Canadians. She has often reiterated her determination to do whatever it takes to correct this unacceptable situation. Our government has no higher priority than paying public servants the correct amount, as calculated by a reliable pay system.

Our public service is among the best in the world. As MPs, we see the work public servants do to help us do our job every day. For example, the work of MPs relies on the skills of our interpreters, who make it possible for us to communicate in the official language of our choice. They do a very good job, despite my very strong Acadian accent. These employees, like all public servants, deserve to be paid properly and on time.

[English]

I want to remind my colleagues that we are dealing with two issues, which are separate but very much related. The first is pay modernization. The old public service pay system was replaced by a new system, Phoenix, which is now used by approximately 100 departments and agencies. The second is pay consolidation, involving 46 departments and agencies, representing roughly 70% of the public service. As the Auditor General reported, 1,200 pay advisers were eliminated in those organizations and replaced with 460 pay advisers and 90 support staff at the public service pay centre in Miramichi.

This consolidation began in May 2012. Once Phoenix was launched, it meant that the centre was responsible for accessing Phoenix to initiate, change, or terminate pay for employees based on requests from these 46 departments and agencies. The over 55 organizations that retained their pay advisers have direct access to Phoenix to enter pay information for their employees into the new system.

As we know, Phoenix was fully implemented in April 2016. As the new system was rolled out, there were problems. However, as the officials from Public Services and Procurement Canada have told us, those cases were taken to be one-offs. It is also worth mentioning that in addition to these new cases, the pay centre was already dealing with a large number of cases, over 40,000, that had not been resolved prior to the launch of Phoenix.

There is no doubt that the hard-working employees at the pay centre and across the department were doing their very best to respond. I might add that I have toured the payroll centre, as it is in my riding, five or six times since it was opened. I have witnessed the hard-working people at the Miramichi centre. They are very hard-working people and take it very personally that people are not getting their paycheques on time.

They were determined to help their fellow public servants who were facing terrible situations without pay and who wanted to know when they were going to be paid. Their first priority was the employees not receiving any pay at all. These included new hires and students, or employees returning to work from extended absences. I want to recognize the efforts made across the public service to provide employees with emergency salary advances and priority payments.

The next priority was employees who were going on leave or leaving the public service. It would become abundantly clear that the calls for assistance had outstripped the department's capacity to respond.

Business of Supply

• (1755)

This was a very difficult situation for the employees at the pay centre. They have worked nights and weekends to assist their colleagues. Every day they demonstrate tremendous dedication and character in very trying circumstances.

[Translation]

The department immediately set up a satellite unit responsible for pay in Gatineau. The department then added and staffed three other satellite pay offices in Shawinigan, Winnipeg, and Montreal to provide support. More than 250 pay advisors were recruited. It also opened a client contact centre to deal with employees' requests for assistance.

I believe it is important for us to have a good understanding of the challenge faced by Public Services and Procurement Canada, which had to recruit pay advisors in a short period of time. We felt the effects of the loss of some 700 pay experts, a situation created by the Conservative government. This loss had serious consequences, because the expertise of these pay advisors would have made a difference and surely helped resolve the problems.

I thank the public service unions that helped the department recruit staff for the pay offices. In conjunction with this collaboration, we came to an agreement that the government would dispatch IT experts to help fix the Phoenix system.

In the months that followed, priority cases were resolved with the help of additional resources, technological upgrades to Phoenix, targeted training, and other measures. The unions also asked the department to prioritize transactions related to parental and disability leave. The wait times for these types of cases was reduced.

The number of cases in the backlog also dropped. However, pay advisers had to direct their attention to other priorities. As tax time approached, employees were naturally worried about how incorrect pay would affect their T4s and tax returns. It took a lot of hard work to fix these problems, particularly overpayments. As soon as tax time was over, another major challenge arose.

[English]

As members know, our government inherited a situation where many employees did not have any collective agreements. In fact, some of the collective bargaining agreements had been expired for four years. Negotiators for the unions and the government were able to sign 21 agreements. However, this triggered the need to process retroactive payments, salary increases, and other allowances negotiated as part of these agreements. To meet this demand, more pay advisers were dedicated to working almost exclusively on these payments. This work also proved much more complicated than expected. Calculating retroactive payments going back as far as four years required data to be pulled from the government's now decommissioned pay system. With this additional work, the backlog of outstanding transactions grew.

It is also apparent that a more comprehensive approach to stabilizing the pay system was needed. The ministers' working group was established to bring a whole of government perspective to the table. The government also allocated \$142 million for investment in people and technology. Another \$56 million in new funding was

provided in this year's supplementary estimates. In November, the Minister of Public Services and Procurement and the President of the Treasury Board announced a series of measures aimed at stabilizing the pay system.

• (1800)

[Translation]

There is no greater champion of the interests of public servants than the Minister of Public Services and Procurement. I was pleased to see the minister visit Miramichi the day after she took over this portfolio. I should also point out that the Prime Minister went with her.

Stabilizing the Phoenix pay system is now the top priority for all ministers and deputy ministers.

In closing, I want to commend our hard-working public servants who have been tackling these extraordinary challenges, for which they were not responsible. They simply want to know when they will be paid.

I also want to thank the dedicated public servants at the pay centre and satellite offices, as well as all public servants across all departments and agencies.

We are aware that public servants experiencing pay problems and those trying to help them are under tremendous stress. We will support these employees, and we will not stop until—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. I am sorry, but the member's time is up. The member will have an opportunity to add to his remarks during questions and comments.

The member for Beloeil—Chambly.

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. It is interesting because he was talking about the pay centre that is in his riding, if I understood correctly.

Through an access to information request, we obtained the minutes of a teleconference meeting that took place in December 2015, after the Liberals took office. One of the issues raised during that meeting was the lack of resources at the pay centre, as well as the team's morale, which was already greatly affected by certain problems.

Is my colleague not aware that it was the Liberals and not the Conservatives who made this major change? There has been talk of a time bomb, but I would venture to say that the Liberals are the ones who lit the fuse.

Does my colleague not think that it is problematic that these same public servants in his riding are now suffering the consequences of a decision that was made by the government led by his party?

Mr. Pat Finnigan: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for raising those questions.

Business of Supply

Let me start by saying that I will always stand up in the House in support of pay centre workers in my region. They have been working seven days a week to fix the problem. Hats off to the people working back home because they are not to blame for any of this.

That said, when we rolled out the system, we had a backlog of 40,000 cases. There was no going back. People worked hard to fix the problem with what they had. We are still in the process of training people, and we are staying the course.

[English]

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have been working on this file for two years now with my colleagues from the NDP. We first broached this in January 2016. In February 2016, we brought up the issue and that is when we heard from the President of the Treasury Board that they would not go ahead with the second part of the Phoenix rollout unless they were 99% certain it was going to work. The very next month, in March, we heard from Judy Foote that this was an outstanding success.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind the member—sorry, she is not in the House any longer. I apologize.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Which is good, Madam Speaker, because she was not doing a great job with Phoenix.

We heard the government again and again deny that there was an issue. We heard in March 2016 that there were only 57 outstanding issues when we knew there were already 40,000 outstanding items in the backlog, which the government did not touch, even though, in December 2015, it was warned to do it. We heard later that it was no problem. Then we heard from the current minister, “We are working on it.” Today, when we asked her about her promise in November to provide resources to MPs and their constituency offices so they can help people with Phoenix, the minister said that people should call their supervisors.

Again and again we have heard the Liberals blow off and underestimate the issues. Why should we now believe the government that it is actually serious about fixing Phoenix?

● (1805)

Mr. Pat Finnigan: Madam Speaker, one does not have to be a carpenter to know that without a foundation, it is hard to build a house. We are, right now, building the foundation and also keeping the house going.

The hon. member talked about minister Foote. I was in my riding three times with minister Foote and one could not find a better, more dedicated person. She made every resource available to make sure we would fix the problem that we inherited from the previous government. To say that nothing was done over that time is a complete fabrication by a government that really—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind members, including the parliamentary secretary who should know better, that somebody has the floor. Let us allow the member for Miramichi—Grand Lake to finish his thoughts on this.

Mr. Pat Finnigan: Madam Speaker, I will conclude by saying that considering—to use the same word that was used—the bomb

that we were left, I think our ministers have done a tremendous job. We are working incessantly to fix the problem. We will fix it.

Mr. Fin Donnelly (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to participate in today's debate on the NDP motion regarding the Phoenix pay system, or as it is known by many public civil servants, the Phoenix nightmare.

It has been two long years, and through it all, public servants have been unwavering. They have kept showing up for work, despite the fact that they have not been getting paid correctly, and they have continued to deliver outstanding service to Canadians. They deserve to be paid accurately and on time. When they are not at work, they are spending hours and hours of their time trying to fix their pay problems.

In September, I met with a constituent in my riding of Port Moody—Coquitlam who is an employee of the federal government. She returned to work on December 12, 2017, after one year of maternity leave and three months of leave without pay. She contacted my office because she was experiencing “significant anxiety and stress regarding my pay issues”.

Following are some of the highlights of her email:

I have two young children ages 1 and 3, who are in full time daycare at a cost of two thousand dollars a month. I pay for a large mortgage and strata fees on a townhouse. I returned to work at 80% capacity (4 days a week) in order to balance my duties at home, and therefore have a 20% reduction in pay, which is my choice, but necessary to care for my children. In order to return to work, I needed to purchase snow tires for my vehicle at a cost of \$1,200 to ensure my children are safe in my vehicle. I also pay daily parking fees to be at work. Therefore I have considerable monthly expenses, and every dollar missing from my pay cheque causes me stress and anxiety. How can I be expected to perform my job well, and serve the needs of Canadians when I cannot be paid properly and on time?

I met with her, and as I am sure one can understand, this experience has been extremely frustrating for a busy mother trying to achieve a work-life balance. She completed the mandatory Phoenix pay centre training, which took her two hours. In the end, it resolved nothing. She called the pay centre numerous times, filed many tickets, and still there was zero resolution.

Here are some of the issues she has been having with her pay. There were erroneous union dues deducted while she was on maternity leave, totalling \$180 in 2016 and 2017, and an overpayment of union dues in 2018. She was not paid for work on December 12 and December 13. Merry Christmas, indeed. There have been deductions for benefits over multiple pay periods which were incorrect and total almost \$400, when they should be less than \$100. On top of those issues, she is trying to buy back her pensionable service for when she was on maternity leave, but the pension centre has informed her that the pay centre miscalculated her pension buy-back amount.

Business of Supply

As her MP, I am baffled as to why no one has met with her to review these issues and why they cannot be resolved. My office has intervened and written on her behalf, but we still have no resolution.

I have another constituent, who works at Service Canada, and was issued an incorrect T4 for 2016. She was told to use the incorrect T4 to do her taxes, which she did. As a result, she received a refund in excess of \$18,000, which she knows she is not entitled to. Now it is 2018, and not only is she waiting for her 2017 T4, but she is still waiting for her correct T4 for 2016. I am sure that if it was the other way around and she owed \$18,000 in taxes, her issues would be resolved by now.

What a shame. All that public servants are asking for is a payroll system that will pay them accurately and on time every time. Is it really too much to ask?

I received a letter which sets out another example:

I am a resident of Coquitlam and a federal government employee. I have been experiencing ongoing issues with my pay since last July. I have diligently followed all of the required protocols to resolve these problems with the pay center and Trusted Source to no avail and it was recommended to me that I contact my Member of Parliament. I am writing to you to seek your assistance in having my pay problems resolved and to express my frustration with the pay problems that I have experienced since Phoenix was implemented. I'm writing this also on behalf of my colleagues who are also experiencing pay issues, including not getting paid at all.

● (1810)

Not getting paid at all: that is unacceptable. Imagine how quickly Phoenix would be fixed if MPs and senators were not getting paid at all. This has been going on for two long years.

Public servants deserve to be paid correctly and to be paid on time. Instead, they have had to push Treasury Board to compensate workers for penalties, interest charges, and other fees incurred due to Phoenix pay problems. They have had to hire tax professionals to help them with tax problems. They have had to apply for priority payments to try to alleviate financial hardship from not being paid. They have had to take the government to court and to the labour board, all to get their paycheques. It is ridiculous, and it is as bad as it sounds.

How did we get here? This was not some random accident. The governments have known since 2011 that implementing the Phoenix pay system would be a mistake. They were told by the union representing federal public servants that it would not work. However, the previous Conservative government decided to merge the pay and benefits services of all federal departments into one centralized service, located in Miramichi, New Brunswick, anyway.

The Liberal government then hit the start button and rolled out this disastrous program. Despite repeated warnings that problems were occurring and a request from the union to slow down the rollout and transfer of new files, they just kept going full steam ahead. Requests from the union were ignored, and public service workers are paying the price.

Phoenix was supposed to cost \$310 million to implement, and the Conservatives claimed it would save taxpayers \$70 million a year. According to the Auditor General, it is going to take years and more than half a billion dollars to fix. That is just an estimate. In the meantime, workers and their families are suffering.

I want to finish by adding that many employees are now refusing promotions or parental leave for fear of losing their salaries completely. What kind of workforce have we created when there is this kind of issue, where there is this kind of prolific fear of advancing or looking to a promotion or going on parental leave? Sure, this is not everyone; this is a number of people. However, this is out there. I am hearing about it. I am sure every member in the House is also hearing from constituents in their ridings, public service workers who are just doing their jobs and want to get decent pay, on time, and what they deserve.

I urge all members of the House to do the right thing and vote in favour of the motion.

● (1815)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): It being 6:15 p.m., pursuant to an order made earlier today, all questions necessary to dispose of the opposition motion are deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Wednesday, February 28, 2018, at the expiry of the time provided for oral questions.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I suspect if you were to canvass the House, you would find unanimous consent to call it 6:30 at this time.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Do we have unanimous consent to see the clock at 6:30 p.m.?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

[*Translation*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—VETERANS

The House resumed from February 15 consideration of the motion.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Pursuant to order made Thursday, February 15, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion of Mr. McColeman relating to the business of supply.

Call in the members.

● (1840)

[*English*]

(The House divided on the motion, which was negated on the following division:)

(*Division No. 454*)

YEAS

Members

Aboultair	Anderson
Angus	Arnold
Aubin	Barlow
Barsalou-Duval	Beaulieu
Benson	Benzen
Bergen	Berthold
Blaikie	Blaney (North Island—Powell River)
Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)	Boudrias
Boulerice	Boutin-Sweet

Adjournment Proceedings

Brassard	Brosseau	Hajdu	Hardie
Brown	Calkins	Harvey	Hébert
Cannings	Caron	Hogg	Hollard
Carrie	Christopherson	Housefather	Hussen
Clarke	Clement	Hutchings	Iacono
Cooper	Davies	Joly	Jordan
Deltell	Diotte	Jowhari	Kang
Donnelly	Dubé	Khalid	Khera
Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona)	Dusseau	Lambropoulos	Lametti
Duvall	Eglinski	Lamoureux	Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation)
Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)	Falk (Provencher)	LeBlanc	Lebouthillier
Fast	Finley	Lefebvre	Leslie
Fortin	Gallant	Levitt	Lightbound
Garrison	Gill	Lockhart	Long
Gladu	Godin	Longfield	MacAulay (Cardigan)
Gourde	Hardcastle	MacKinnon (Gatineau)	Maloney
Harder	Hoback	Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia)	
Hughes	Johns	May (Cambridge)	
Julian	Kelly	McCrimmon	McDonald
Kent	Kitchen	McGuinty	McKay
Krniec	Kusie	McKenna	McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
Kwan	Lake	McLeod (Northwest Territories)	Mendès
Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)	Laverdière	Mendicino	Mihychuk
Liepert	Lloyd	Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Sœurs)	
Lobb	Lukiwski	Monsef	
MacGregor	MacKenzie	Morneau	Morrissey
Maguire	Malcolmson	Murray	Nassif
Mareil	Masse (Windsor West)	Nault	Ng
Mathysen	May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)	O'Connell	Oliphant
McCauley (Edmonton West)	McColeman	Oliver	O'Regan
McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)	Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound)	Ouellette	Peschisolido
Moore	Motz	Peterson	Petitpas Taylor
Nantel	Nater	Philpott	Picard
Nicholson	Nuttall	Poissant	Qualtrough
O'Toole	Paul-Hus	Ratansi	Robillard
Pauzé	Plamondon	Rodriguez	Rogers
Poillievre	Quach	Romanado	Rota
Rankin	Rayes	Rudd	Ruimy
Reid	Richards	Rusnak	Sajjan
Sansoucy	Schmale	Sangha	Scarpaleggia
Shields	Shipley	Schieffe	Schulte
Sopuck	Stanton	Serré	Sgro
Stewart	Strahl	Shanahan	Sheehan
Stubbs	Sweet	Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon)	Sidhu (Brampton South)
Thériault	Tilson	Simms	Sohi
Trost	Trudel	Sorbara	Spengemann
Van Kesteren	Van Loan	Tabbara	Tan
Vecchio	Viersen	Vandenbeld	Vaughan
Wagantall	Warawa	Virani	Whalen
Warkentin	Webber	Wilkinson	Wilson-Raybould
Weir	Yurdiga — 120	Wrzesnewskyj	Yip
		Young — 155	

NAYS

Members

Aldag	Alghabra
Alleslev	Amos
Anandasangaree	Arya
Ayoub	Badawey
Bagnell	Baylis
Bennett	Bibeau
Bittle	Boissonnault
Bossio	Bratina
Breton	Brisson
Caesar-Chavannes	Carr
Casey (Cumberland—Colchester)	Casey (Charlottetown)
Chagger	Champagne
Cormier	Dabrusin
Damoff	DeCoursey
Dhillon	Di Iorio
Drouin	Dubourg
Duclos	Duguid
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Dzerowicz
Easter	Ehsassi
El-Khoury	Erskine-Smith
Eyolfson	Fergus
Fillmore	Finnigan
Fisher	Fonseca
Fortier	Fragiskatos
Fraser (West Nova)	Fraser (Central Nova)
Fuhr	Gameau
Goldsmith-Jones	Goodale
Graham	Grewal

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion defeated.**ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS**

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[Translation]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government is fond of saying that Canada is back, but one has to wonder where exactly we are, because we do not see much of Canada on the international stage. In any case, Canada's name rarely comes up in good news stories.

Adjournment Proceedings

Consider peacekeeping. During the election campaign, the Liberals promised to recommit to peacekeeping. I have a feeling that we do not have the same definition of commitment, because all I see is a total lack thereof.

In November, right when we were hosting an international conference in Vancouver, Canada's contribution dropped to 62 peacekeepers. That is the weakest commitment since peacekeeping operations were first introduced over 50 years ago.

What happened between November and December? Canada's contribution dropped further from 62 to 43 peacekeepers. Incidentally, despite all the government's rhetoric on the role of women and the need for more women in peacekeeping operations, there are only six women among those 43 peacekeepers.

However, the Liberal government had made some very specific promises. In August 2016, it promised 600 troops and 150 police officers. By November 2017, all of a sudden, it was promising only 200 troops. For that matter, we have yet to see a single one of those troops.

The government says it will provide training and equipment. There are plenty of developed countries providing training and equipment, yet also doing the hard work on the ground. In the meantime, Canada is not doing its fair share. That leads to two problems, the first of which is fundamental. By carrying out peacekeeping operations, Canada could contribute to global peace and security and help protect civilians. However, we are not doing that. We are full of talk, but no action.

The second is that our refusal to live up to our commitments harms Canada's reputation. That goes for peacekeeping as well as for other files like climate change, as Canada will not even be meeting its Paris agreement targets. In the eyes of the international community, a country that says one thing and does another is a country that cannot be trusted. I do not know if the government actually thinks that that is how it will gain the credibility it needs to win a seat on the United Nations Security Council, but I really do not think this is the right approach.

I want this government to stop talking and stop making us promises only to reconsider them and put them off.

When will Canada truly return to peacekeeping?

• (1845)

[*English*]

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for being here this evening to talk about our re-engagement within the international community and specifically about the issue she first raised in the House of Commons that led to this late show, which is around nuclear disarmament.

Canada is committed to re-engaging in peacekeeping missions. She will know of our women in peacekeeping initiative, the Elsie initiative, which is receiving tremendous support from other countries around the world. Certainly, we see a role for Canada to play in increasing the number of women who play important roles in peacekeeping missions and as part of our larger women, peace and security agenda.

We know that engaging women and girls in conflict and post-conflict affected areas is tremendously important for peace building, peacekeeping, and maintaining peace over the long haul. Canada is already actively working in these areas, and will continue to reach out to other partner countries around the world as we build a coalition of support for this. This is all part of what underpins our feminist international agenda and our feminist development assistance agenda. We understand the importance of supporting women and girls in other vulnerable communities, including members of the LGBTI community. That underpins everything we do in support of human rights around the world.

Let me speak briefly about nuclear disarmament. This is the reason we are gathered here this evening.

Just two weeks ago in Munich, the Minister of Foreign Affairs met with Beatrice Fihn, the director of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, ICAN. ICAN won the Nobel Peace Prize for its important advocacy on spreading awareness about the true and terrible consequences of using nuclear weapons and for its work on the ban treaty. It is hard work, and the hard work of these women on this important issue must be acknowledged and commended. We do that here now and wherever we have the opportunity to do so.

We recognize the catastrophic impact that any detonation of nuclear weapons can have, and we remain firmly committed to ensuring our children inherit a world free of nuclear weapons.

Canada shares the deep frustration expressed by many regarding the slow pace of nuclear disarmament. We remain committed to advancing tangible progress to a pragmatic step-by-step approach that strengthens the international framework for nuclear disarmament. This includes the universalization of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, or NPT, the entry into force of the comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty, and the negotiation of the fissile material cut-off treaty, or FMCT.

While the NPT may be imperfect, it has been effective in eliminating the spread of nuclear weapons. Among the 186 non-nuclear weapon states party to the treaty, only North Korea has violated its obligation to not develop nor acquire nuclear weapons.

Most important, the priority for Canada is advancing the fissile material cut-off treaty. Ending the production of the explosive fissile material used in nuclear weapons is critical for ending proliferation and preparing the way for nuclear disarmament. This is exactly why Canada is currently chairing a UN expert preparatory group on the FMCT, which includes all five nuclear non-proliferation treaty nuclear weapons states, India, and 19 other nuclear weapons states. We are counteracting growing international divisions by uniting both nuclear and non-nuclear armed states in making genuine practical progress on nuclear disarmament.

Disarmament is a goal for Canada to see the world free of nuclear weapons, as is our re-engagement in peacekeeping initiatives around the world.

• (1850)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Madam Speaker, there seems to be some confusion because I am pretty sure that the objective was to talk about peacekeeping.

If my colleague wants to talk about re-engagement, a re-engagement that I have yet to see, and the issue of nuclear disarmament, I could remind him that 120 countries approved a convention to ban nuclear arms and that Canada disengaged from that exercise.

My colleague also talked about women in peacekeeping. Currently, only six out of Canada's 43 peacekeepers are women. He is talking about women, peace and security, but there is no money for Canada's action plan in that regard. They talk about their feminist international agenda, but they sell arms to Saudi Arabia. They talk about women in international development, but do not provide a penny more. In fact, the international development budget is decreasing. If that is re-engagement, then we have—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Madam Speaker, as I just said, we fully subscribe to a world free of nuclear weapons and that is what we are focusing our efforts on.

[*English*]

Our efforts are aimed at achieving concrete progress and building important trust. We are pursuing inclusive, pragmatic initiatives that bring the international community together behind our common goal of a nuclear weapons-free world. That is why Canada is leading international efforts to prepare the way for a fissile material cut-off treaty that halts the production of the fissile material used in nuclear weapons. Canada is determined to show leadership in such initiatives and is taking real action that counts.

We understand more must be done, and we remain committed to nuclear disarmament as part of our broader re-engagement in the world, promoting and protecting human rights, focused on women and girls and those who find themselves in vulnerable situations.

[*Translation*]

AVIATION SAFETY

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would first like to thank all my colleagues from all parties who agreed to study aviation safety at the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

As this subject was of concern to me, I was both surprised and disappointed by the minister's reply to one of my questions in the House about this.

I will provide the context for those interested in the question. I stated:

...according to internal documents from Transport Canada, pilot proficiency tests will be conducted by the airlines themselves, rather than by Transport Canada inspectors...

Adjournment Proceedings

The airline companies will test their own pilots.

What I was asking the minister was whether he was planning to put an end to this practice, which was similar to that of the Conservative government in power before the Liberals. The Conservatives allowed more and more self-regulation, which did not always have the desired effect on safety. In fact, as we speak, 90% of the industry's pilots are tested not by Transport Canada inspectors, but by the airline companies themselves. I was truly perplexed by the minister's reply.

I would like to quote an excerpt. He said, “we periodically conduct an...audit”. There is already a problem here. We are talking about aviation safety and he said, “Using a risk-based approach, we periodically conduct an airline safety audit.” In other words, no inspections are conducted if things seem to be going well. However, aviation safety and air accidents involve injury and death. Conducting audits periodically, looking at the statistics after the fact, and seeing that, strangely enough, there have been more injuries and death is no way to determine that more inspections are needed. That seems to be a rather contradictory approach to me.

There are some other important elements that make the minister's response even more ambiguous. I would like to list a few in the time that I have left. As I just said, Transport Canada is reducing the number of safety inspectors. The Liberal government cut the aviation safety budget by 15% from 2015 to 2017. Transport Canada documents indicate that, for 2016-17, the number of inspections in reaction to accidents, thus after the fact, is nine times higher than preventive inspections. It seems to me that the point of an inspection is to prevent an accident from happening, not to react after it has happened.

We could also talk about the comments made by expert Mr. Moshansky, who said:

Transport Canada has now totally abandoned traditional hands-on regulatory oversight, in-flight inspections and audits across the aviation system...

I am going to skip some examples and come back to the basic question that I asked the minister in the hopes that this evening I will get a response that is more coherent and more in keeping with the statistics that continue to rise. The fact that the numbers are going up means that we are not going in the right direction.

Does the Liberal government intend to reverse this decision and give Transport Canada inspectors back the full authority over inspections?

• (1855)

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Trois-Rivières for his question. Canada's air transportation network is among the safest in the world, and our government is constantly working to maintain this level of safety and to improve on it.

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Transport Canada has a stringent regulatory oversight program with high standards. The approved check pilot program is one such example. Transport Canada requires that professional pilots regularly participate in a proficiency check carried out by an approved check pilot. This test is designed to confirm a pilot's skills and abilities in flying specific types of aircraft. The frequency of these pilot proficiency checks depends on the type of operation, and on the size and complexity of the aircraft. Canada's requirements and standards are in line with those of other aviation authorities, such as the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration, and meet, or even surpass, the requirements of the International Civil Aviation Organization.

Under this program, which has been around for more than 25 years, the pilot proficiency checks can be delegated to experienced pilots trained and supervised by Transport Canada, according to the highest standards to guarantee compliance with the Canadian Aviation Regulations.

Using expert ministerial delegates is an established practice for highly skilled activities, such as certifying aircraft, checking pilots for various types of licenses, and written pilot exams.

Our government conducts detailed data analysis to ensure that the delegation of authority program provides complete oversight. Data for the past five years show that Transport Canada approved check pilots are effective at ensuring compliance.

Transport Canada recently conducted two thorough assessments of the risks associated with the approved check pilot program in specific commercial aviation sectors.

The assessments confirmed that unplanned risk-based inspections are more effective than planned inspections because they enable inspectors to focus on individuals whose performance is not meeting expectations.

Our government will continue to monitor the program as a whole to ensure that it upholds excellent safety standards. Canadians can rest assured that Transport Canada inspectors will continue to carry out inspections in situations that pose a significant risk to the safety of our air transportation network and resolve those situations while lower-risk compliance inspection duties will be delegated to the most experienced check pilots in the industry.

Mr. Robert Aubin: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. It was quite a speech, but it did not answer the question

whatsoever. He states that cuts to Transport Canada are not felt by travellers, but the numbers paint a clear picture.

Oddly, on the subject of what the member said about the International Civil Aviation Organization, that organization has asked Transport Canada to establish biannual pilot proficiency tests. I imagine that in the spirit of its representatives, this responsibility falls to Transport Canada and not the airlines.

To give an example of the increase in incidents and accidents, I have the most recent figures from 2016 and 2017. In terms of accidents resulting in injury or death, there were one in 2016 and nine in 2017. If that is not an obvious tenfold increase and does not give cause to question the approach, then I wonder what the government is waiting for and when it will do something about this.

● (1900)

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Madam Speaker, the safety and security of Canadian passengers certainly remains Transport Canada's top priority. Instead of ending the testing of approved check pilots, Transport Canada will focus its oversight on areas of greater risk as determined by the data obtained. For example, we know that unscheduled inspections focusing on risk are more useful than planned inspections. The use of industry delegates, namely pilots trained and supervised by Transport Canada inspectors, to certify compliance with regulations is a long-standing practice that is clearly in keeping with the program. Thus, Transport Canada will delegate part of its inspection activities to the industry's most seasoned approved check pilots in order to continue to monitor the program in its entirety.

[English]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Calgary Rocky Ridge is not present to raise the matter for which adjournment notice has been given. Accordingly, the notice is deemed withdrawn.

[Translation]

The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:02 p.m.)

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