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Thursday, October 20, 2016

—

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, October 20, 2016

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)
[English]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if you seek it I believe you will find consent for the following motion.

I move:

That, at the conclusion of today's debate on the opposition motion in the name of the member for Calgary—Nose Hill, all questions necessary to dispose of the motion be deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Tuesday, October 25, 2016, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

PETITIONS

TAXATION

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition signed by close to 100 campers who stayed at Sequin Beach Kampground in Callander, Ontario, which is located on the pristine shores of Lake Nipissing, in the riding of Nipissing—Timiskaming.

The petitioners call upon the government to ensure that campgrounds with fewer than five full-time year-round employees continue to be recognized and taxed as a small business.

PALLIATIVE CARE

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise on behalf of the constituents of Battlefords—Lloydminster to present two petitions.

The first petition calls upon the government to implement the palliative care package of \$3 billion over four years that it had campaigned on. The first year has passed, and we are already behind. Therefore, 100-plus petitioners are asking the government to move forward on that expeditiously.

JUSTICE

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition demands that the government recognize the rights of the unborn. We had the vote last night on Cassie's law, which unfortunately failed. However, it is time to continue to move forward and make sure the government takes heed of this type of petition with its hundreds of signatures asking it to do exactly that.

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise and present this petition from people across Canada who are growing increasingly concerned about the Prime Minister's disregard for the promises he made to first nations people and the string of broken promises made to the youth, particularly the promise he made of \$50 million for post-secondary education, which was to flow this year. They have received zero.

The petitioners are also concerned that the Prime Minister made the promise to lift the 2% cap. He made that promise publicly, and yet the 2% cap is still in place on post-secondary education, which is taking away the ability of this future generation of leaders to get the quality education that they deserve and that Canadians believe they deserve.

The petitioners are calling upon the government to live up to its promises and stop breaking the promises it has made again and again. It is the longest con in Confederation, and it needs to end.

JUSTICE

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I stand today to present more petitions from Canadians who are requesting that the government consider protecting pregnant women and their unborn children. This is an issue that will not go away. I am pleased to stand again today and present these petitions.

* * *

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 ask that all questions be allowed to stand at this time.

Business of Supply

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

The Speaker: Before we go to orders of the day, the Chair would like to take a moment to provide some information to the House regarding the management of private members' business.

[*Translation*]

As members know, after the order of precedence is replenished, the Chair reviews the new items so as to alert the House to bills which at first glance appear to infringe on the financial prerogative of the crown. This allows members the opportunity to intervene in a timely fashion to present their views about the need for those bills to be accompanied by a royal recommendation.

[*English*]

Accordingly, following the September 30 replenishment of the order of precedence with 15 new items, I wish to inform the House that there is one bill that gives the Chair some concern as to the spending provisions it contemplates.

[*Translation*]

It is Bill C-245, an act concerning the development of a national poverty reduction strategy in Canada, standing in the name of the member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot.

• (1010)

[*English*]

I would encourage hon. members who would like to make arguments regarding the need for royal recommendation to accompany this bill or any of the other bills now on the order of precedence to do so at an early opportunity. I thank hon. members for their attention.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—GENOCIDE AGAINST THE YAZIDI PEOPLE

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC) moved:

That the House (a) recognize that ISIS is committing genocide against the Yazidi people; (b) acknowledge that many Yazidi women and girls are still being held captive by ISIS as sexual slaves; (c) recognize that the government has neglected to provide this House with an appropriate plan and the corresponding action required to respond to this humanitarian crisis; (d) support recommendations found in the June 15, 2016, report issued by the United Nations Commission of Inquiry on Syria entitled, "They came to destroy: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis"; and (e) call on the government to (i) take immediate action upon all the recommendations found in sections 210, 212, and 213 of the said report, (ii) use its full authority to provide asylum to Yazidi women and girls within 30 days.

She said: Mr. Speaker, human history is littered with examples of our capacity to inflict great evil upon each other. There are also times when humanity has shown its capacity for great compassion and love.

The greatest failures of humanity have occurred when opportunities for us to exhibit our capacity for compassion are presented but we choose instead to turn our backs. These would be the times when we justify that it is too difficult to do something, that it is not our place, that we are already doing enough, that it is too risky, or that something cannot be done. Simply put, the greatest failures of humanity occur when we self-justify our failure to prevent the infliction of evil upon others when we know it is occurring.

Unfortunately, as we near Canada's 150th anniversary, our country has many examples of these great failures. We allowed the *Komagata Maru* affair to happen. We allowed the Chinese head tax to happen. We interned Japanese Canadians during World War II. We allowed the residential school system to happen. The most shameful thing we as a country could do is to forget the lessons of these events, to dismiss them as in the past, to think that they could not possibly happen again, and then to repeat them. Today, I believe we are at risk of doing just that.

In 1939, the *MS St. Louis*, carrying more than 900 refugees seeking asylum from Nazi persecution, changed course for Canada after being denied entry to the United States. A group of Canadian academics and clergy tried to persuade Mackenzie King to provide sanctuary to the ship's passengers, but an immigration official, a bureaucrat, persuaded the prime minister not to intervene. These refugees were turned away and sent to face genocide.

I would like to imagine that I do not know any of the excuses this bureaucrat used to justify Canada's failure to show compassion and love. However, I suspect they sound a lot like the excuses being delivered by Canadian federal immigration officials today, as many of us in the House across party lines seek to find ways to help the Yazidi people who are facing genocide. Frederick Blair was the name of the immigration official who persuaded the prime minister to turn away the *MS St. Louis*. In 2000, his nephew apologized to Canadians for his shameful record.

I have two charges today, one to my elected colleagues and another to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada bureaucrats.

The first charge is to the immigration bureaucrats who are sitting in the government lobby right now watching this speech, nervously hovering over government MPs, and handing out department-written speeches designed to obfuscate the fact that Canada has done nothing to help the Yazidi people.

This charge is directed to junior bureaucrats who write up the briefing notes to the minister for their bosses, which tell him that it is too hard to help these people, that the Turkish and Greek governments' policies are too hard to navigate, and that Canada cannot possibly help.

This charge is to the IRCC official who has the job of watching this debate right now and writing up the key points in summary for the bosses, so that media talking points can be written, instead of seeking to help the Yazidi people.

Business of Supply

This charge is to the ADMs and DM of IRCC who have spent more time in the last two years, across two governments, coming up with reasons as to why we cannot help the Yazidi people, instead of finding innovative ways to do so.

My charge for them is this. In the decades ahead, will their families have to apologize for their being so stuck in the mire of a bureaucracy that they were unable or unwilling to help a people facing genocide, or will they push forward and find innovative approaches to help these people?

My second charge is to my elected colleagues. We are elected to make decisions on behalf of the people we represent, not these officials. They carry out our will and, in doing so, the will of the people of Canada. For two years, we have sat in committee meetings, briefings, and caucus meetings listening to reasons why we cannot help.

In the meantime, thousands of Yazidi women have been raped dozens of times a day by dozens of men. Right now, Yazidi children are being trained to become suicide bombers after being stripped from their families. Right now, tens of thousands of Yazidis lie in mass graves. Right now, Yazidis in refugee camps in Greece and in Turkey know that they can never go home or they will die. Right now, these same refugees are being persecuted and beaten in these same refugee camps.

A deputy director for research at Amnesty International has said, "The international community must translate its shock and horror at IS crimes...into concrete actions". Yet, we listen to the advice of bureaucrats when they say that Canada cannot do anything.

•(1015)

Groups that have raised money to bring these families to Canada and have identified them are being told by bureaucrats that there is nothing we can do to help, that it is too hard, that it is really not Canada's place, and that we are already doing enough. That is all false. It needs to stop, and it needs to stop today.

My charge to my elected colleagues is this. We were elected to bring hope and change to Canada. This is one of those moments in our parliamentary careers when we have the ability to impact change and bring hope. I will not stand in this place, on the eve of Canada's 150th anniversary, and allow us to repeat a great failure in our history. I implore my colleagues, if for nothing else than for the sake of Canada's honour, to do the same.

Now to the motion before us today. The motion asks the government to take immediate action to support Yazidi victims of genocide. It asks us to first recognize that ISIS is committing genocide against the Yazidi people. This is a fact that is well established and should be formally recognized in a vote in the House, which has not yet been done. This is our opportunity to do so.

The motion then asks us to acknowledge that many Yazidi women and girls are still being held captive by ISIS as sexual slaves. Again, this is a fact. Our acknowledgement of this by supporting the motion would send a message to the international community that this is a great atrocity and that we are compelled to stop it.

The motion also asks us to recognize that the government has neglected to provide the House with an appropriate plan and the corresponding action required to respond to this humanitarian crisis. I do not want this debate to become about who did less for the Yazidi people, our former government or the present government. However, I feel that this is where we are at, and we have to move past it.

This component of the motion is included because if we do not acknowledge our shared failure, we can never move forward in helping these people. This part of the motion is included because when our former government asked IRCC bureaucrats to establish ways for Canada to prioritize persecuted and ethnic religious minorities in our refugee system, we were stymied.

The reality is that Canada is dependent upon the UN to provide the names of refugees to Canada, and the UN is not delivering Yazidi names to us. We need to innovate to stop this spiral of uselessness.

For my Liberal colleagues who will retort and say that Canada should in every instance turn a blind eye to religion and ethnicity in the prioritization of refugees, I would disagree, as these factors sometimes are the key contributing factors to the reason people are refugees to begin with. However, for today, let us put that aside and look at the fact that with the Yazidi people, we are dealing with people who are facing genocide. This is a separate category of persecution, and it carries with it a different level of responsibility when it comes to the protection of these people, because their very survival as a distinct group is threatened. The United Nations has even explicitly asked Canadians to prioritize Yazidis in its report.

This component of the motion is here because, to date, the government has failed to acknowledge that the Yazidi people need to be prioritized in Canada's refugee system, let alone put in place a plan to help them.

We could argue that the government's retraction of our CF-18s from the fight to contain ISIS did not help the Yazidi cause, given that it is widely acknowledged that the coalition air strikes have greatly aided Iraqi ground forces in taking back key ISIS strongholds. That aside, I will give the House three specific instances of when the government has had an opportunity to show a clear action plan to assist the Yazidi people but has failed to do so.

First, I have asked the Minister of Immigration many questions in the House about what he is doing to accelerate Yazidi refugee claims. In one of these recent exchanges, he said, "we do not know how many Yazidi refugees have come to Canada.... What I do know is that we have admitted more than 30,000 Syrian refugees".

Business of Supply

In his reply there is no acknowledgement that we need to prioritize Yazidi genocide victims in our refugee system. While the government has certainly admitted more than 30,000 Syrian refugees, the reality is that departmental officials told a parliamentary committee that only nine Yazidi refugee cases have been processed. Further, many Yazidis are not Syrian refugees. Most of them originate in Iraq.

After being slow to acknowledge the genocide of the Yazidi people, the minister's response was a punch in the gut for many organizations in Canada that are working hard to bring Yazidis to Canada.

The government has failed to show a plan to assist Yazidis. Operation Ezra, a multi-faith group, which has fundraised over \$250,000 to bring Yazidi families to Canada, has been, politely put, given the runaround by the minister and his bureaucrats for over a year now. They had Yazidi refugees identified who are in camps outside of Iraq that are accessible by UN and Canadian officials alike.

● (1020)

When one of the organizers of this group, a Yazidi woman herself, approached the minister at a citizenship ceremony in Winnipeg last week, at the Museum of Human Rights, no less, about the families they had identified, he said that it was in the hands of the bureaucracy and that there was nothing he could do. For the love of God, he is the Minister of Immigration. If there is nothing he can do to help Yazidis, then maybe we need a new immigration minister, because that is his job.

The third failure of the government to present a plan occurred when the Standing Committee on Immigration and Citizenship presented its sixth report to Parliament a little over two weeks ago. Our committee held emergency summer meetings regarding the Yazidi genocide, and Nadia Murad, a UN ambassador and a survivor of sexual slavery at the hands of ISIS, testified, as did other Yazidis and organizations that are working to help the Yazidi people. We heard hours of damning testimony about the inability of the international community to help the Yazidi people.

We also heard concrete and smart recommendations that Canada could examine to develop a plan to help the Yazidi. The report that was submitted after all that work contained exactly zero recommendations to help the Yazidi. Instead, the government opted to issue an op-ed in the *Toronto Star* in which it listed the following reason why it could not help the Yazidi. It stated:

Yazidi society is based on a caste structure...

Although this tradition has been questioned in recent years, it remains firmly in place. The result is that members of the morid class could be overlooked, even though their predicament may be far worse than that felt by shaikh and pir elites and their families. This is not a certainty, but it is a possibility and should give us pause.

Instead of seeking to help the Yazidi, a Liberal member wrote an op-ed about why their religious structure should exclude them from being refugees to Canada. I highly doubt that the member talked to any Yazidi families about this or sought understanding. He simply made assumptions about their religion and then used it as an excuse for why Canada should not help. This article is perhaps one of the most embarrassing pieces of garbage I have ever had the misfortune of reading. It tarnished the reputation of a government that has

welcomed many refugees to Canada. The government needs to clarify whether this is in fact the real reason it is not helping Yazidis.

All this said, I am willing to amend and remove this component of the motion if the government will commit to immediately helping the Yazidi. To me, saving the lives of these people is more important than an argument about who did less when.

A plan, with a very short timeline for action, is what matters now. The plan should include ways to address items (d) and (e) in the motion, which are to support recommendations found in the June 15 report, issued by the United Nations Commission of Inquiry on Syria, entitled "They came to destroy: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis", and to call upon the government to take immediate action on the recommendations found in sections 210, 212, and 213 of said report and use its full authority to provide asylum to Yazidi women and girls within 30 days.

The recommendations in the UN report present a clear, non-partisan, concrete path for the international community to protect the Yazidi people and should also be reflected in Canada's action plan. These recommendations are the following: strongly encourage rescue plans targeted at Yazidi captives; encourage coordination between local and international armed forces where military operations target ISIS controlled regions where Yazidi captives are held; use all means available to ensure that Yazidis held captive by ISIS and Syria are rescued during ongoing military operations; put in place a protocol for the care and treatment of Yazidis rescued as areas are seized from ISIS; recognize ISIS's commission of the crime of genocide against the Yazidis of Sinjar; and for those states that are contracting parties to the genocide convention, engage with article VIII of the convention and call upon competent organs of the United Nations, including the Security Council, to take such action under the Charter of the United Nations to prevent and suppress acts of genocide.

Further, provide expertise, on request, to assist in the preservation and documentation of mass grave sites; provide further funding for psychosocial support programs, with increased emphasis on trauma therapy for children, noting that Yazidi children have suffered different violations, depending on their sex; provide funding and expertise to support the training of psychologists and social workers in Iraq and Syria; provide funding for the reconstruction of Sinjar and expertise to allow more efficient clearing of improvised explosive devices; accelerate the asylum claims of Yazidi victims of genocide; and ensure that the provisions of the genocide convention are enacted in national legislation, as contracting states are obliged to do under article V of the genocide convention.

Business of Supply

● (1025)

There are many more good recommendations under this section, and that is why these recommendations are included in the motion today. They come from the UN. They are non-partisan, and the UN hopes that the world will act on this.

Given that the government is seeking a seat on the UN Security Council, in addition to saving Yazidi lives it should show international leadership in advancing UN directives by supporting the motion today.

When the Prime Minister posed for a photograph with Nadia Murad in New York, I hope he recognized Canada's covenant to do her and her people justice by championing these recommendations.

The motion also includes a special reference to Yazidi women and girls, not to the exclusion of Yazidi men but as an acknowledgement that there are many survivors of sexual violence who need to be supported in our country. Germany recently accepted over 1,000 Yazidi sex slave survivors and their families. There is no reason Canada cannot do the same.

Moreover, we need to put a deadline on a plan for action. It has been nearly two years since the massacre at Sinjar, and every day that passes, more Yazidis die. In the 2015 election campaign, the government said that bringing 25,000 Syrian refugees to Canada by the end of 2015 was only a matter of political will. The government was sworn in on November 4, 2015, yet it held firm to its year-end commitment.

Today is October 20, 2016. If the government could commit to focusing on bringing 25,000 refugees to Canada in a similar time period, surely it could commit to doing what the motion asks, which is to assist Yazidis within a 30-day period, after having had a year to already so.

Further, the government has the benefit of hours of committee testimony and the recommendations contained in the dissenting reports of the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

The time for committees and reports has passed, and the time for action is now. The government needs to act today. Frankly, even 30 days is too long.

For my colleagues today who have speeches prepared by departmental officials that say that we cannot help Yazidis because it is too dangerous to travel to Iraq, keep in mind that figuring out how Canada can help internally displaced Yazidis and helping Yazidis who have made it to camps in Greece and Turkey are not mutually exclusive. Yazidis in these places still face persecution, which often hampers their ability to find employment and stay in camps for any length of time, and they cannot go home, because the religious majority in the region is likely to kill them if they do so. As well, many Yazidi villages have been razed and simply do not exist anymore.

Testimony at our committee also showed proof that Yazidi refugees are being discriminated against by UN screening agents and are not making the lists that are given to Canada for the selection of government sponsored refugees. For these reasons, Yazidi refugees

in these camps should absolutely be prioritized, and they should be the first people Canada helps.

Canadian departmental officials who say that this cannot be done simply are not being encouraged strongly enough by elected leaders. For this reason, many Yazidis will be listening to the speeches given here today to see if we are courageous leaders or bureaucrat followers.

I implore members to support the motion. In the words of author Ken Harbaugh, who recently visited a Yazidi refugee camp in Greece:

In every other camp I have visited, refugees talk of one day going home. That can never happen for the Yazidis. The brutality that drove them here was utterly complete. Their homes were burned, their worship houses were defiled, their faith vilified. When ISIS targeted their ancestral lands in northern Iraq, the Sinjar mountains became the Yazidi's last stand. The world watched as ISIS closed in, intent on finishing the massacre begun in the villages...

Now, their culture hangs in the balance. Its survival depends on an ancient woman who can neither see nor walk, but can remember it all too well. It depends on a saint like Nadia Murad, who wanted nothing more than to become a school teacher in the shadow of Mount Sinjar and now carries the weight of her people's grief. And ultimately, it depends on us, on whether the world awakens to the suffering of the Yazidis, or lets it count for nothing.

Let our actions here today count for something. Support the motion, support the Yazidi people, and show Canada's capacity to stand for good in the face of great evil.

● (1030)

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge the advocacy and commitment of the member for Calgary Nose Hill on this issue and many others in respect of the immigration portfolio.

I want to ask her a short but simple question. Does she believe that the parties in the House could work collaboratively in a non-partisan manner to achieve the exact goals she is pursuing, namely justice and a safe haven for the Yazidi people?

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, if that non-partisan capacity does not exist here today, then we have not only failed the Yazidi people, we have failed our country.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by sincerely thanking my colleague for her passionate, moving, and visionary speech. I would also like to say that I was a little surprised, but I applaud her very strong support for the United Nations, at least in this context.

In March 2015, the prime minister at the time, Mr. Harper, argued that Canada did not need to concern itself with international law to justify air strikes in Syria and Iraq because ISIS did not have lawyers.

Does the member agree that, instead of joking about international law, which is our best guarantee of security, we have to work with the UN, respect international law, and bring this issue to the Security Council?

*Business of Supply**[English]*

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, it is my understanding that there is an international movement to bring the ISIS perpetrators of genocide against the Yazidi people to justice in the International Criminal Court. This needs to transcend party lines here in the House. It is something that every single one of us needs to be a vocal advocate for.

The fact that this genocide is not front-page news every day concerns me. We see the rise of nationalism among many governments and political parties around the world, and seeing this issue concerns me. I certainly hope that when advocates like Amal Clooney and representatives like Nadia Murad have the courage to take this case forward to the International Criminal Court, the international community will band together, get behind this, and bring justice to the Yazidi people of Iraq.

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member on the other side was criticizing the way that the Minister of Immigration has been dealing with refugees. As a matter of fact, the world knows that Canada's Minister of Immigration has done a beautiful job. His program has been welcomed at the United Nations and several countries around the world have adopted it.

Regarding our involvement in the fight against ISIS, as we all know, Canada is providing logistics and training for the Iraqi army to be capable of fighting ISIS.

However, my question for hon. member is this. Who created ISIS? Who helped ISIS smuggle crude oil? What country opened its borders for foreign fighters to come in from around the world, to infiltrate Iraq, and to fight together with ISIS? If she could answer this question, I believe we could devise a program to eliminate and fight ISIS.

• (1035)

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, the scope of the motion before us today is how we in the House will conduct ourselves and act to bring justice and a safe haven for the Yazidi people. I said in my speech that the time for reports and debates about who did less or more have passed. My hope today is that this debate will focus on how we can help the Yazidi people. There is no doubt in anyone's mind that ISIS has committed genocide against them.

The question for us now is how we can preserve their culture, their heritage, and their very existence going forward. I hope my colleague opposite would be seized with that task.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her excellent speech, but also more importantly for her steadfast and ongoing work on this important file.

One of the interesting things about this issue is that while we often hear from the government about the importance of data and science-based policy generally, it does not seem that it is even gathering data on many of these issues around refugees. Indeed, in technical briefing on this issue in December, when the officials were asked about the taking of people from these key vulnerable categories—Yazidis, Assyrian Christians, sexual minorities, and other communities—the response was that we do not have data fields for that.

Could the member comment, in the context of the genocide we are seeing, on the fact that the government does not seem to be gathering information on such a vital part of this discussion?

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, this is a tricky issue because the gathering of data on religious and ethnic minorities coming into Canada as refugees often has the connotation of racial profiling. However, the reality is that if we are to do as the UN tasks us with doing, and accelerate and prioritize asylum claims for victims of genocide, then yes, we actually have to know if we are bringing those people into Canada.

I think in one of the rare moments of consensus among parties during the committee hearings, we realized that in order to know if we are achieving those ends and actually bringing victims of genocide to Canada, yes, we in fact have to measure if we are actually doing that. Certainly one of the recommendations by groups at committee was to ensure that we are tracking our success in bringing genocide victims to Canada.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the motion of the member before this place is very thoroughly written and very thoughtful. It is encouraging that a member of the Conservative Party is calling for action by the government in response to a call for action by the United Nations. That is a refreshing shift from the stance her party previously took while in government.

The member also raised the issue about the trafficking in women, women who have been trafficked for sexual purposes. Has she also reached out to organizations such as ACT Alberta, which has been doing incredible work across the country on trafficking, and considered whether or not we might connect with them if we bring Yazidi women here?

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, this is such an important issue, and since today's debate should be talking about action and forward thinking, the government absolutely needs to look at these types of groups because when we bring these women to Canada, they will need an extra level of support and care, given the atrocities they have gone through.

I have had the opportunity to meet Nadia Murad. I cannot believe that this woman has the courage to stand up for people when she has had the soul raped out of her. Groups such as my hon. colleague mentioned will play a vital role in the support and long-term survival of these women.

I implore my government colleagues to both support this motion and to ensure, when they are developing their plans, that there are adequate resources for these women in their healing process.

• (1040)

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Calgary Nose Hill for her tireless advocacy on behalf of Nadia Murad and hundreds of women, such as Nadia, who have escaped sexual slavery and the thousands upon thousands of women who continue to be enslaved by this genocidal death cult.

Business of Supply

During our hearings in summer, at which Nadia Murad testified, we heard that there was a country that not only declared that what had occurred was genocide, but also felt compelled to act immediately. It was Germany. Germany brought a large contingent of Yazidi women to sanctuary to help rebuild their shattered lives.

Perhaps the member would like to comment on why Germany was able to act and how it went about bringing those women to Germany and to begin the settlement process there.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, I would also like to take a moment to personally thank the member for Etobicoke Centre for his non-partisan approach to this and his leadership on the citizenship and immigration committee, which frankly led to the study on this issue happening this summer. I can say without a shadow of a doubt that if it were not for his intervention, this study would not have occurred, and for that I and the Yazidi people thank him.

With regard to the German program to bring Yazidi women to their country, the secret to their success was that their political will. German officials acted quickly. They looked beyond the bureaucratic obstacles that were in their way to bring these people to Germany.

Without going into all of the technical details of the program, there was an enormous amount of fast-tracking and good political will to get this done. What is so great about the German project is that there is a blueprint available for Canada to follow, should this motion be adopted today.

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to participate in this important debate.

I first want to acknowledge the advocacy on this issue by the member for Calgary Nose Hill. She has put a very important motion on the persecution of minority groups in Iraq and Syria before the House. I think I can safely say that everyone in the House, across party lines, is outraged by the despicable attacks on minority groups by Daesh.

As a member of this chamber who has had the opportunity to prosecute genocide at the Rwanda war crimes tribunal with the UN, I can say that I am personally horrified by genocide whenever it emerges. It is indeed an issue that members take seriously, none more so than I do, as someone who has participated in taking action on the very types of genocide we are discussing today.

Genocide is clearly the most internationally reprehensible crime known to law and is something to which the international community should respond. Canadians in general have expressed their horror at the murderous actions of Daesh against groups such as the Yazidis, Christians, Shia Muslims, women, and members of the LGBTQ community.

Since 2014, we know that the actions of Daesh have resulted in thousands of civilian deaths, and many more innocent people have faced persecution. These terrible acts have appalled governments and people around the world, not only for their cruelty but also for how they have contributed greatly to the worst refugee crisis since the Second World War.

In addition to the refugees in other countries, more than three million people are internally displaced in Iraq. The Government of

Canada recognizes the need to protect Yazidis throughout this region. We have a long and proud tradition of providing protection to those who need it the most. We are a key contributor to international efforts to address protection issues in the region and, indeed, a hallmark of our government is that we believe in engagement with the international community, not isolation from it. That is what Canadians expect of their government. That is exactly what this government has been doing in the first year of its mandate.

Canada has always provided refuge to the world's most vulnerable people. We have welcomed generations of newcomers, who have helped us rebuild our society and economy. We have learned through years of experience that when Canadians come together to welcome and integrate newcomers, it strengthens our communities and contributes to our country's prosperity.

We see this unfolding now as we continue to welcome the some 32,000 Syrian refugees who have arrived since November 4, 2015, in addition to the thousands of other refugees from other populations. In respect of Iraq, the Government of Canada has fulfilled its commitment to resettle 23,000 Iraqi refugees alone. This was accomplished through both the government-assisted and privately sponsored refugee programs.

Following the comments made by the Minister of Immigration in the House a short while ago, I can confirm to the House that departmental officials from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada have very recently completed a visit to northern Iraq. In addition to having interviewed a very large number of Syrian refugees, these officials also met with key partners to gather as much information as possible on the situation on the ground.

Given the security situation in Iraq, we need to consider these next steps very carefully. The region's continuing instability presents very significant challenges to accessing persons who are being persecuted by Daesh in order to identify, select, and interview them, not to mention getting them out of Iraq, while ensuring that our immigration officers, members of the Yazidi community themselves, and other vulnerable groups remain out of harm's way. Moreover, recent military activities in northern Iraq present even greater challenges to the safety of Canadian personnel, as well as aid agencies and partner organizations working in the area.

As well, with the massive displacement expected as a result of the activities that are ongoing right now near Mosul, close to a million internally displaced persons are expected to be on the move and seeking shelter from violence. Some of the very partners we need to work with in the region will be consumed with this mass movement of people, making discussions and coordination with local governments and agencies even more difficult.

Business of Supply

Let me underscore that the refugee resettlement we undertake is not Canada's action alone. We do it in concert with partners, such as the UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration. Without their co-operation and their ability to act on our behalf, operations such as the current refugee resettlement or future operations relating to the Yazidi people simply cannot occur.

The feasibility of any program assisting these vulnerable groups in northern Iraq is going to be assessed in light of the challenges that I've just been describing.

●(1045)

We are also aware of the fact that there is a vulnerable Iraqi population in Turkey, which includes the Yazidi people. We would like to explore working with the Turkish government and the UNHCR to look at the best possible resettlement options for that group.

When choosing which refugees to welcome, we rely on our partners, as I mentioned, such as the UN Refugee Agency, the UNHCR, to help us find vulnerable individuals. The UNHCR independently identifies and refers the most vulnerable refugees for resettlement, including people with severe medical needs, survivors of torture or violence, children and adolescents at risk, and women and girls at risk.

In all of its humanitarian programs, including resettlement, UNHCR prioritizes those who are most vulnerable without making distinctions on the basis of nationality, race, gender, religious belief, class, or political opinion. That is an important mandate and it is one that we believe should continue in order to facilitate the responsible resettlement of refugees to this country and to other countries throughout the world.

Such prioritization naturally results in programming that addresses the protection and assistance needs of victims of attacks and abuses, including those who are attacked on ethnic and religious grounds. It is important to underline that persecution based on religion is a consideration that is already assessed by a visa officer but the government does not track cases based on race, religion, sexual orientation, or ethnicity.

However, referrals by the UN Refugee Agency and other referral organizations and private sponsors mean that Canada is well-positioned to provide protection to the most vulnerable refugees identified by our partners, including religious minorities like Yazidis. We know from anecdotal information that some Yazidis have been successfully resettled to Canada. For that, we are thankful. However, we are unable to provide the specific number of Yazidis who have been resettled because we do not track refugees according to their ethnicity or their religious affiliation.

I must also note that there are limits to what our dedicated visa officers can achieve in places such as Iraq and Syria, where the safety and security of all who are there continue to be at significant risk. Indeed, our recent trip was undertaken under top secret classification, and it is only now that I am able to report that it has concluded. The region's instability makes it extremely difficult to reach these vulnerable Yazidis in order to identify and interview them in an effort to get them out of Iraq. We have to ensure that we

do not endanger them or other vulnerable groups or place our immigration field officers in harm's way.

With respect to what we have been doing in the region, I would highlight the efforts we have made with the Syrian population, which has captured the attention of the world. We have heard this referenced this morning already.

Canadians and permanent residents of this country have stepped forward in a compassionate, tolerant, open, and internationally engaged manner to sponsor and welcome Syrian refugees under various programs, including the private sponsorship program. We have witnessed a truly national effort in this regard, collaboration by government and non-government actors, service provider organizations, the private sponsors themselves, the public and private sectors, and people from literally coast to coast to coast. Those efforts have attracted the attention of many countries around the world, attention that has added to our country's long-standing tradition of a well-respected international reputation for generosity and humanitarianism.

In respect of that tradition, members of the House agree that this type of issue is an important issue that needs to be addressed. If there is an opportunity wherein we can work collaboratively with parties across the aisle to come up with a non-partisan approach to how we can best assist the Yazidi people, that is exactly the type of opportunity we are looking to explore. This includes welcoming persecuted and vulnerable groups, whether from the Middle East, Iraq, or elsewhere, including those fleeing war zones and those in need of legal or physical protection.

Canada resettles refugees to save lives and to provide stability to those who are fleeing persecution.

This past year has been our most ambitious year ever, in terms of refugee resettlement. The compassion and fairness that we have seen is justifiably a source of great pride for Canadians, the Canadian government, and all parliamentarians. These values are at the core of our refugee program and our resettlement assistance program, which have been praised by the United Nations Refugee Agency as recently as the summit in September in New York.

We will continue to provide protection to individual cases with compelling protection needs around the world. Once again, I believe all of us can agree that the actions of Daesh, as have been witnessed and as have been documented by the UN and other actors, are brutal, are unjustified, and should be soundly condemned.

The member for Calgary Nose Hill referenced in her comments the actions taken by the House of Commons Standing Committees on Citizenship and Immigration with respect to a study on internally displaced people and vulnerable groups, which included the Yazidis, among other groups.

Business of Supply

• (1050)

The fact that the study was undertaken under the leadership of the chair of the committee and by the members of three different parties who sit on that committee and there was a unanimous decision taken about pursuing that kind of study, that is exactly the type of non-partisan collegial co-operation that we need to see more of in the House in addressing this kind of issue. When we are dealing with genocide, partisanship has no place in the discussion. I firmly believe that and I believe my colleagues opposite firmly believe that.

We heard from many witnesses that day, including Ms. Murad on behalf of the Yazidi people. She testified before our committee. She has been around the world talking about the Yazidi people. She testified at the United Nations in September. Her testimony was compelling. It was moving. It was a call to action.

That kind of call to action has been answered by this government in the past, whether it was Hungary, Vietnam, or Uganda. Parenthetically, I am a by-product of that kind of call to action because I came here as a Ugandan Asian refugee in 1972. We have heard a call to action for Kosovo. We have heard calls to action for Syria. We have responded to those calls to action. With co-operation and with a collaborative approach, I am confident we can address the call to action here.

There are great challenges, as I have outlined, in terms of offering Canada's protection to people in danger and turmoil. What I can do is assure the House that the Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship is actively exploring options to respond to these challenges. The trip that was recently taken into northern Iraq is a testament to the action that is being taken.

What we are trying to do is support the basic needs of those most affected by the conflicts in Iraq and Syria, to support the stabilization of areas that are newly liberated from Daesh, and to bolster the investigative and judicial processes so that perpetrators of atrocities are held responsible. We have also taken action on the international development front. As the Minister of International Development has stated:

Canada's assistance will help meet the urgent health, shelter, protection, education and food needs of hundreds of thousands of affected civilians. Our assistance will also support organizations responding to incidents of violence and sexual abuse, particularly against women and girls, who have been disproportionately affected by the current crisis.

Over the next three years, Canada will be contributing \$840 million in humanitarian assistance and \$270 million in development assistance, in addition to the \$145 million already dedicated to counter-terrorism, stabilization, and security programming in the region. That is on the monetary front. There is significant diplomatic engagement. There is significant co-operation with our allies, both at the UN and among nation states, which we are also engaged in. We will continue to provide protection to individual cases with compelling protection needs around the world.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this important topic. It is something that is personally meaningful to me as a former war crimes prosecutor. It is something that is inherently meaningful to everyone in this chamber, because when we are dealing with genocide and there is a call to action, a collaborative approach is

required and Canadians and parliamentarians need to speak with one voice.

• (1055)

Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to remind the parliamentary secretary that a committee of parliamentarians is not government action. It is independent parliamentarians coming together to try to make recommendations to the government because of actions that have not been taken for two years. The hon. member spent the time when he did focus on Yazidis laying the blame at our partners' feet.

I am assuming that if we are in a partnership, part of the partnership is direction and part of our responsibility when we are working with our partners is to insist on specific directions that are actually going to save people from genocide. Rather than lay the blame at our partners' feet, will the member not recognize that Germany was able to come up with an innovative way to rescue 1,000 Yazidis? Will he be committed right now to the same kind of innovation to make sure that the record of nine will be in the past and will he move right away to rescuing Yazidis now?

Mr. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, with respect to those two points raised by my colleague opposite, the actions of the committee are a significant symbolic step forward in the type of collaboration that can be undertaken when members of different parties work together. That is why it was highlighted by me. That is why it was highlighted by the member for Calgary Nose Hill. It is a microcosm of what can be achieved when parties work together. It can be extrapolated, in a larger sense, to what can take place in this chamber.

In terms of apportioning what is going on in the region and why actions have not been taken thus far, the remarks I was making were not an effort to lay blame at the hands of the UNHCR or the International Organization for Migration; far from it. They are our allies in this cause in resettling refugees everywhere. They are important allies in that cause. What I was identifying were the challenges of operating in certain parts of the world where the violent, grave dangers to people's physical security are so acute that there is a risk of death when people enter into those regions of the world.

Can other options be explored? Of course they can. The member for Calgary Nose Hill rightly noted that there are Yazidis not just in Iraq but there are also Yazidis in neighbouring countries. Can issues be explored with those neighbouring countries? Of course they can. Turkey is an example, which I highlighted in my speech.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, obviously, we need to help the Yazidi people. As my colleague mentioned near the end of his speech, there is also the issue of justice. We need to take steps to ensure that justice is done.

However, justice cannot be done in a vacuum. Detailed information needs to be gathered on the ground. In May 2015, the Conservative government of the day had approved a one-year \$1.2-million investment for justice and transition initiatives in Iraq and Syria. However, we have heard nothing about it since that time.

Business of Supply

Can my colleague confirm whether the current government is funding or will fund these kinds of initiatives on the ground to gather evidence?

Mr. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's question and her support on this issue and human rights in general.

With respect to what the Yazidi people are going through in Iraq and the Middle East, it is absolutely clear that we need to look at things differently. As for our development assistance, I am not entirely sure whether it applies to promoting justice and the rule of law. However, I can look into that to confirm whether that is the case.

I can assure the member opposite that we are currently building relationships and we have already begun working with the United Nations to promote justice. For instance, we recommended that a tribunal like the International Criminal Court examine this genocide situation. We have already begun pursuing these kinds of actions, but I need to confirm whether any funding has been allocated for promoting the rule of law in Iraq.

• (1100)

[English]

Mr. Michael Levitt (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague from Parkdale—High Park for his remarks. I also want to acknowledge the work that has been done by the member for Calgary Nose Hill over a long period of time in terms of giving voice to this very grave situation.

It is very clear, even from just the first 20 minutes of this morning's commentary on the issue, that it transcends party lines. Opposing genocide and taking action is something that is felt on all sides of the House.

We have heard a lot of discussion on the immigration end of this file, which is absolutely important in terms of providing significant aid and opportunities to Yazidis in the area. However, from the perspective of the United Nations, from the perspective of being able to ensure that the perpetrators of these heinous acts are held to account, what does the member feel that we in Canada, in this Parliament, can be doing to make sure that voice is being heard at the UN, and that this continues to be looked at and investigated in the most serious manner?

Mr. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question and for his passion on this issue. We have had many discussions about this over a considerable amount of time.

There are two aspects to the member's question. One is, as the member for Calgary Nose Hill noted, making sure that the issues of the Yazidis are constantly at the forefront of people's agendas and on the radar, so to speak. This is something that Canada can do as a responsible member of the international community and as a nation that believes in international engagement.

However, I think it is also important, and this is what I appreciate most about the motion by the member for Calgary Nose Hill, that this is not just about declaring or acknowledging genocide. We have done that in the past. It has been done five times in the past in this chamber. This is about coupling a symbolic declaration with action, and the action that is referred to in the motion is action that relates to providing asylum, which I think is an important piece in coupling a

symbolic statement with action. I hope that we can work collaboratively to sort out how exactly that can be done in a manner that is safe, both for Canadians working in that region and also for the Yazidis who we would be attempting to bring out.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am not part of the committee, but I am very concerned as a Canadian and as a member of Parliament who is hearing about this a lot in my riding.

I was able to attend the very first briefing by the immigration minister on what we were doing with the refugees. I was really pleased to hear that the focus was on vulnerable people. A member from the NDP was very thankful the government was focusing on the gay community, which is another group that is extremely vulnerable.

That night I asked about other very vulnerable people, like ethnic and religious minorities, that we would like to connect with. The response was that the UNHCR had identified three groups: the gay community, single women, and young families. At that point, I asked about ethnic or religious minorities, and the answer was no.

The following night, the press asked a question in this regard and the comment was the same, at which point an individual said that it was their understanding from the UNHCR website that ethnic and religious minorities were included in that vulnerable group and that the first two plane loads to Canada were from particular group.

Given the outrage we are feeling and the fact that Germany has been successful in doing this, as a committee and a government, would not the most important thing be to communicate with them, to take action, and make this happen the way we know it can happen in Canada?

• (1105)

Mr. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, as I outlined in my opening comments, we need to work with international organizations, the IOM and the UNHCR. The UNHCR targets people who meet the convention definition of a refugee and focuses its efforts on those who are identified as most vulnerable.

The issue that has come up again and again is what that means and how it drills down in terms of specific ethnic groups, genders, and sexual orientations, etc. The answer that we have received again and again, which we operate under, is that if a group is being targeted because of its ethnic or religious status, to the point where it is facing atrocities and, indeed, genocide, it constitutes a vulnerable population to the UNHCR, which then makes its best efforts to bring them out of the region.

Can we learn from the German example what can be done with the Yazidi population, following up on the question by the chair of the standing committee and comments made the member opposite? I think, indeed, that we can. We have just concluded a mission in Iraq. We are going to take information from that mission, but we are also going to look at best practices internationally to see what more can be done in this context.

Business of Supply

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by informing you that I will be sharing my time with the member for Vancouver East

The Yazidis are a proud and ancient people. What has happened to them and what is still happening to them is absolutely horrendous. They are being tortured and killed. They are being taken into slavery and sexual slavery. The women are being separated from the men. Children are being taken from their families, often so that they can be trained for combat. It is a genocide and we are not the only ones saying so. The United Nations also agrees.

We need to take action. It is urgent and important. It calls upon our humanity. These people need help. That is why we are going to support the motion before us today. It is a very important motion and I thank my colleague for moving it.

The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development heard some very troubling testimony about the situation of the Yazidis. I know that the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration also heard some moving accounts. What is happening here today is partly the result of the extraordinary work that the committee has done in this regard, and I hope that more will be done. Following the study in committee, the NDP issued a series of practical recommendations. In a case like this, we need to be practical to determine what measures can be taken.

We therefore made very practical recommendations with regard to relocation, for example. We think that the Government of Canada, through the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, should use the discretionary power granted under section 25 of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and take immediate action to bring Yazidis who are fleeing the genocide to Canada. To that end, credible organizations on the ground would identify and select the genocide victims who would be relocated to Canada. These measures should build on the policies and initiatives already in place.

As far as humanitarian assistance is concerned, the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship and the Minister of Foreign Affairs should ensure that humanitarian assistance levels are increased and they should work more closely with credible groups on the ground to ensure that the humanitarian assistance gets to those who need it.

The processing delays are a major issue. The additional oversight provided by Canada, in other words, the additional interviews conducted by Canadian officers, cause inexcusable and unacceptable delays in the current context. We urge the government to ease up on this additional oversight and bring to Canada the Yazidis selected for resettlement by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. If the government is not on board with this and decides that additional oversight is necessary, although it is not clear why, then there are some mechanisms that can be used for this purpose. For example, it could use a process similar to the one used for family reunification, whereby additional oversight may be used in cases that raise red flags. Otherwise, the government could proceed the way it does for family reunification.

Refugees selected by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees could obtain a temporary visa to enter Canada and then get

permanent resident status once the next stage of the screening process is done here. We know that generally speaking this group of people does not pose any significant threat.

● (1110)

We must use our imagination to find ways to accelerate the process given the terrible situation in which these people find themselves.

We must give them asylum, but we must also give them justice. That is important. These people have a right to justice, but in addition to that right and the importance it could have for them, it would serve to prevent further genocide. Failing to deal with crimes of genocide could result in them being repeated again and again. We must prevent them on the ground, and we must prevent them by ensuring that justice is served when a case such as this arises.

Justice does not just happen. People do not just find themselves before the International Criminal Court or other tribunals where decisions are rendered. It requires evidence and detailed analyses on the ground.

I am now appealing to the current government. Largely due to our efforts, in 2015 the Conservative government agreed to allocate a little bit of money, or just over \$1 million, for what is known as transitional justice in Iraq and Syria. I believe we should be doing much more than that, but at least it was a first step. That was in May 2015, and we have not heard much since then. I would like to know if the program still exists. I would also like to strongly encourage the government to invest in the program and, naturally, to work with our partners so that this matter is presented to the International Criminal Court and all other similar bodies.

Finally, we must fight those who commit crimes against humanity. The Yazidis have suffered a tragedy in a context where the abuse of human rights is generalized, and not just by ISIS. We must never stop pointing out that the Bashar al-Assad regime is blatantly attacking its own citizens and committing war crimes and crimes against humanity. Unfortunately, we are seeing too many such crimes.

Everyone knows we sell weapons to Saudi Arabia, and apparently the Saudi coalition is committing crimes against humanity in Yemen too.

I do not have enough time left to delve into all of these issues, but I do know for sure that we must act, and that includes providing humanitarian aid. We have to stop the flow of arms to those regions. We have to cut financial lifelines to the whole region, with our first priority being to impede those who are perpetrating genocide against the Yazidi people.

We also need to keep in mind the need to rebuild not only cities and roads, but communities, and hopefully soon. That will be key to ensuring lasting peace.

I would like to close with a quote from the United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, whom I believe was absolutely right when he said that over the longer term, the biggest threat to terrorists is not the power of missiles; it is the politics of inclusion.

Business of Supply

•(1115)

[English]

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. friend for her excellent speech and the work she does on these and other related issues.

One of the questions that I would like to raise in this debate is what the UN's definition of a refugee actually is, because it is clearly laid out by the UNHCR and in various agreements that a refugee is someone who “has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group.” Therefore, when we are talking about refugees, there is a certain sense of persecution entailed in that definition. Sometimes we hear from the government that we should not ask these questions or not look at people's background because of the issue of so-called discrimination. However, if we look at what the UN is saying to us about the definition of refugees, it does entail some element of persecution on identifiable grounds.

Could the member give her perspective on this?

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Mr. Speaker, I understand my colleague's question, and I appreciate the work he is doing on a number of files.

We have to be very careful when talking about refugees. The first key criterion for granting refugee status remains vulnerability, which can be related to a range of factors such as age, children, and sexual orientation.

In this instance, genocide is being perpetrated against members of a well-defined group. That means these people are particularly vulnerable, and there is an urgent need to help them specifically. However, nationality, skin colour, or whatever should not be our primary filter. Our primary filter should be the vulnerability of the affected populations.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a former critic for citizenship and immigration, I understand and appreciate the many sensitivities surrounding the issue of refugees. I do feel very sympathetic, and I suspect that all members of the House see the horrific actions that are taking place abroad. It is very horrific what is happening to the Yazidi people in particular. Even though Canada has been there for a year, the government has demonstrated a great deal of sympathy toward people abroad and a great desire to help them. We have seen that in terms of the number of refugees who have come into Canada over the last year.

Recognizing the plight of Yazidis in particular and this particular issue, and the significant movement that the United Nations has made in this direction, what would my colleague recommend as an individual, and what does she believe all New Democrats would like to see this government do specifically with respect to the Yazidi people?

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Mr. Speaker, I think it is actually pretty straightforward. We want action, swift action. Following the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration's study, we have some recommendations, which I went over in my speech. As discussed this morning and mentioned by several people, other countries like Germany have introduced special, very effective processes. We could follow those examples, but one thing is certain: we need to act quickly, because this crisis, that has been unfolding for quite some time now, is still happening. We need to act now.

•(1120)

[English]

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am compelled to rise in the House today to speak to and support the motion of the member for Calgary Nose Hill.

This summer, members of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration approved holding an emergency meeting for a study on protecting vulnerable groups.

The declaration made by the United Nations Human Rights Council in its report released in June of this year, entitled “‘They came to destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis”, explicitly stating the ongoing crime of genocide being committed, was certainly the impetus for this study.

While the committee had the opportunity to hear about vulnerable groups and internally displaced persons from a number of countries and regions, the testimony regarding the still ongoing situation facing the Yazidi people was nothing short of harrowing.

The Yazidi people follow an ancient religion believed to have been founded in the eleventh century and are a historically misunderstood group. One of the major points of this misunderstanding is Tawsi Melek, the peacock angel. The reverence for the peacock angel, a fallen but forgiven angel, has led them to be misconstrued throughout history as “devil worshippers”. Tragically, this gross misunderstanding has led to the Yazidi people being subjected to more than 70 genocidal massacres since the 18th century.

Today, the most recent attempt to exterminate the Yazidi people is happening before our eyes.

The UN Human Rights Council report and individuals appearing at the citizenship committee have provided heart-wrenching details of the crimes against humanity being perpetrated against these innocent people. To quote the UN report:

ISIS has sought to destroy the Yazidis through killings; sexual slavery, enslavement, torture and inhuman and degrading treatment and forcible transfer causing serious bodily and mental harm; the infliction of conditions of life that bring about a slow death; the imposition of measures to prevent Yazidi children from being born, including forced conversion of adults, the separation of Yazidi men and women, and mental trauma; and the transfer of Yazidi children from their own families and placing them with ISIS fighters, thereby cutting them off from beliefs and practices of their own religious community, and erasing their identity as Yazidis.

Business of Supply

After the release of this report, the Minister of Foreign Affairs delivered a statement in the House of Commons echoing the declaration of genocide against the Yazidis. Unfortunately, despite this recognition and Canada's historic key role in the establishment of the international doctrine, "responsibility to protect", the government has thus far failed to take any concrete and direct action to provide humanitarian assistance to the Yazidi people.

This report in turn served as both the impetus and foundation for an urgent, intensive study that was undertaken by the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, which took place from July 18 to 20, on immigration measures for the protection of vulnerable groups.

The committee had the opportunity to hear first-hand accounts from both survivors of trauma and those working on the ground to extract vulnerable people from suffering.

We received many thoughtful recommendations from individuals and organizations on how Canada can best position itself as a world leader in addressing the extreme suffering facing vulnerable people in the world today.

As a result of our committee's study, I had the privilege of meeting Ms. Nadia Murad, both through her appearance at committee and in a separate meeting.

Ms. Murad is a Yazidi genocide survivor. Her strength, resilience, and dedication to her people after facing such incredible atrocities, which attempted to strip away her humanity, are nothing short of astounding.

Ms. Murad was enjoying her summer vacation from school when ISIS attacked her peaceful village in Sinjar. She was preparing to enter grade six and focus on getting good grades. Horrifically, the next time she was at school was a moment she will never forget. As she explained to our committee:

I was in the village, along with more than 1,700 individuals, and we were seized for two weeks under the control of ISIL. We asked for help from all sides because we knew that our destiny would be for the men to be killed and for the women and children to be taken hostage. We asked for help, but unfortunately we did not get help. On August 15, they gathered us at the village school, they separated the men from the women. They killed our men. More than 700 men in a matter of two hours were killed in the village of Kocho. We saw our fathers, our brothers, and our sons getting killed at the outskirts of the village.

● (1125)

The atrocities did not stop there. Ms. Murad detailed what she and thousands of other Yazidi women and girls were subjected to. She said:

When they took us, the girls and children, we were not simply held prisoners, but they committed crimes against us. They forced us to change our religion. They raped us. They sold us. They leased us. This continues today against more than 3,000 women and children in Iraq and Syria.

In a show of unbelievable resilience, Ms. Murad was eventually able to escape ISIS enslavement. During our committee's study, I stated that this study was perhaps one of the most important moments of the work that we would do here at this committee, so for that reason, we needed to focus on solutions.

While much of the testimony we heard was of tragedy, the atrocities committed, the cataloguing of mass graves, and the discrimination that Yazidi people can still face, even within a refugee

camp, we did hear that not only were there ways Canada could help, but these actions were already being taken by some countries.

Mr. Murad Ismael, the executive director of Yazda, spoke to the committee about the decision made by Germany. The German government acted quickly, formed a committee that was sent to Iraq, and engaged in an expedited process to bring 1,100 Yazidi women and children to Germany within a few months. Mr. Murad also informed us about project Yazda, which has been working with the Australian government to resettle Yazidis. We were further informed that they have registered about 200 people and believe about 300 in total will be resettled in Australia. Understanding the gravity of the situation, the Australian government bypassed the UN system, bringing these people directly to asylum in Australia.

Mr. Murad stated that his organization alone has a detailed database of 900 Yazidi women and children who have gone through similar atrocities and traumas as Ms. Murad, of which 600 are still in Iraq. Additionally, Mr. Mirza Ismail, from Yazidi Human Rights Organization International, noted that "In total there are about 3,363 Yazidi refugees in Greece". There are also thousands currently in the Turkish camps.

Precious time has already passed since the summer when the committee met on an urgent basis. Action needs to be taken now. I implore all members of the House to recognize what we are talking about in this motion. It is genocide, and as Canadians we have a duty to act. Protecting human lives in the face of genocide is not something that should be done if it happens to fit within our "immigration levels plan". This is an exceptional situation that requires exceptional action.

I laid out in my letter to the minister, as well as in my supplementary report for the summer's committee study, a series of recommendations for immediate action that can be taken. One such recommendation is included in this motion: to immediately act on the UN report's recommendations 210, 212, and 213.

I would like to quote Ms. Murad's committee testimony. She said:

When I was besieged I heard that thousands of girls had been taken as hostages. I thought, well, maybe they would take me as a hostage, and perhaps I would try to reason with them, try to convince them that I am a human being, that I have done nothing to deserve to be raped, to be sold for nothing. I thought I would try to reason with ISIL because they are human beings, but when they took me away they did not give me any chance to say anything, to say that I was a young girl, that I had the right to live. When ISIL did not give me the chance, did not want to hear from me, I said I was going to talk to the world, and the world would understand me. For more than six months I went to more than 17 countries, talking to presidents, to parliamentarians, and other people, and saying, "Listen up, we're talking about girls who are being raped in the jails of ISIL, people who are dying of starvation in the camps, thousands of children who have been deprived of education." And they were just simply silent, quiet about it, quiet about our right as Yazidis.

If Canada is back, Canada cannot be simply silent. Canada must match its words with action. I implore all members of the House to support this motion.

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•(1130)

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's words of wisdom that she shared with us here this morning. I am very aware that this kind of violence against girls and women is really endemic around the world. Does she have any thoughts about how Canada could use its kind of power to improve the response of world bodies to this kind of situation?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Speaker, the wisdom actually did not come from me. It came from the witnesses who presented to us. Many of the words I used in my speech earlier were in fact from them.

What they are calling for us to do as leaders in Canada is to step up. There are recommendations that we can in fact take immediate action on right now. One such recommendation is to do what other countries have been doing. Germany is already on the ground providing support, taking Yazidi women and girls who are victims and survivors of genocide to safety. We can do that. Australia is doing a similar thing.

There are organizations on the ground who know where the victims are, and they can help with that effort. I would ask the Canadian government to work with the people who know what needs to be done, to look to other jurisdictions that are already doing this work, and to follow suit. Let us not talk about this anymore. Let us get to the action. Every single minute counts. It is about saving lives.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is great to hear that the NDP is supporting the motion. We have heard some members in the government saying supportive things about this as well.

However, I would like to ask the member to comment a bit on the issue of the timeline for this. We have been calling and I think all opposition parties have been calling for action on this for quite some time. We had the rejection of a motion that identified this as genocide earlier, although it sounds like there is some movement back from that.

I wonder if the member could just comment again on the urgency for action on this issue, on which other countries have acted, and on the importance of Canada stepping up and really making sure we are helping the most vulnerable in response to this conflict.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Speaker, I would say the moment the UN declared with their report that this was a genocide, we needed to act.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs, in the House, also echoed that there is a genocide going on. We know that there are refugees throughout the world, and there are crises going on everywhere. The international community needs to step up. However, when there is a genocide going on and it has been acknowledged nationwide, we need to do more than to say that we have already brought in Syrian refugees.

To that end, I would say that action needs to be taken right now. A minute cannot be lost. We have already lost time since the summer hearing. We had an emergency sitting of our committee to look into this issue the minute the UN declared that there was a genocide. The committee came together and we heard witnesses throughout the

course of the summer. Actions were identified that could be taken, coming out of that committee. Unfortunately, substantive recommendations were not received and made part of the report. As we can see, when the report was tabled they were not part of that.

I have provided a supplementary report, as did the member for Calgary Nose Hill. I hope that the government will now act. It is never too late to say that something can be done to save someone's life.

Mr. Fin Donnelly (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the member if she would not agree that it is critically important to recognize all atrocities committed in the region, not just those by ISIS but also by Syrian President Assad's forces and the opposition militia.

Can the member comment on that? We have heard a lot about the impacts of ISIS, but not much on President Assad and his regime.

•(1135)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is absolutely right. There is not just a single area where we need to focus but rather multiple series of issues we need to focus on. The issue around the genocide is clearly established and that is why action needs to be taken.

Canada can do a lot more. As my colleague, the critic for foreign affairs has also identified, the government could address the issue around arms being sold to countries they should not be sold to. It is actually harming civilians. We could do something about that.

There is a multitude of actions that could be taken.

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

I stand in frustrated and impatient support of the motion by the official opposition. I am frustrated because the Liberal government has so deliberately looked the other way in responding to the Yazidi genocide. First, it refused for so long to recognize what was clear to other democracies around the world, that Daesh, so-called ISIS, has committed the crime of genocide and a variety of crimes against humanity and war crimes against the Yazidis.

Then, when the Liberals finally recognized this outrage, they have for four months now refused to act, to consider even the most minimal of Canada's state obligations under the UN genocide convention. Two of these obligations are referenced in the motion before us today: to take immediate action upon all recommendations found in sections 210, 212, and 213 of the UN report, and to provide asylum to Yazidi women and girls.

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I am impatient because Liberals, from the immigration minister down, have ignored those recommendations by virtually bragging that Canada does not seek to identify refugees by religious or ethnic groupings, and because Liberals, again from the minister down, have excused their government's inaction by saying they only accept refugees on the basis of recommendation and certification of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. That is why the motion has been brought before the House today. That is why we in the official opposition are calling on the Liberal government to urgently, if belatedly, reassess and refocus Canada's refugee program.

I was asked yesterday, when notice of today's motion was given, exactly how many Yazidis live in Canada. I think the implication of that question is unfortunately clear. My answer is not many, maybe 4,000 or 5,000 naturalized Canadian citizens or permanent residents, perhaps not from the government's point of view a major political consideration. However, in my riding of Thornhill and across the country, survivors and descendants of the Holocaust and other genocides share my anger and frustration with the government's deliberate inaction on this tragedy.

Of course, I should recognize here the magnificent work done by the Jewish community of Winnipeg with Operation Ezra, which aims to sponsor privately, rescue, and resettle Yazidi refugees in Canada. Many of my constituents in Thornhill are standing by, again willing to sponsor, but the government is not stepping up and enabling those sponsorships.

Canadians have been pretty much left in the dark since the genocide was recognized by the government, despite, as I mentioned, a wide range of obligations that should have triggered Canada as a signatory to the UN genocide convention. While the government currently defers to the UNHCR to identify refugees for resettlement and literally boasts that Canada does not track refugees by religion or ethnicity, we believe the recognition of the genocide and associated atrocities that have been and continue to be committed should have immediately prompted a change in the selection process and should still, prioritizing the acceptance of Yazidis, particularly women, widows, and girls, as well as other persecuted minorities. In short, Conservatives believe that Canada should, when it comes to the Yazidis, deliberately circumvent the UNHCR process for all of the reasons offered here today.

The independent international commission recommended that all parties fighting against Daesh strongly consider rescue plans for thousands of Yazidis still captive in areas held by Daesh. We know that Canada is not in a position to consider such action. More importantly, we must hope that the allied coalition's Operation Inherent Resolve, now focused on liberating Mosul, will result in the effective rescue of many Yazidi prisoners. However, a rescue dimension could and should also apply to the many thousands of individually internally displaced Yazidi people, so-called IDPs, who are in the Kurdish autonomous region of Iraq.

• (1140)

We know that more than 500,000 Iraqi Yazidis were driven from Sinjar and other communities, many finding sanctuary of a sort in Iraq's Kurdish autonomous region. However, these internally

displaced persons, or IDPs, are not recognized or certified by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees as refugees.

We heard powerful first-hand testimony from a strong, articulate, young survivor of the genocide and brutalization, Nadia Murad, at a special sitting of the House Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration in July, that these displaced Yazidis, along with other persecuted minorities in Iraq, are caught in a terrible limbo. They often face discrimination, less deadly than from Daesh, but discrimination nonetheless, when they register at UN camps, where they are segregated from the others for their own protection.

Outside the camps, the Kurdish sub-sovereign government tries to provide humanitarian food and health services, but there is precious little funding for these IDPs from the Government of Iraq, which should be doing much more. The situation is somewhat better, but only somewhat better, for thousands of Yazidis who have made their way to relative safety in Turkey. However, we were saddened and again frustrated to learn that, while the UN High Commissioner for Refugees tells us that it has submitted Yazidi women from Iraq for resettlement from Turkey, it is for Canada to say if the government is considering taking Iraqi Yazidis from Turkey as part of our refugee program. Unfortunately, the Liberal government has not stepped up.

We can be encouraged by the significant and continuing battlefield successes of the allied coalition against the dark, murderous forces of Daesh, but the liberation of cities and towns previously home to millions of Iraqi civilians of many regions, religions, and ethnicities is coming at a terrible cost. These cities are in different states of destruction and rubble, without basic services, and littered with many tonnes of unexploded explosives and booby traps. It has been estimated that it will take billions of dollars to make these cities safe, and many billions of dollars more and years to rebuild.

We know that however generously welcoming Canada and other developed countries might be during this massive refugee crisis, most of the millions of displaced survivors of the wars in Syria and Iraq, and the genocide, can only hope that one day they will be able to return to try to rebuild their homes, communities, and their lives. That is at best a faint hope for the Muslim victims of these wars, but hope is much fainter for the persecuted minorities who survive the conflict, particularly the victims of the Daesh genocide, the Yazidis.

We have suggested to the government several steps that Canada could take to help this tragedy. We suggested a removal of the cap on private sponsorships of Iraqi nationals. Our previous Conservative government did not have a cap on Iraqi or Syrian sponsorship. The Liberals have still not explained why they have chosen to impose a cap. We also urge the Liberal government to reframe Canada's refugee policy to address the specific Yazidi tragedy, to prioritize the most vulnerable, and to actively seek to identify and process survivors of the genocide.

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A year ago, the Prime Minister told us that bringing 25,000 refugees to Canada was only a matter of political will. We on this side of the House hope that, despite the delay, the denial, and the inaction to date, the government will finally be moved to the same demonstration of political will and act to provide asylum and proper resettlement, specifically for Yazidi women, widows, and children.

• (1145)

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, obviously parliamentarians in the House are informed and compassionate.

I know the member had more to say and he was rushed at the end of his speech, so I would like to give him the opportunity to discuss further his thoughts around reframing refugee policy.

Hon. Peter Kent: Mr. Speaker, I missed the last part of my colleague's question, but I thank her for the question.

What was it that my colleague wanted me to explore and amplify my remarks on?

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones: Mr. Speaker, on reframing refugee policy, it is our government's position that we prioritize the most vulnerable, but perhaps he has further ideas.

Hon. Peter Kent: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the opportunity to respond.

What the government needs to do and should do is rethink its general policy of being blind to the religious or ethnic background of refugees generally. More specifically, after recognizing the genocide back in June of this year, it needs to respond appropriately to the most vulnerable, those most at risk in this continuing genocide, to make exceptions and respond to the United Nations direction under the genocide convention to do more to rescue these people. Rescue comes in many forms.

In response to the Yazidi who have survived the genocide and have literally walked across their country and are now sitting in limbo in northern Iraq, where they are not recognized by the UN as refugees, I think the government should unilaterally rethink its policy. We know it has access. Foreign Affairs has sent a small mission there to investigate the situation in the Kurdish autonomous region. It needs to circumvent the UNHCR restrictions that do not recognize these Yazidi as refugees, and should act to bring at least some of them to Canada for resettlement.

[Translation]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will gladly vote in favour of this motion, but given that the international community has been hearing about these atrocities since August 2014, it is astonishing that it has taken two years for any action to be taken.

As my colleague from Laurier—Sainte-Marie said earlier, when vulnerability is a concern, justice is extremely important and we need to trust the refugee determination process in place.

We know that the government wants a seat on the UN Security Council. Does my colleague not think that, in addition to what is in the motion, we need to engage with the UN Security Council on this issue?

[English]

Hon. Peter Kent: Mr. Speaker, to respond to the first part of the question, yes, indeed, we saw Daesh or ISIS sweeping across Iraq and Syria in 2014. But as Daesh attacked and progressed across the region and Iraqi and Syrian forces retreated and abandoned communities, we were unable to have access. It was only in the last year that Yazidis have moved to places where they are accessible for processing by Canadian immigration officials for consideration, if the government would change its focus to accept Yazidi refugees specifically.

Yes, the motion today could make many more requests on the government for action, but I think, first and foremost, if we can convince the government to rethink its basic position of looking away and refusing to recognize specifically our responsibilities under the genocide convention to the victims of the Yazidi genocide, then I think we will have accomplished a good deal.

I know that among the members on the government benches, there are many who agree with us, and were they not whipped, would vote with us to pass this resolution.

• (1150)

[Translation]

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to take part in this important discussion. I hope that all hon. members are familiar with the tragic situation facing the Yazidi people and Christians in Iraq and Syria.

A genocide is taking place. Representatives of the Yazidi community are here in Parliament. They are asking us to give their people the chance to live in freedom and to continue their way of life. We must respond to the specific and unique situation facing the Yazidis and Christians.

We understand that the situation in Iraq and Syria is very difficult for all communities, but it is clear that the Yazidis and the Christians are in a unique situation. The general violence is having a tremendous impact, but the impact of this genocide is on a whole other scale.

[English]

What is a refugee? It is a fairly simple question, but it would seem from what we have heard at certain points from the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship that he does not actually know what a refugee is, according to the formal definition.

If the minister goes to the website for the UN High Commission for Refugees, he will find the following definition under the heading, "What is a refugee":

A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group.

The definition comes from the 1951 UN convention relating to the status of refugees, to which Canada is a signatory.

Under Article I it states:

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For the purposes of the present Convention, the term "refugee" shall apply to any person who...owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.

This convention was updated by a 1967 protocol, to which Canada is also a party, which removed certain temporal and geographic restrictions. However, other than that update, the original convention remains in force, and we remain a signatory. Therefore, for the benefit of the minister and the government, that definition of a refugee is clearly set out in international law to which Canada has assented. The minister should know that definition and should apply it, as he has a moral and legal obligation to do so.

As I stated, the core of that definition is that a person has a fear of persecution on the basis of certain identifiable characteristics, yet the minister has told the House that his government does not even identify or track whether refugee applicants qualify as members of these particular identifiable groups, which might expose them to particular persecution.

On October 5, he said this in the House:

Mr. Speaker, we do not know how many Yazidi refugees have come to Canada, because when refugees come to Canada, we do not ask them their ethnicity or their religion. We do not discriminate by religion or ethnicity.

While it appears that the parliamentary secretary said something slightly different today, that is what the minister told the House during question period on October 5. I can only conclude from his statement that the minister is either unaware of or unwilling to apply the UN definition of a refugee. As mentioned, this definition specifically entails an assessment of whether or not that person seeking refugee status faces discrimination in their country of origin on the basis of religion, ethnicity, or some other characteristic. We cannot have a serious refugee system without asking if someone fears persecution in their home country, and if so, on what basis. Even beyond the specific question of Yazidis, this exposes an apparent, very serious problem in the way the minister is doing refugee assessment.

The minister said in his comments that Canada should not discriminate by asking questions about religion or ethnicity. However, as a point of basic principle, the minister seems not to understand the difference between ordinary discrimination and ameliorative discrimination, by which I mean the process of providing compensatory advantages for historically disadvantaged minorities who need protection.

Ameliorative discrimination is explicitly protected in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, in two separate sections. Most centrally, on equality rights, subsection 15(2) reads:

Subsection (1) does not preclude any law, program or activity that has as its object the amelioration of conditions of disadvantaged individuals or groups including those that are disadvantaged because of race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.

● (1155)

The clear distinction is made in our law between traditional discrimination aimed at keeping disadvantaged groups down on the one hand, and ameliorative discrimination aimed at raising the relative position of disadvantaged groups on the other hand. This

distinction is clearly understood in our domestic human rights jurisprudence, as well as in international law and practice with respect to refugees.

Beyond the definitions and the question of our legal obligation, there is an obvious practical reason why the definition of refugees identifies those who legitimately fear discrimination on the basis of personal characteristics. It is because Canadians expect that when we set out to help people, we work to help those who need the help the most: the vulnerable.

There are many places around the world where people face death, imprisonment, rape, and other forms of abuse because of those identifiable characteristics. Syria and Iraq are obviously very challenging places for anyone right now, but there are groups and individuals who are being singled out for abuse and who are the targets of genocide.

The UN convention on refugees calls on us to respond to them in a particular way, as refugees. However, the Liberals' approach up until now has been to take pride in their ignorance, to stick their head in the sand and to say that they do not track that. They do so without understanding the basis of every legitimate refugee claim, which according to the UN definition is a well-founded fear of persecution, and without understanding that taking those who fit the UN definition of a refugee and are genuinely most vulnerable requires us to notice and ask about these identifiable characteristics. Of course, our system of intake should be asking about the basis on which people have a fear of persecution in order to assess the credibility of their claim and their relative vulnerability. Again, if the government cares about refugees, it should learn the legal definition of a refugee and apply it.

In the past, some have implied that applying the UN definition of a refugee means that we might not end up taking people from certain groups. They have implied that it might mean not taking Muslims, but that is absolutely not the case and that insinuation in some cases shows a real profound misunderstanding of the human rights challenges that exist.

Of course, a Shia Muslim from Saudi Arabia would have a well-founded fear of discrimination on the basis of religion, but a Shia Muslim in Iran would not. A Sunni Muslim from Crimea or East Turkestan would likely have a well-founded fear of discrimination on the basis of religion, but a Sunni Muslim from Egypt would not. An Orthodox Christian from Iraq would have a well-founded fear of discrimination on the basis of religion, but an Orthodox Christian from Russia probably would not. A devout Buddhist from China would have a well-founded fear of persecution on the basis of religion, but a Buddhist from Sri Lanka would not. Moreover, a Hindu in Sri Lanka might have a well-founded fear of discrimination on the basis of religion, but a Hindu from India would not. I could go on and on.

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The point is that it is about vulnerability. The UN definition is not fundamentally about a religious test. It is about a system of ameliorative discrimination, the counter discrimination that exists in the real world, that requires an adjudication of the situation on the ground of the characteristics of the applicant and the credibility of the claim of discrimination on that basis. Again, we have to ask the question.

Through our motion today we are calling on the government to take notice of and to respond to the particular discrimination faced by Yazidis, Syrian Christians, and other minorities who have been marked out for slaughter by Daesh and their fellow travellers. We should be ensuring that we are taking the victims of genocide, escaped sex slaves, and those who truly need our help the most.

I note from some of the comments by members on the government side that we are seeing more agreement today, and I am optimistic about where that may lead us. I will tell the government that we can only take a nonpartisan tone insofar as the government is doing the right thing. It is far too late at this stage, but I am hopeful that we will see the government make a shift on this. The government has to understand and appreciate these basic principles of refugee determination. It is legitimate to ask the questions and critically important that we take those who are the most vulnerable.

If members of the government remain unconvinced, let me restate the argument in somewhat different terms. What we are saying today in the motion is that Yazidi lives matter. The government's response is in some way akin to saying all lives matter, and, of course, it is true that all lives matter, but it is not the correct response to the specific assertion in this context that Yazidi lives matter. The reason that we need to say that Yazidi lives matter is that it is their lives that are particularly threatened in this context.

I think members would accept in principle that if we have a problem with religious or racial discrimination, it is no virtue to put our head in the sand and pretend that we do not notice a difference, on the basis of being colour-blind or blind to religious or ethnic differences. In cases where systematic discrimination exists, taking the time to notice these problems and recognizing the need for ameliorative measures is critical.

No one disputes in principle that all lives matter, but we do need to attend to those whose lives have not been recognized or respected. That is why we need a refugee approach that notices and responds to difference. It should not be that hard for the government to start noticing and tracking these things. When the officials were specifically asked about this in the technical briefing at the end of last year, they responded that they do not have data fields for it. I say respectfully to the minister and to the government that it is time to fix the data fields, because people are dying.

● (1200)

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for the passion that he brings to this particular issue. It is obvious he is very knowledgeable on the topic, and that is important here. I have always believed that to solve serious and complex issues such as this, we in this House need to find a way to work together. Maybe this is the start of that kind of dialogue that we need.

Does the member have any ideas about how we can make these kinds of discussions less partisan? How do we create those opportunities?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, I will say this about partisanship in general. We have a responsibility to those who send us here to be as non-partisan as possible while being true to our principles.

To the extent that the government is willing to support this motion, and to the extent that we can come to some agreement on certain aspects of it, we have a responsibility to move in that direction. At the same time, we had a motion on genocide earlier that was defeated.

It shows that we have not always been able to reach a point of collaboration on these issues. To the extent that the government is willing to listen to these arguments, not just listen and hear but to take concrete action and respond to them, then certainly we will be supportive of the approach of the government insofar as it actually responds to the challenges.

To date, to be frank, we have not seen an approach that recognizes the reality of the distinctions, and the need for a response that is specifically ameliorative toward those most vulnerable communities.

I do not think we have seen that recognition. As recently as the comments I quoted earlier this month from the Minister of Immigration in question period, we did not see that recognition.

If the government is willing to change direction on this, support this motion, and support the action that we think needs to be taken, not only with respect to Yazidis but also with respect to Assyrian Christians and other minorities, I will be very supportive of that change, and I will be supportive of the new direction.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have enjoyed the debate here this morning. I would like to thank the Conservatives for bringing this motion forward, and I will be supporting it of course.

I was listening to the member's speech, and he does seem very knowledgeable about the issue of refugees. I might have misinterpreted what he said. When we are debating the definition of refugees and whether it is appropriate, I hope the member is not implying that there are some people in Canada who have been classified as refugees, and they may have been, in his opinion, mistakenly classified as refugees.

Could the member clarify that point? If there are any groups that perhaps should not be classified as refugees, could he indicate which groups these might be?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, if that was unclear, I appreciate the question because it does give me a chance to clarify. That was certainly not what I was intending to say.

The definition of a refugee entails exactly what I said it entails. It entails that relative vulnerability. It entails that issue of persecution. That would not exclude any particular group. It would ask us to actually assess the relative vulnerability.

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We know Syria and Iraq are so complex that there are going to be different groups that face different kinds of persecution in different parts of that conflict. It is important that we engage, and look at relative vulnerability, that we track this information, that we ask these questions, and in particular seek to help those who are most vulnerable.

• (1205)

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Markham—Unionville.

[*Translation*]

I thank the hon. member for putting this pressing issue on the agenda for a more thorough debate. This motion comes at a major turning point in the fight against Daesh. The Iraqi security forces, supported by the global coalition against Daesh, are currently approaching Mosul, the self-proclaimed capital of Daesh in Iraq and its last stronghold in that country.

Canada has been a member of the coalition supporting Iraq since 2014. The training and expertise that we provide to the Iraqi forces and their partners will become invaluable in the coming weeks and months, as the fight against this terrorist organization continues.

[*English*]

However, Canada's role in Iraq goes beyond military support. Canada is investing over \$1.6 billion over three years for countering Daesh, and responding to the crises in Iraq and Syria, and to address the significant and tragic impact on the wider region. This includes \$840 million in humanitarian assistance, which goes directly to trusted partners for immediate work.

When the hon. member of the opposition calls on this House to support recommendations made by the UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria, this government can say with confidence that it agrees, and it can demonstrate that it is already acting on the recommendations raised in the inquiry.

Ours was the first government to formerly call on the United Nations Security Council for urgent action with regard to the genocide occurring against the Yazidi people.

Daesh and its followers have attacked innocent civilians around the world. Its vile message of hatred knows no borders, but its gravest abuses have been concentrated in Iraq and Syria. The majority of victims have been Muslim, though it has also perpetrated crimes against minority groups, including Christians, Shabaks, Turkmen, and Yazidis.

The Yazidis in northern Iraq have suffered the loss of as many as 5,000 members of their community; 7,000 have been captured, mainly in Syria. Women and girls are forced into sexual slavery; boys are indoctrinated and used as child soldiers.

In the face of genocide against the Yazidis, it is most fitting that all parties in the House join together in support of the opposition member's motion. The Government of Canada has recognized Daesh's crimes against the Yazidis. We have called on the Security Council to take action, and we have been, and continue to participate, in collecting and documenting evidence to ensure that those responsible are held to account.

In terms of immediate action, our government is supporting the delivery of critical psychosocial care to victims. Our humanitarian assistance is also helping to meet basic needs and improve the Yazidis' conditions in camps and host communities. Many of these are located within Iraq where access has been extraordinarily difficult. To ensure Yazidis have the option to return to their homes, we are also supporting the clearance of improvised explosive devices in areas of Iraq that have been newly liberated from Daesh.

Last month, the Minister of Foreign Affairs attended the United Nations General Assembly, where the questions raised by the commission of inquiry about Daesh's horrific crimes and the international community's response to these unspeakable crimes were his first priority. The commission's report documents grave violations of international humanitarian and criminal law.

The minister has stayed focused on the evidence, and on taking action to bring Daesh to justice for its genocide against the Yazidi people. Canada is appalled by these widespread abuses, and the sexual and gender-based violence committed against religious and ethnic communities.

Recent exchanges in New York with representatives of the Yazidi community and senior government officials have advanced our understanding of what steps the international community can and should take.

As leaders in the international community on this issue, I would like to update the House on the many efforts made by the Minister of Foreign Affairs in the fight against Daesh.

With regard to the United Nations, twice, in May and again in June of this year, the Minister of Foreign Affairs wrote to the president of the Security Council to urge it to take action on the matter of Daesh's crimes. On June 16, the Minister of Foreign Affairs stood before the House to recognize the atrocities committed by Daesh against the Yazidis of Sinjar and to state, unequivocally, that these crimes constitute genocide. The Minister of Foreign Affairs continues to call on the UN Security Council to take steps to ensure that those responsible for the atrocious crimes perpetrated by Daesh in Iraq and Syria are held accountable.

In July, my colleague, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Consular Affairs, met with Ms. Nadia Murad, a member of the Yazidi community of Iraq and a survivor of sexual violence perpetrated by Daesh, to discuss the plight of her family, friends, and community.

Our mission in Baghdad has been active in reaching out to Yazidi organizations and Iraqi authorities.

• (1210)

In September, in New York, the Minister of Foreign Affairs participated in a dedicated session at the UN General Assembly on the subject of holding Daesh to account. At this high-level meeting, the Minister of Foreign Affairs called upon the UN to establish a special commission to investigate Daesh activities, and called for more action from the international community and, specifically, from the Security Council.

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With regard to our international partners, we will be working closely with the U.K. and others in the coming months to activate a core group of actors, and coordinate between governments and relevant organizations as we work toward international consensus on which mechanisms are most effective in ensuring accountability for the atrocities committed by Daesh.

I would also like to express the importance of regional and national partnerships in documenting Daesh crimes and holding it responsible. Iraq's participation, in particular, is critical, which is why Canada supports the Iraqi government's effort to improve governance in the country, strengthen institutions, and mend ethnic and religious divides.

The government is undertaking an integrated approach to the crisis in Syria.

To ensure that Daesh fighters are brought to justice and that victims receive healing support, the government is engaged in evidence collection, in support for courts, and in care for victims.

The starting point of justice and holding Daesh to account is securing the necessary evidence. Canada funds work by civil society organizations in Iraq and Syria to preserve critical evidence, which includes the mass graves that continue to be uncovered as territory is re-taken from Daesh.

Organizations we support, such as the Commission for International Justice and Accountability, have developed legal case files focusing on Daesh criminality in Iraq and Syria, including sexual slavery.

In order to pursue Daesh, local governments and the international community will have to determine the right court system to pursue justice. Options that exist include the International Criminal Court, ad hoc international criminal tribunals or hybrid tribunals, state-level criminal prosecution, and civil actions.

Whichever judicial mechanism or mechanisms are pursued, it is critical that the government of Iraq and the international community, in general, be supported and engaged. The international courts only function if they have the necessary international co-operation. Domestic courts need to have the capacity to conduct fair and independent trials. Canada is actively looking at ways in which we can provide capacity-building to support the important elements of the Iraqi justice sector.

As the international community seeks justice for these crimes, it is important that the survivors of these grave abuses be provided with the care they need. In particular, victims of sexual violence and slavery require urgent psychosocial and medical assistance.

Since 2014, Canada has supported experienced humanitarian partners in Iraq, including the United Nations Population Fund.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs is deeply committed to pushing the international community to help alleviate the terrible suffering of the Yazidi victims of Daesh, as well as to lay the foundation for a process of transition in the societies affected by Daesh.

This government can say with confidence that we are actively advancing the issues contained in the commission's recommendations. We have been active in the military fight against Daesh, and

we have led in calling on the United Nations Security Council to declare that crimes against the Yazidis constitute genocide. We have engaged international and local partners to be as effective as possible.

From the outset, we have insisted on evidence collection so that, together with our partners, we can hold Daesh accountable for the crime of genocide. We are engaged in assessing an appropriate court system to this end. Throughout, we are providing essential support for the victims who are at the centre of all of our efforts.

[*Translation*]

In closing, we recognized that the crimes committed by Daesh in Sinjar constituted genocide and we asked the Security Council to intervene. On behalf of the entire House, we are incredibly grateful to the Canadian men and women who work on the ground providing military intelligence, training, and support in the fight against Daesh, as well as ensuring the safety and security of the victims in Syria.

[*English*]

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the parliamentary secretary for her contributions to this debate, so far.

Why did her government initially vote against the opposition motion that basically recognized the genocide that was going on, and continues to be going on? Does her government now recognize, as well, the genocide of Christians and Kurds in the region?

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones: Mr. Speaker, of course, at the time, members can see by our comprehensive and integrated approach, we were deliberate to get the steps in the right order. We appreciate the attention that the world focused on whether or not this was a case of genocide. We wished to have the evidence. We wished to participate in being able to prove it, and of course, we pushed the UN to make that declaration. The report has been most helpful.

I would like to thank the members opposite for bringing this motion forward and articulating some of the findings. We are on a very solid foundation with regard to foreign policy, with regard to national defence, and with regard to an immigration and refugee policy for Canada, and for those who are the victims of genocide in Syria.

● (1215)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her speech.

It is vital that we give those people asylum as well as humanitarian assistance and psychosocial care because they have been traumatized by their experiences.

I heard my colleague say that those who commit these horrible crimes must be brought to justice and held responsible for their actions.

I would like to ask my colleague two questions. First, if that applies to ISIS, should we also investigate the actions of the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen and those of Bashar al-Assad?

Second, the search for justice requires on-the-ground investigations to collect medical and legal evidence. It is very painstaking work that requires a lot of resources. Will Canada finance such efforts on the ground?

[English]

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones: Mr. Speaker, it is important to recognize that Canada is participating in a coalition of partners, and we are there to play our part. Absolutely, with regard to the investigation, we have devoted funds to making sure that evidence can be verified and documented and can get to the right place so that we can hold Daesh to account.

With regard to the first question, which is to bring a whole other matter into this discussion, I would rather we stay focused on what we are doing here as parliamentarians to defend the fact that the Yazidi are victims of genocide. We are in a unique position as a country to support that.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member just said that we should focus our attention on the Yazidi. If we look at the Prime Minister's or this government's attitude toward refugees, in a very short time span, we were able to get a lot done. It is important to recognize our place in the world with respect to refugees. I would ask the member to comment on the support of refugees.

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones: Mr. Speaker, my colleague, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, mentioned earlier this morning the model of leadership the minister has provided, particularly with regard to bringing 30,000 refugees from Syria to Canada. It was a meticulous process to ensure the health of people, to ensure the safety and security of Canadians, and to make sure that we are helping the most vulnerable.

I have had the opportunity, as have many of my colleagues, I am sure, to speak to international audiences, and Canada is very highly respected for the efforts we have made for those refugees, and we will continue in that vein.

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to rise and speak on this subject. I think that crimes, even genocide, of which we are speaking, are so horrendous that this is an issue that should go beyond partisanship and on which we should be able to find agreement among all parties in the House.

That is partly why I am speaking a little late in this debate, because we have been in discussions with representatives from the Conservative Party to see if we could come to a common understanding on a motion that we could all support. Those discussions are ongoing. I do not think we have come to an agreement yet, but I think all members would agree that it is worth an effort. We have certain differences between us and the Conservatives, and possibly the NDP, but those differences are very minor compared with the overall urgency and importance of the issue that is before the House today.

Business of Supply

I would hope that further discussions, which are now ongoing, will lead to some agreement among the parties so that we can all agree on this motion. Whether or not those discussions bear fruit, I would like to single out the Conservative critic, the member for Calgary Nose Hill, for her commitment on this topic and for her willingness to enter into discussions with us to try to find an all-party agreement.

I would also like to single out my parliamentary secretary, the member for Parkdale—High Park, and in particular, the chair of the immigration committee, the member for Etobicoke Centre, for the undying passion he has exhibited on this question of the Yazidi. At the risk of leaving someone out, I would like to also draw attention to other colleagues in the Liberal Party and my caucus who have been very active on this file in favour of the Yazidi. This would include the members for Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs, York Centre, Mount Royal, West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, and New Brunswick Southwest. I am sure there are others, such as the NDP member for Vancouver East.

I know that members from all parties have been very active on this issue, because we are shocked and horrified by the atrocities brought against the Yazidi people, but also against so many others, by Daesh and also in the context of the Syrian civil war.

That, of course, is why we did step up early in our mandate to commit to 25,000 refugees within a four-month period, a commitment that we honoured, and I am proud of that.

We want to work with the Conservatives, but I would point out that in terms of resettled refugees, we are bringing in three to four times more in 2016 than was the case in 2015. I am proud that Canadians from all walks of life stepped up to the plate so forcefully in favour of the Syrian refugee effort, and I am also grateful to all of the opposition parties, which professed their support for this initiative from the beginning.

● (1220)

[Translation]

It is also true that other countries have shown great support and admiration for what we have done; so much so, in fact, that we launched an initiative at the United Nations to basically export our model for private sponsorship of refugees. Thirteen countries have already expressed an interest, including the United Kingdom and the United States. Canadians can therefore be proud of our efforts to help refugees.

[English]

However, we are talking more specifically about the Yazidi today, so let me report, as the parliamentary secretary has already said, that a group of officials from my department has recently returned from Iraq. We could not discuss this before they returned, because there are very dangerous conditions on the ground there, and indeed, that is one of the constraints on quick action in that part of the world. Not only is it dangerous, but there is a war going on, as we speak, in Mosul, which is not too far from where our officials were just recently.

Business of Supply

That is one of the reasons why it is not easy to quickly address this issue. I have yet to receive a full debrief from my officials. They have just returned, but I know that they had a twofold mission. One was to interview Syrian refugees located in Iraq, and the second was to confer with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organization for Migration, or the UNHCR and the IOM, on options regarding assistance for Yazidis and the opportunity to bring more of them to Canada.

I might mention that the IOM and the UNHCR are absolutely critical to our efforts in this area. When we brought all the refugees from Syria, it was the UNHCR that provided the names of the vulnerable people, and the IOM provided indispensable help in terms of logistics.

In terms of the Yazidi issue, it is Canada working with those international parties that will seek to bring to Canada many people who are victims of Daesh, including the Yazidi people, who have been subjected to unconscionable aggression in the form of genocide.

I can report to the House that my department is working very actively and very assiduously to come up with a solution to this issue as soon as possible.

I might just say in closing, more generally, that in terms of the refugee crisis the world is facing, I think Canada did step up to the plate. I think we can be proud of our efforts. In terms of the numbers we took in, it may be three times more than in 2015, but it is still just a drop in the bucket compared with the millions of refugees around the world, and this is a worsening crisis. It is a crisis that is tearing apart various parts of the world, including the European Union. It has become an issue in the United States. I think we can be proud of what we have done, but it is obviously a major crisis for the world as a whole.

I think there are really three parts to the solution to this.

One is military action to end the war in Syria and to defeat ISIS, or Daesh. Members know that Canada is involved in that in an important way. The attempt to liberate Mosul is playing out as we speak. That is an important part of the overall solution.

The second important part is humanitarian relief. My colleague, the Minister of International Development, has announced assistance in the hundreds of millions of dollars for the region.

I know from my visits that front-line countries like Jordan and Lebanon have had a huge burden imposed upon them, with as much as one-quarter or one-third of their populations consisting of refugees. It is as if in Canada we had some nine million or 10 million refugees in our midst. The burden they are bearing is enormous, so a second part of the operation is to provide assistance to those countries.

Finally, last but not least, is to receive refugees, and we have done our bit. However, it would be desirable to extend the number of refugee-receiving countries beyond the usual performers: Australia, Canada, the United States. Possibly other countries around the world could be induced to do more in terms of receiving these refugees.

● (1225)

[*Translation*]

This is not a simple issue; it is very complex. However, I believe that the solution has three basic elements: first, a military component; second, financial aid for various countries; and third, the resettlement of refugees, not just here in Canada, but in other countries as well.

[*English*]

Finally, I do hope that the inter-party discussions will bear fruit and that we will be able to vote as a whole, together, on this motion. Whether or not that happens, I am confident that all of us, in slightly different, nuanced ways, nevertheless support a very major effort to assist the Yazidi in their hour of great need.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was interesting for me to listen to the Minister of Immigration's speech. I do note a change in his tone with respect to these issues, and I appreciate that change in tone. However, I do want to get his comment on something he said here in question period on October 5. He said:

Mr. Speaker, we do not know how many Yazidi refugees have come to Canada, because when refugees come to Canada, we do not ask them their ethnicity or their religion. We do not discriminate by religion or ethnicity.

What concerns me about that is that the minister does not really seem to appreciate, in that statement at least, the importance of the refugee definition, being that we take those who are most vulnerable and those who face persecution on the basis of identifiable characteristics. It seemed as well that the parliamentary secretary said something a bit different in his speech. He said that we do not track these things. It sounded like he was saying that we do ask the questions up front, but we just do not track it afterward.

I want to ask the minister to clarify. Does what he said on October 5 still hold? Is what he said correct or is what his parliamentary secretary said correct? Do we ask these questions? Will the government finally begin to keep track of the level of vulnerability of those who come to this country?

● (1230)

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question, and I assure him there is no distinction between my position and that of my parliamentary secretary.

I am proud of the fact that from the beginning of our becoming the government and the Syrian refugee project, we have stated consistently and repeatedly that our position is to accept the most vulnerable people. Irrespective of religion, of community, of other characteristics, we will accept the most vulnerable people. We have lived by that commitment from the beginning and we retain that commitment today.

In terms of how we decide who are the most vulnerable in terms of the government-assisted refugees from Syria, we receive the names from the United Nations, UNHCR. It identifies those who are the most vulnerable and we take those names and choose from among those people. I can assure the member those people truly are vulnerable. We know now that they speak almost no English or French and often they do not have much education so it is some work to equip them for success in Canada, but we have achieved our objective in terms of receiving those who were truly vulnerable. It is the United Nations that decides the criteria. The member may recall that one of the criteria was gay men because in that part of the world they are particularly persecuted and therefore vulnerable.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the minister for his speech, and for being so frank and open. It is greatly appreciated.

However, I would like to add something to what he said regarding the solution to the terrible crisis facing Syria and Iraq. The solution must be political and diplomatic, otherwise the problem will never really be solved.

Now that I have made that brief comment, I would like to ask the minister a question. Australia and Germany, for example, have taken specific measures to quickly relocate Yazidis. Has his department been in contact with representatives from those countries in order to discuss their experience and learn from their approach?

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her question.

I used to be the defence minister. I do not agree that a military solution is never needed. For example, during the Second World War, a military solution was needed. I could give many other examples.

We held direct consultations on the ground in Iraq. My staff just got back to Canada. I have had discussions with the German government about issues related to immigration and refugees in general. In my opinion, Angela Merkel is a hero because she welcomed over one million refugees into Germany.

• (1235)

[*English*]

Maybe she was a little bit ahead of her people, but it was a great humanitarian act.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise today in support of the motion put forward by my colleague, the member for Calgary Nose Hill. She has been a relentless advocate for the rights of women and girls, especially on behalf of the Yazidi girls in Syria and Iraq.

I also want to note that I will be splitting my time with the member for Calgary Shepard.

The motion before the House today focuses on the egregious and ongoing abuses faced by Yazidi women and girls, and identifies these actions as genocide. I want to take a moment to examine the Yazidi people, who have been subjected to this human rights abuse.

Business of Supply

The UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide states that a crime of genocide is committed when a person commits a prohibited act “with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such”.

In the case of Yazidis, they are an ethno-religious group, who identify with both ancestral heritage and shared religious culture. The Yazidis are ethnically Kurdish and practice Yazidism, which combines parts of Zoroastrianism, Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, and is believed to have originated in the 12th century. Today, the majority of this ethno-religious group can be found in the Nineveh region of Iraq, but smaller communities can be found throughout Syria, Turkey, Armenia, Georgia, and Russia.

The Yazidi people clearly qualify as a group under the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide based on their distinct ethnic and religious characteristics.

I think it is also important to examine why Yazidis, as well as Christians and Shia Muslims, are being targeted by ISIS. Each of these religious communities has faced horrific injustice at the hands of ISIS. However, the Yazidis face a fierce persecution since ISIS has branded them as devil worshippers. ISIS propaganda has shown a particular focus on trying to portray the Yazidis as subhuman.

One ISIS victim testified about her captor, “He told us that Taus Malik”, which is one of seven angels to whom the Yazidis pray, “is not God. He said that Taus Malik is the devil and that because you worship the devil, you belong to us. We can sell you and use you as we see fit.” In fact, an official ISIS ruling encouraged the sexual abuse and enslavement of Yazidi women and girls precisely because they were less than human as unbelievers.

The experiences of Yazidi women and girls, once captured, reflect a level of brutality and horror that is hard to comprehend or portray. Allow me to share the words of 22-year-old Noor, as she and other Yazidi women were enslaved for several months by ISIS:

Just imagine for a moment that you wake up one morning and watch as all the men in your family are taken away. A few hours later you hear the sounds of machine guns and screams.

Then imagine your terror as you, your grandmother, your mum, your sisters and your aunts, are herded on buses and driven away by the same people who took the men.

Imagine then being sold at a slave market a few days later along with your little sister to a man old enough to be your grandfather, who is fat and ugly and stinks of body odour.

Finally imagine being raped by this man every day from then on, and when he’s bored with you, being turned over to his six guards to use as their plaything, to be gang raped after they’ve got themselves excited watching pornographic DVDs.

It sounds like the worst nightmare any girl could have, but for her, it was a reality. It was her life for a few short months. This has been the experience of countless Yazidi women and girls, and many more continue to be enslaved.

Business of Supply

Last June, the House had the opportunity to denounce the actions of ISIS specifically with a motion “that the House strongly condemn these atrocities and declare that these crimes constitute genocide.”

As a newly elected member of Parliament, I was optimistic that the motion would receive support from all parties and present a strong statement to the world of Canada's commitment against ISIS and genocide, but more important, unanimous support for the motion would have sent a strong message of hope to the Yazidi victims of ISIS that we recognize the gravity of the injustices they have experienced. However, I was ashamed that when we had the opportunity to be united against evil, the Liberal government refused to acknowledge the actions of ISIS as genocide.

● (1240)

To be clear, the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide defines a genocide as the commission of prohibited acts against a group with the intent to destroy. Prohibited acts include killing members of this group, causing serious bodily or mental harm to this group, deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about physical destruction in whole or in part, imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group, and forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

The UN report on the crimes against the Yazidis found that ISIS had committed every single prohibited act listed on the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Despite the overwhelming documented evidence of genocide, in June the Liberals alone voted against declaring the actions of ISIS a genocide. Conservatives are not afraid to label these crimes what they are, a genocide.

Today's motion is an opportunity for the government to correct its inaction on this important issue and to do the right thing. The Conservatives are calling on the government to develop an appropriate plan and corresponding action to respond to this humanitarian crisis.

As an automotive technician, I know first-hand that if we cannot measure it, we cannot manage it and we cannot improve it. The Liberal government has no plan to assist Yazidi women and girls, even though the Conservatives brought forward numerous recommendations for focusing on three key areas: humanitarian aid, military intervention, and resettlement. For example, we called on the government to act upon the June 16 United Nations recommendation to accelerate the asylum claims of Yazidi victims of genocide, as well as review the selection process used by the United Nations to identify refugees for the government-sponsored refugee stream and encourage changes, if any were necessary.

While many Yazidi men, women, and children have escaped ISIS and now live in refugee camps, they continue to face violence and persecution, as a result of their ethnicity and religion, from other refugees. The previous Conservative government attempted to prioritize persecuted religious, ethnic, and sexual minorities for resettlement in Canada.

ISIS continues to commit genocide against the Yazidis. Thousands of Yazidi women and girls continue to be raped, tortured, sold, and enslaved by ISIS. By refusing to act, the government has failed these

Yazidi victims. We must take immediate action and I call on all members of the House to support the motion. This is the first step toward action. From here, we can build and go forward.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is a great deal of support for depoliticizing this issue given the horrific actions that are taking place, particularly in respect of the Yazidis. Canadians as a whole and all parliamentarians see these as horrific acts and I understand some discussions are taking place in the hope we can achieve something that all of us can get behind in a comfortable fashion. My question to the member is related specifically to that.

Would he not agree that Canadians as a whole who are aware of the situation are horrified, and in many ways, in disbelief? I appreciated the graphic way in which the member explained the situation, but Canadians are quite upset about this and want to see the government and all parties come together through a consensus to look at ways the motion could possibly be changed to generate support. That would be the best way forward, would he not agree?

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Mr. Speaker, I am glad to hear that there is some discussion happening on how we can work together. I believe strongly that is how to solve issues like this, by putting all of the ideas on the table.

There is one thing I would like to talk a bit more about. I mentioned in my speech that if we cannot measure it, we cannot manage it. That is my biggest concern. We say that the most vulnerable are getting the spots we have set aside for refugees and that the Yazidis are a very vulnerable group, but when asked how many Yazidis we have taken in, we say we do not know because we do not register that kind of thing.

I am going to restate the point that if we cannot measure it, we cannot manage it. If we have no idea how many Yazidis have come to Canada through our current refugee program, then the way we have been working on it has to be fixed.

● (1245)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for all of the work he does here and on behalf of his constituents. I want to ask him a follow up to a question I asked the Minister of Immigration. He said that we take the most vulnerable but we do not ask those questions, because there is a certification process through the United Nations. However, many of us here appreciate the fact that religious minorities in the region have struggled to access that certification process. In many cases, they do not feel safe in refugee camps. There is a major concern about religious minorities, whether Christians, Yazidis, or other groups, not being able to live in the refugee camps for fear of a negative response toward them. I would ask my colleague about the importance of taking the most vulnerable, those who face the greatest persecution, particularly in a context in which there are some really practical problems for those groups even accessing the necessary steps for certification that would be part of the process we are using in Canada.

Business of Supply

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that the very definition of genocide states that we have to identify a particular group in order for it to be genocide. If we do not identify particular groups to help, how can we combat genocide? I am struggling for the words to portray this, but that is precisely what makes a genocide a genocide, because it is an identifiable group involved. If we are not prepared to help an identified group, then we are taking people off the UN's list. However, when they say these people are the most vulnerable, how do we even know they are?

The member for Lethbridge recently went to that part of the world to investigate this. I believe she went to northern Syria and Turkey. She said that refugees there are split into identifiable groups within the refugee camps, that each group has its own area, and that often the Yazidis are not represented at all within the camps themselves.

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to join the debate today, both as the deputy critic for foreign affairs for the Conservative Party, as well as the chair of the Parliamentary Friends of the Kurds. This is a group that I started on Parliament Hill when I first came here. It was actually a promise that I made during the election to non-constituents, people who lived outside my riding whom I met. They told me their stories and those of their neighbours, friends, and family members who lived in northern Iraq, in southern Kurdistan.

I also moved Motion No. 72 in the House, which called on the House to recognize the genocide of the Kurds during the 1980s. This is a region where genocide is simply a way of life. Multiple groups have done it to others. It is a region of the world with very little central control by governments and where the borders are quite fluid.

Next week, I will be hosting Pastor Ray Baythoon of a Christian and Missionary Alliance church from the region. As well, he is the director general of Christian affairs of the Kurdish regional government there. This is something I deeply care about. It is an issue that I have kept myself apprised of and on which I share information with fellow members of the Parliamentary Friends of the Kurds group.

We know there have been reports of 25,000 refugees being accepted so far into Canada from Syria. There are nine cases, supposedly, that can be identified as Yazidi. If, as members of the government and government backbenchers have said, this is something of great importance to them, one would think that more than nine out of 25,000 would be prioritized.

As the member for Peace River—Westlock said, this is an identifiable group against whom genocide has been committed and continues to be committed. One would think they would be the ones to be prioritized for entry into Canada. That is what this motion seeks to do. We want to prioritize this group for entry into the country.

Media reports indicate that 25,000 Yazidis live in UN refugee camps in Turkey, a NATO ally of ours. Have we approached Turkey? Have we even asked about taking these Yazidis to assist that NATO ally of ours and reduce its burden? It has many internally displaced persons who come from different parts of Turkey, Syria, and northern Iraq. They have crossed Turkey's borders and are seeking refuge in it, and the Turkish government has extended aid to them.

I want to take a different stance perhaps than other members have taken so far. I want to talk about the good work being done by a Canadian and American organization, Samaritan's Purse. It is doing incredible work assisting Yazidis directly in the region. I know Samaritan's Purse has three refugee camps east of the city of Mosul and is assisting people right now fleeing the battle to retake that city, where our courageous allies, the Kurds of the Kurdish regional government, will be playing a major role in liberating the city. It also has camps all over northwestern Iraq providing direct assistance to Yazidi groups. Many of these Canadians have first-hand accounts of assisting Yazidis.

Samaritan's Purse operates something called the Northern Iraq Community Center. In this community center, there are services for families that have been victimized and traumatized by ISIS, also known as Daesh. They have had programs since October 2015 teaching carpentry skills, among many other things. This gives Yazidis opportunities to learn new and marketable skills, and give them a chance at a better life. Photography, art, cooking and nutrition, and literacy are the next programs to be offered. As the Minister of Immigration said, it is equipping them for future success. Samaritan's Purse is also offering sewing classes to bring women together to learn to make garments. They are generating an income. As a graduation gift from this program, they receive a sewing machine of their own so they have a chance to become entrepreneurs to rebuild their lives in the region, if they so choose.

Other programs exist to address the psychological needs of many of these internally displaced persons. They have suffered significant trauma from ISIS fighters, as well as from pre-existing conditions that have been worsened by the conflict and the displacement.

There is a new medical clinic that was started by Samaritan's Purse in 2016. It offers doctors, obstetric services, gynecologists, a dentist, and a pharmacy. There is even space for children made available so that the children can come together. They have been broken by the war, with some of their family members having been murdered by ISIS fighters. This gives them an opportunity to be children, to play with other children in playgrounds and to have an opportunity to be safe with people they trust.

We know the impact of this program. In 2016 alone, I am told that 13,800 Yazidi people have been served. It is a \$2.5 U.S. million project that is helping people on the ground directly.

● (1250)

Canadians are on the ground in these places and are doing more to help these Yazidis and other displaced people survive than what the government has done so far, compared to the supposed nine Yazidi cases the government has prioritized out of 25,000 refugees.

Business of Supply

I got to visit the Samaritan's Purse headquarters in Calgary, just north of my riding. It is an incredible place, with hundreds of staff members who do assistance work and disaster relief work anywhere in the world. They have a unit on 24-hour standby mode. Within 24 hours, they can be anywhere in the world. They have their own planes. They have their own equipment. They provide direct assistance to those who need it anywhere in the world. They are incredibly committed to the most vulnerable in Iraq, especially in south Kurdistan.

I have had an opportunity in the past to meet both missionaries and assistance workers on the ground who have been to northern Iraq and have travelled back to Canada. They have told me incredible stories about these survivors, people who could never have imagined that what happened at Mount Sinjar could continue to happen while the world turns a blind eye.

Just to use some of the terms that have been used in newspapers, the western world has been accused of “negligence” and “silence” at what ISIS has continued to do, including the rape, torture, killing, and enslavement of Yazidis.

In the past Canada has served as a refuge for many ethnic groups from all across the world. This has been a story of Canada for well over a hundred years, whether they be Ukrainian or Polish people, South Vietnamese boat people, the 1999 airlift of 7,000 Kosovo refugees, the 1980s resettlement of 2,800 Baha'i refugees from Iran, and the 1956-57 37,000 Hungarian refugees who fled persecution by a communist regime controlled by the Soviet Union.

To his eternal credit, it was the former prime minister, the Right Hon. Joe Clark, who accepted 60,000 Vietnamese boat people. They have since made enormous contributions to Canada. I am going to underline the contribution of one of these South Vietnamese who first came to the United States on the final airlift out of Saigon.

He is Wayne Cao, the former MLA for Calgary-Fort. He was a refugee then, who came aboard an American helicopter, landed in California, and made his home in Calgary in 1976, where he represented the constituents of Calgary-Fort in the northern part of my riding. He became deputy speaker, earning the trust of his colleagues, in 2008. If he is looking now, I want to thank him for his service to Alberta and Canada. I actually picked up his constituency office in this past election. It is a great office. It serves constituents on the northern part of the riding really well. Wayne has made an amazing contribution to Canada.

Seeing the opportunities that the South Vietnamese have had in Canada, I know that the Yazidis could also contribute to Canada if we prioritize their entry here. They need it. They need this help just like the South Vietnamese needed it; just like the Baha'i of Iran needed it; just like Polish people needed it, who were fleeing the communist Polish regime from 1981 to 1986, which was persecuting people, especially shipyard workers. My father came to Canada in those years and got amnesty then. He got to stay in Canada and was then able to sponsor us here.

Before I finish, I want to move:

That the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word “slaves” and substituting the following:

“(c) support recommendations found in the June 15, 2015, report issued by the United Nations Commission of Inquiry on Syria entitled, “They came to destroy:

ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis”; and (d) call on the government to (i) take immediate action upon all the recommendations found in sections 210, 212, and 213 of the said report, (ii) provide asylum to Yazidi women and girls within 120 days.

• (1255)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): It is my duty to inform hon. members that the amendment to an opposition motion may be moved only with the consent of the sponsor of the motion. Therefore, I ask the hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill if she consents to this amendment being moved.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, I believe that this addresses the concerns of some of my Liberal colleagues, which they have raised. It is moved in non-partisan good faith and, therefore, I heartily agree to this amendment.

• (1300)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's comments in which he brought forward a wonderful example of Wayne Cao, the former MLA. I am not sure if he is a current MLA—no, he has retired—but it emphasizes the positive impact that refugees have had on Canada in virtually every aspect of our society. The member made reference to the boat people, and I know individuals also from that era. We could talk about the Kurds.

In the recent election, there was a great deal of emphasis on what sort of numbers Canada could take in. Our Prime Minister made that commitment to 25,000 and possibly beyond. We went beyond that 25,000. Canadians understand the importance of Canada showing leadership at the national level.

I was encouraged by the member bringing forward an amendment, and I wonder if the member could provide some additional detail on how his amendment would change the main motion. Let there be no doubt that the horrific actions against the Yazidis are something that no one in the House and no one within the Canadian public would try to justify. They are completely unacceptable, and as government we want to demonstrate leadership on the file.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for those comments. The amendment to the motion would actually remove the partisanship out of it. It gives Liberals four months to come up with a plan. We know Operation Ezra is working. They have had time to consider this as well, but my focus is the Yazidi families. They need help right now. It is nice that Samaritan's Purse is on the ground helping them with this, but there really is no civic society for them to return to.

I would recommend all members read a book called *Ending Wars Well* by Eric Patterson. Dr. Patterson was the dean of the school I went to for a master's degree at Regent University in Virginia in the United States. It talks about civic society and what it looks like after a war. For a community like the Yazidis who have suffered the types of torture, rape, murder, killing, and genocide, there is no civic society for them to return to. The only chance for survival for this community is to be helped and assisted by a country like Canada and to be resettled to Canada.

Again, I am inviting members in a non-partisan way to assist the Yazidis, to make sure the community survives for future generations. Naomi Kikoler's report says on the very front page, "Our Generation Is Gone". That is from a Yazidi woman saying their generation is gone.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the amendment that was just moved. I know there has been a lot of discussion in the House about how we can make the motion acceptable to all parties. I know that the Liberals had some concerns in the former wording of clause (c), which we have now removed. There were also some concerns around the timeline.

I would like my colleague to expand on a four-month period of time to bring Yazidi asylum claimants to Canada. Given that the government came into office in early November of last year, and confirmed its commitment to 25,000 refugees coming to Canada by the end of last year, does he feel that a four-month timeline to see Yazidi asylum claims—where there is already paperwork in the system for these families through groups like Operation Ezra—is a reasonable timeline, and does he feel that he could reach across party lines and get the support of the Liberal caucus on this?

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for that question and comments and for the great work she has done at the immigration committee to push for this Yazidi cause to make sure that their plight is heard by the government and that the government responds to the request for assistance.

I think four months is more than enough time. As I mentioned, Samaritan's Purse is able to deploy within 24 hours some type of relief by aircraft. I have more about the Grace Community Centre here, which has pilot programs for children with disabilities to be involved in sports. It has computer, cooking, carpentry, and sewing classes. Some are in the fifth cycle. It is not the first intake. It has done it multiple times. This is over the past year.

In four months a government, with its resources, individuals, expertise, and the aircraft, could totally do it. Four months is more than enough time.

• (1305)

Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood.

In my office, there are two large photographs I see every day, one of former prime minister Lester B. Pearson, a former resident of my riding of Willowdale and a recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, and the other of General Roméo Dallaire, a Canadian hero and one of our leading and most resonant and compelling voices on issues of human rights. Both of these Canadian icons serve as constant reminders of the tremendous global leadership Canada should always strive to demonstrate on issues of human rights, human security, the rule of law, and multilateralism. It is in that spirit that I rise to speak to the opposition motion before us today.

As members of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, this summer we undertook a special study on the plight of Yazidi refugees and other vulnerable populations. I deeply appreciate the urgency and the tragedy of the situation unfolding before us. This issue resonates deeply with all of us, as I know it

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does with my constituents and with all Canadians. We recognize the horrific fight facing the Yazidi population and the need for effective action on the international stage. We also recognize the role that Canada, in keeping with our great traditions, must play in ensuring both global and human security. In every instance, however, we understand that in order for Canada to play a significant role in advancing the causes of human rights and security, we must collaborate closely with our allies and fellow international institutions.

In the 12 months since the people of Canada decided that our foreign policy needed a new tone and direction, our government has done much to restore Canada's international standing and reputation. We have recommitted to multilateralism and the international rule of law. We have provided a model to the rest of the world in terms of our intake of Syrian refugees and also drastically increased our contributions toward the coalition to defeat Daesh. In that same vein, our response to the Yazidi genocide, while ever-evolving, demonstrates a similar commitment to responsible, engaged, robust, and multifaceted policy solutions.

Allow me to be clear. Our government unequivocally stands by the Yazidis. Like my colleague opposite, I had the chance to hear some of the horrifying and chilling testimony of Yazidi refugees over the summer, and I understand the urgency to act. In that vein, while I fully respect the motion before us today, it gets ahead of the process.

Dialogue with the appropriate partners, as well as an assessment of the situation in regions where Yazidis and other victims of Daesh are located, must take place to develop a responsible plan. This is not feasible within the time frame contained within the motion. The timeline proposed in the motion demands expedient processing of Yazidis specifically, a worthy goal but one that is operationally unrealistic and dangerous due to the complex security situation on the ground.

As the member opposite is aware, many of the most vulnerable Yazidis live in highly dangerous and inaccessible regions. Fully supporting these vulnerable populations, as such, will therefore require carefully considered legislation, not a rushed and incomplete motion such as the one before us today. It is imperative that we allow the IRCC to complete its analysis of this situation in close collaboration with our allies and partners in order to craft a truly effective course of action going forward.

Furthermore, this motion makes no mention of other vulnerable populations targeted by Daesh, including Christians, Shia Muslims, Mandaeans, Druze, Kakais, Shabak, and many more minorities in Iraq. Again, a more in-depth analysis of the situation based on knowledge on the ground and established best practices is certainly required.

Far from being inactive or passive in response to the Yazidi crisis, our government has taken concrete steps to respond to this significant issue. The Yazidi crisis is a multifaceted issue that requires a whole-of-government approach, with input from Global Affairs Canada, the Department of National Defence, Development Canada, and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

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• (1310)

Indeed, Canada has been highly active both internationally and domestically in responding to the issue before us today.

In the international arena, for example, the Government of Canada has taken the following concrete steps, among many others, to assist the Yazidis. In June, the foreign affairs minister declared in this very chamber that Daesh was guilty of committing genocide against the Yazidi population. Similarly, the minister has continuously and forcefully advocated at the United Nations, including formal correspondence with the Security Council, in calling for greater action in response to the Yazidi crisis. Our government has also committed to increase funding to the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to document human rights abuses and violations and to collect evidence and investigate serious international crimes.

Furthermore, working as part of a global coalition to combat Daesh, we have increased our military advise and assist missions and have increased humanitarian assistance to vulnerable populations in Syria and northern Iraq, including the Yazidis. Our government has also tripled military training, doubled intelligence efforts, and significantly increased aid, all to protect those vulnerable to the threat of Daesh.

Also Canada, through the peace and stabilization operations program, is contributing \$3.3 million to the Commission for International Justice and Accountability to investigate violations of international criminal and humanitarian law in Syria and Iraq, including of course Daesh's enslavement of thousands of Yazidi women and children who were subjected to sexual and gender-based crimes, forced marriages, and forced conversions. Finally, Canadian development assistance in Syria and northern Iraq is already helping to provide shelter, food, water, and medical services to families fleeing Mosul; and specialized services for women and girls victimized by Daesh, including women and girls from the Yazidi community.

Similarly, the government has taken significant steps to ensure that our immigration and resettlement policies are adequately responding to this crisis. For example, IRCC is continuing to monitor the situation of vulnerable persons. In response to the Yazidi genocide this month, the IRCC sent a team of observers on a fact-finding mission to northern Iraq. This is something we heard of and, of course, that mission did return to Canada yesterday, as everyone has been informed. IRCC is also reviewing the aforementioned report released on October 5 by the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration on its study of how Canada can best assist vulnerable groups through immigration measures. Finally, the IRCC officials are engaging in discussions with key partners on the ground, such as the UNHCR, IOM, and local authorities, on the best path forward to assist victims of atrocities perpetrated by Daesh.

I believe that everyone in this House can agree that the atrocities being committed against the Yazidis and other vulnerable populations by Daesh are unconscionable and require swift and determined action by the international community. In cases such as these, Canadian leadership and action are invaluable. I believe that our government's response to this crisis has been in keeping with this tradition of Canadian leadership, and as the situation unfolds I look

forward to and expect continued robust engagement by our government.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do have a question in response to the issue around timelines. With the amendment that my hon. colleague introduced to the motion, we have really extended those timelines. We initially had hoped for a 30-day window. We just recognized the dire situation of the Yazidi girls and women, but we wanted to recognize that sometimes things do not happen as quickly as we would hope, so we would want to give that extension of 120 days.

We also recall that it was just over a year ago, on October 19 and earlier, that the new Liberal government committed to bringing in 25,000 refugees by the end of that year. The government committed to bringing in 25,000 refugees in a much shorter amount of time with much more work to do, so why could the government not commit to bringing in Yazidi girls and women whom the Ezra Project has already identified? Why could the Liberals not at least commit and then follow through with that in the most possible, practical way? Why could the Liberals commit to 25,000 refugees by the end of December, the same time period, but not commit to bringing in some Yazidi girls and women in a much greater amount of time?

• (1315)

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for her question. Of course, as you know full well, the government is committed to taking action on this very critical issue. Having said that, as you can imagine we would like to act responsibly, and acting responsibly will require some time.

First we have to review the committee report prepared by the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. That particular report was released last week.

In addition to that, as you know full well, IRCC sent a team to Iraq. That team just yesterday or this morning returned to Canada. We have to examine what the members have to say and what their particular advice is.

Finally, as you know, this government is not into going it alone. We are collaborating with our allies. We are speaking to various institutions to make sure that the response we adopt is an effective one and a robust one.

As you know, we are all concerned about the Yazidis in Iraq. However, it is well to bear in mind that the Yazidis live in inaccessible regions of Iraq.

All of these things will require a strategy, and we have to use partners on the ground to make sure that we are acting effectively.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I am sure that when the hon. member was saying “as you know”, he was not talking to the Speaker. He was referring to the hon. member for Portage—Lisgar. I just wanted to clarify that for everyone in the room.

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Question and comments, the hon. member for London—Fanshawe.

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for his remarks. He did say in the course of those remarks that his government has reached out to various groups and has had dialogue with various groups. I wonder, though, if the Liberal government has spoken directly to governments like Australia and Germany about the specific programs they have put in place to help refugees from the Middle East.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Mr. Speaker, as I understand it, listening to the debate as it has unfolded in this House today and to the Minister of Immigration, the government actually is discussing these issues with other countries that are acting on the ground in Iraq.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if my colleague could pick up on the answer he provided on how important it is that Canada work in collaboration with other countries to ensure that we maximize the benefits in dealing with this refugee issue, in particular for the Yazidi people.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Mr. Speaker, of course, we appreciate that the Yazidis are facing terrible circumstances in Iraq. However, it is good to bear in mind that they live in inaccessible regions of Iraq. In addition to that, any assistance we do provide could make them more vulnerable within that country. Therefore, it is critical that we know what we are doing on the ground in that region to make sure that the good we are doing is done in a responsible fashion, so yes, we are speaking to experts on the ground.

Hon. John McKay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to engage in this debate. It is similar to the debate we had in June, when we discussed the scourge of ISIS and everyone condemned the atrocities of ISIS, or Daesh, as it is called.

At that time, I indicated that the government and the people of Canada stood together in solidarity with the victims of Daesh. By that I meant all victims, whether they were Yazidis, Syrians, Chaldeans, Christians, Sunnis, Shias, or others in that particular part of the world.

Canada stands in solidarity with them. Our entire effort is to free them from this scourge.

I would also highlight the fact that the Minister of National Defence and the Minister of Foreign Affairs are both determined to eradicate this threat. Our government has taken substantial and concrete steps to degrade Daesh and to ultimately help the Iraqi security forces defeat this villainous plague themselves.

To no great surprise, I will take a bit of a military focus in this debate.

All members feel that the carnage and slaughter committed against these minority groups and communities by Daesh demonstrates an undeniable evil intent. No words are strong enough to reflect our opposition to Daesh's actions.

Less than a year ago, the international coalition campaign against Daesh was about degrading the entity. We are now talking about dismantling and ultimately defeating Daesh. This significant change of language is proof that the work Canada is doing with our allies,

with our coalition partners, is helping to stabilize the Middle East and is delivering results.

As members of the House know, the Minister of National Defence has travelled to the region and has met with his counterparts. He came back convinced that an enhanced presence on the ground and increased engagement with local and international partners were necessary for resolving the crisis and restoring stability in the region. This is exactly what Canada has done.

All members of the House debated Canada's response to the crisis in Iraq and Syria back in February. Indeed, over 98 members of the House took part in a five-day debate. I consider that to be an outstanding show of parliamentary engagement and a notable exercise in the democratic process. We did this following a careful and comprehensive review of our options.

On March 8, we voted on a motion. Our collective view was unequivocal: Daesh has to be stopped and defeated.

The situation on the ground has evolved. It has become quite clear that we will only be successful in our efforts to counter the threat posed by Daesh through a combination of security, diplomacy, humanitarian assistance, and development.

Our air task force has remained active, conducting more than 2,507 sorties since the beginning of operations in 2014. Of those, 583 sorties were completed by our Polaris refueller and a further 600 were by the Auroras.

As Canadians are also aware, our government refocused the mission after the parliamentary debate, placing additional emphasis on training, advising, and assisting Iraqi security forces in their efforts to degrade and defeat Daesh. Subsequently, we upped our commitment to training, assisting, and advising by threefold and doubled our commitment to intelligence missions. In addition, we made available, to support the coalition, further intelligence and headquarters personnel.

The goal has been to enable the Iraqi forces to conduct their own offensive operations to reclaim their territory.

● (1320)

Members will recall that just two years ago, when Daesh started to take over Iraqi territory, Iraqi fighters were paraded in their underwear on their way to their own execution. That is against the rules of international combat, but in addition, it was a terrible display for all the world to see. It is not as if those soldiers were not brave people, but they were poorly trained people. Canada, along with our coalition partners, set about rectifying that so that now, when they are approaching the area of Mosul, they are much better trained.

As of this month, Daesh has lost approximately half the territory it once dominated in Iraq. The 40% of Iraq it dominated is now down to approximately 10%. That 10% is largely centred on Mosul. Members will have read in this morning's papers about the attack on Mosul. They are going about that attack in an organized, disciplined military fashion. We have, with the assistance of our coalition partners, upgraded the quality of the Iraqi security forces—

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●(1325)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Order, please. The hon. member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman is rising on a point of order.

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, I would like to raise a point of order on relevance. As we have been listening to the parliamentary secretary for defence talk about the defence efforts being made by the government in Iraq, not yet has he mentioned the refugee crisis, the Yazidis, or the genocide that has occurred. I ask that he get on point.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I believe that is more a point of debate than a point of order.

I have heard a number of speeches in the House that go around and then come back, so I would like to give the hon. member the benefit of the doubt, and we will let him continue.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence.

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, thank you for dealing with that interruption, which was masquerading as a point of order.

I note that the security environment is the only issue of relevance to the security of Yazidis, Chaldeans, Syriacs, Christians, Sunnis, and Shias. Had the member been listening to my speech, he would have noted that I had mentioned all those refugee groups.

Nearly 10,000 kilometres have been liberated in Syria. We have reclaimed vast swaths of territory, and that has largely been done through the efforts of the Iraqi security forces, which have been, in some measure, trained, advised, and assisted by the Canadian Forces. Indeed, the strategic towns of Fallujah, Hit, and Rutba have been retaken.

Key Daesh leaders have been eliminated, and the organization's conventional military capabilities have been severely degraded. They are losing terrain, fighters, and resources on multiple fronts as they struggle and scramble to react to the coalition's efforts. In the end, it is the people of Iraq who will be responsible for stabilizing the country. It cannot be done by outside forces. It is they who will ultimately defeat Daesh.

We also recognized that the ultimate solution to regional instability would require more than just military force. This is why, to help address the disastrous crisis in the region, we have focused our efforts on meeting the basic needs of those most impacted by the conflicts in Iraq and Syria, including refugees who have fled to neighbouring countries

In addition to this effort, over the next three years Canada will contribute more than \$1.6 billion toward this approach to security, stabilization, humanitarian, and development assistance.

The Government of Canada is committed to the eradication of Daesh, and it is unwavering. Eight months ago, we saw the shifting landscape in theatre, and we adapted our efforts to ensure that Canada's contribution remained at the heart of the coalition campaign. We are now seeing the results of this refocused approach. Our dedicated men and women in uniform have been supporting and empowering local forces to take their fight directly to Daesh so that they can reclaim their homes, their land, and their country.

I look forward to all the questions from my colleagues opposite.

●(1330)

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, late last year, after the government was sworn-in, I believe the date was November 4, 2015, it stood firm on its commitment to bring 25,000 refugees to Canada by December 31. There was no arguing about it, it was something the government was going to do. It took a little longer than that, about four months, but it did it.

My question today is, will the government commit to bringing an unspecified number of Yazidi victims of genocide to Canada in the same amount of time? There is no partisan language in this motion any more as it has been pulled out.

Would my colleague opposite, who has a long, proud career in this place, commit to supporting this motion, given that there is a little hypocrisy involved, and to supporting victims of genocide like it committed to supporting vast numbers of other refugees last year?

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, I do recollect the motion to bring in 25,000 refugees, and I regret to say that the only party in the House that opposed that initiative was the party opposite. That was quite regrettable because we brought in about 30,000, a mix of private refugees and government-sponsored refugees. It has been a largely wonderful exercise not only for the refugees but a nation-building exercise for us.

As to the specific motion at hand, it is more an issue of timing than anything else, as well as the variety of vulnerable populations. Is a Yazidi more or less important than a Syrian, a Chaldean, a Christian, a Shia, or a Sunni? That is the decision the minister has to make. These are all vulnerable populations, all, arguably, subject to genocidal intent on the part of Daesh.

I applaud the hon. member for bringing her motion, but there is a prematurity to the motion, and a possible lack of reflection on the complexity of the situation.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we all agree that the Yazidi people are in an absolutely terrible situation. The government keeps telling us that actively offering them asylum is a very complicated undertaking.

However, countries such as Germany and Australia have put together plans for this specific group of people. I would like to know if government officials or the minister have talked to those two countries to learn more about what they are doing and about their specific plans for the Yazidi people.

[*English*]

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, I am advised that IRCC officials have engaged with its on-the-ground partners, presumably the nations that the hon. member referenced, along with the UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration, in order to determine the best response.

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The government is clearly engaged. The motion is certainly welcome, but it has to be taken in the context of a larger response on the part of the government.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with my colleague from Sarnia—Lambton. It is indeed an honour to speak to this motion brought forward by my friend from Calgary Nose Hill and amended by my colleague from Calgary Shepard.

It is unfortunate that we have to have this debate today, knowing that so many Canadians understand the atrocities that have been committed against the Yazidi people. When we look at what happened two years ago in Sinjar and Iraq, ISIS targeted the Yazidi community, and carried out one of the most brutal genocides that have been witnessed in the world's recent history.

We saw men executed at gunpoint. We saw children crucified by ISIS. We saw Yazidi people being trapped on Mount Sinjar. Many perished from dehydration. The elderly collapsed and died, and ultimately, after the execution of men over the age of 10, the younger boys were moved into terrorist training and were reprogrammed. They were brainwashed and turned into suicide bombers and terrorists. The women and girls were sold into sexual slavery. Those who refused to convert, those girls and women who refused to be sexual slaves were burnt alive. These atrocities were so despicable that the world pronounced them as genocide.

I would like to remind the House that it was only in June that we had before the chamber a debate on a motion that the official opposition brought forward to recognize the atrocities being committed by ISIS against the Yazidis as genocide. The government, the Liberal Party, voted against it. Only a couple of days later, the UN declared it a genocide. Only then, rather than leading, the Liberals decided to follow the United Nations, when the rest of the world, the British House of Commons, Secretary of State John Kerry in the United States, had already boldly proclaimed it as genocide, as did our former Conservative government.

The sad part in all of this is that we are debating a motion today to look at bringing more Yazidi refugees into Canada. We have a government that is very proud of its record of bringing in, or will bring in, 25,000 refugees from Syria and Iraq. The sad part of this is that out of the thousands of refugees that have come to Canada for asylum, only nine of them are Yazidi.

That, in my opinion, is despicable, and I am certain it has to be an embarrassment for the government. I really do have to raise this question, why has the government not brought in more of these poor women and girls who are in refugee camps already in the region, who have been identified by the United Nations refugee organization? Is the government discriminating against the Yazidi people? That has to be asked.

We have people who have been subjected to treatment worse than livestock by ISIS, and largely abandoned by some of the people in the region of northern Iraq.

•(1335)

They deserve asylum. They deserve a place to call home. I know for a fact that organizations across Canada are prepared to privately sponsor them. I know that the Jewish Foundation of Manitoba wants

to sponsor these poor Yazidi girls and women, and get them to a safe and secure environment that we offer here in Canada.

We are giving, through the amendment, the government 120 days to act upon the United Nations Commission of Inquiry on Syria report entitled “They Came to Destroy: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis”, and implementing articles in sections 210, 212, and 213 of the report.

As my colleague from Calgary Nose Hill, the immigration critic for the official opposition, has already said in a written letter to the Minister of Immigration that he could use section 25 of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act to expedite the asylum seekers in the Yazidi community who are currently in the queue to come here.

As has already been pointed out, Britain, Germany, Australia, and other countries have been able to bring in hundreds of these girls and women, who have been able to escape the sexual slavery, who have been able to get away from ISIS, as often Jihadists and militants hang on to them as comfort wives. This is something we have not seen since World War II when it was practised by the Japanese.

I am glad we have had the opportunity to at least address this issue in the House today. I do not think most Canadians realize that the government, in its efforts to bring in all of the refugees who have been displaced and targeted by ISIS, had not included the Yazidis in its efforts. I know that when we were in government, it was our intention to go after the ethnic and religious minorities who were the primary targets of the atrocities being committed by ISIS itself.

If we are going to ultimately protect people, if the government believes in its responsibility to protect, then, one, we have to have that military force there; two, we have to provide the humanitarian aid and assistance, which we are going to need right now as the battle for Mosul evolves and 1.5 million civilians are at risk inside the city, as 30,000 coalition troops charge the city to root out and destroy ISIS and its roughly 5,000 fighters in the city.

We have to support the surrounding nations that have those refugee camps, and are providing humanitarian assistance, schools, water, hospital services, medicine, but what about the responsibility to protect those who cannot protect themselves? What about the responsibility to bring in those who have been subjected to a genocide?

I have talked many times in this House about genocide, and Raphael Lemkin, the wordsmith and author of the UN Genocide Convention back in 1948. He developed it. He spoke of how different state players and different organizations and groups would target minorities to eliminate them. The UN, just this June, agreed again that what has happened to the Yazidi people, specifically, was a genocide.

If there was ever a time for the government to show compassion, if there was ever a time for the government to use its powers under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act to expedite the movement of these poor girls and women away from danger and into the peace and security that we offer here in Canada, this is the time.

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We are asking the government to do it within the next 120 days, to follow-through on the UN report and recommendations, and to support this motion as it stands before the House.

• (1340)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate what the member across the way is saying. What I would ask for is that the opposition recognize that as a government we have taken a very proactive approach in dealing with the refugee issue. It is something that we take very seriously, right from the Prime Minister's Office to the responsible ministers, in terms of making sure not only that we get the job done but that we get it done right.

The horrific actions that are taking place overseas are in fact very upsetting for all of us on all sides of the House. We have demonstrated this with the Syrian refugees in terms of the large number of refugees, and we have been complimented around the world for Canada's approach in dealing with the Syrian refugee crisis.

However, at times we have to go through a process and there are concerns in regard to the timing among a couple of other things with respect to the resolution. Would the member not acknowledge that specifically there needs to be proper processing to ensure that it is done right and we have to work with our coalition partners as much as possible so that we can maximize the benefits for as many as possible?

• (1345)

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, the question really is for the government and for my friend from Winnipeg North. Why is the government not acting upon the United Nations recommendations 210, 212, and 213 on actually bringing in and accelerating the protection of Yazidi girls and women?

This has been a recommendation since June, yet we still see foot-dragging by the government. This is the chance for the Liberals to actually stand up for a major group that has been targeted and essentially almost eliminated and exterminated by ISIS, but instead they are discriminating against them. I urge my colleague to get behind the motion and ask the government to implement the recommendations by the United Nations, which they love very dearly, and accelerate the immigration and protection of these refugees.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for not only his leadership on this issue but on the many issues relating to foreign affairs.

My colleague mentioned earlier in his speech that in June of this year the Conservative Party put forward a motion and the Liberal Party voted against it, in terms of simply declaring the Yazidi situation a genocide. Even on that point of simply making a declaration, the Liberal Party failed to act. Does my colleague think that part of the problem may be simply acknowledging that there is a problem before we can begin to take action? Would he urge them to get on with it?

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, it was very disheartening to see the government refuse to recognize this first as a genocide. We brought that motion forward on June 9. A couple of days later we

had the vote on it and the Liberals voted against it. June 15 was when the report came out from the UN that ISIS was committing genocide against the Yazidi people.

It is disheartening that the Liberals love to talk like they are out there supporting the responsibility to protect, they are out there addressing these humanitarian crises, and they like to denounce historical genocides, but at the same time, we have a genocide before us today that they can do something about and they decide to sit on their hands instead. To me, that is deplorable.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am standing in the House today to speak to the important issue of genocide against the Yazidi people and the actions that we need to take now to react.

Canada claims to stand for a lot of things on the world stage. We say we are a place of refuge for those in the world who are persecuted. We say we are committed to eliminating violence against women and children. We say that sexual assault and rape are wrong and we will stand against it. Therefore, I am here today to plead with the House on behalf of those who cannot speak for themselves, to ask the current government to have mercy and to take action now to rescue the Yazidis.

[*Translation*]

The Yazidis are a religious minority from northern Iraq. Theirs is one of the most ancient religions in the Middle East. They have their own religion, language, and culture.

The Yazidis do not have protected person status in their country, which means that members of the religion can be killed, raped, and enslaved with impunity. Refugee camps are not safe havens for Yazidis because they are full of Muslims who are so fiercely opposed to Yazidi religion and culture that the Yazidis fear for their lives.

Many Christians find themselves in similar predicaments. They cannot take refuge in these camps because they fear persecution. Yazidis in refugee camps are not safe and may be segregated because of either security concerns or persecution.

The problem is further exacerbated by the fact that some Yazidis are considered internally displaced while others are considered refugees. Depending on their status, there can be significant differences in the aid available to them, including access to food, drinking water, shelter, and medical care.

• (1350)

[*English*]

The area around Mosul is full of trapped and terrified civilians, but as Iraqi forces and their allies move to wrest this city from the militants of the Islamic State, one group finds itself particularly desperate and in peril. Scores, perhaps even hundreds of Yazidi women and girls enslaved by the Islamic State more than two years ago are thought to remain captive in Iraq's second-largest city, as the U.S.-backed offensive gets under way in earnest. Activists fear for the lives of these women and children, even amidst hopes that the extremist group's grip on the city could be broken.

Business of Supply

Thousands of Yazidi women and children were seized, and men and boys killed or forcibly enlisted in the military, when their traditional heartland was overrun by the Islamic State in August 2015. By a UN estimate earlier this year, 3,200 women and children are still caught in the maw of a vast slave-holding network extending across the group's self-declared but now shrinking caliphate, encompassing parts of Syria and Iraq.

Human rights groups and activists believe that most of the Yazidi captives were sold as slaves or given as gifts to fighters in Islamic State-held areas of Syria. However, some either have spent the duration of their captivity in Mosul or found themselves back in the city after forced journeys between other Islamic State bastions, passed hand to hand like cattle, as their husbands were killed in battle, traded them away, or offered them as presents to relatives and fellow fighters.

Those who have escaped or have been ransomed have described conditions there as grimly similar to other areas where the Islamic State holds sway. Cruel, medieval torments are a feature of daily life, coupled with harrowing sexual and domestic servitude in the households of fighters. Enslaved women are routinely raped and beaten.

Global efforts to help are under way. We have heard about some of those today.

Amal Clooney, a barrister at Doughty Street Chambers, specializing in international law and human rights law, has confirmed that she will be representing Yazidi ISIS survivor, Nadia Murad, and other victims of the Yazidi genocide. Amal will serve as their council in their effort to secure accountability for the genocide, sexual enslavement, and trafficking of Yazidi girls and women by the militant group, the Islamic State in Iraq. Efforts to achieve accountability will include seeking an International Criminal Court investigation and prosecution of the crimes committed against Nadia Murad and the Yazidi community.

Nadia Murad is a 21-year-old victim of ISIS crimes in Iraq and one of the thousands of Yazidi women who were abducted and enslaved by ISIS. She was brutally raped by more than 12 ISIS members over a period of three months. After her escape, Nadia spoke out about her experiences to draw attention to the ongoing genocide.

ISIS attacks began the genocide. The attacks have resulted in the death of an estimated 5,000 civilians, the enslavement of at least 2,000 women and girls, and the displacement of 400,000 people from the Yazidi homelands in Sinjar, the Nineveh plains, and Syria.

When asked why she decided to take on the case, Amal Clooney stated that the European Parliament, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the U.S. government, and the U.K. House of Commons have all recognized that there is genocide being perpetrated by ISIS against the Yazidis.

How can it be that the most serious crimes known to humanity are being carried out before our eyes, but are not being prosecuted? We know that thousands of Yazidi civilians have been killed and thousands of Yazidi women have been enslaved by a terrorist organization that has publicly proclaimed its genocidal intent. We

know that systemic rapes have taken place, and they are still taking place, yet no one is being held to account.

● (1355)

[*Translation*]

The situation facing the Yazidi people has also been internationally recognized. In June of this year, the United Nations Human Rights Council issued a report stating that the Yazidi people are victims of genocide. The report also outlined possible remedies to the situation.

Shortly after that, the Canadian government formally took the same position on the Yazidi people, but it has not taken any concrete action to date.

[*English*]

Others have recognized this terrible situation and have begun to help. Canada should be helping, but from what we know we have only rescued nine Yazidi families out of the more than 50,000 refugees who have been brought to Canada so far. This is an absolute shame. Most of the Yazidis who are currently being persecuted came from Nineveh. Do you remember Nineveh from your historical studies? This was the place that—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Order, please.

I just want to remind hon. members that debate is taking place. It is nice to see people being collegial and talking to each other, but it is getting a bit loud. If hon. members are having a conversation, I would appreciate it if they would take it to the lobby. Thank you.

The hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: As I was saying, Mr. Speaker, we need to help the Yazidis and also the Christians there.

The debate today and the motion is about Yazidis but it could just as easily be about Christians. For the first time in over 2,000 years, there are no Christians left in Mosul. They have been obliterated while the world stood by and watched. According to the latest census in Canada more than 60% of Canadians claim to be Christian. How can our country stand by and watch while our brothers and sisters are erased from the planet?

The Christian population of Syria alone has gone from 30% in 1920 to less than 10% today. That is 4.4 million people, or nearly the equivalent of the Holocaust. Although the motion is about rescuing the Yazidis, which is critical, the same could be said and should be said for persecuted Christians.

[*Translation*]

I call on the Liberal government to fast-track the refugee claims of Yazidis seeking to come to Canada. The reality is that very few Yazidi people have been recommended for resettlement in Canada. Many Yazidi victims wait more than five years for resettlement by the UNHCR. This is not just another refugee crisis. This is clearly an act of genocide based on religious beliefs. Both the UN and this government have recognized this.

*Statements by Members**[English]*

I am calling on the Liberal government to act to rescue these Yazidis, especially Yazidi women and girls, bring them to Canada, and save them from brutal acts and death. Please have mercy. Please act now. We have been talking about this for almost a year.

Mr. Omar Alghabra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Consular Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during the last election the member's leader was scaring Canadians by saying that if we received more refugees, they would be a threat to the security of our country. Now that we are a year into this mandate, I am curious if the member still agrees with her former leader. What is her opinion on what his position was?

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's question is absolute nonsense. We were the ones who took action to start bringing in refugees from Syria and Iraq. We were committed to doing that. It is utter nonsense to think anything else.

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague spoke about the many different religious groups that were being persecuted and killed. The reason that we hear about the Yazidi women is that in one instance 700 husbands were taken outside the city and shot, all within two hours. The children were taken away and many of them were trained to fight for ISIL. ISIL continuously targets Christian groups, Yazidis, and Muslim groups that do not see things the ISIL way.

Could my colleague perhaps tell us a bit more about the plight, not of the Yazidi people as a whole, but specifically of the women who are there as refugees?

• (1400)

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Mr. Speaker, definitely they are being raped every day. Every day that the government does not act, more women are being brutally raped. I hear a lot about talking, and consulting, and visiting, and thinking, but what I really want to hear about is action to bring these Yazidi women here.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

*[Translation]***COLOMBIA**

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia have reached a peace agreement after 52 years of armed conflict.

The Bloc Québécois commends this historic agreement and congratulates the Colombian president, Juan Manuel Santos, who was recently awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

However, the people of Colombia rejected that agreement by a very narrow margin in a referendum with a very low turnout rate. This referendum illustrates just how hard it is to rise above the suffering left by 52 years of conflict and grief; it is hard, but also courageous.

For the sake of all the direct and indirect victims of the conflict, for the sake of the younger generation, who deserve a safe country in which to flourish, it is important to pursue the path of peace.

We urge all sides to continue the dialogue in an inclusive process and choose the brightest possible future for all Colombians.

* * *

*[English]***FORT LA TOUR**

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Saint John—Rothesay has an amazing history. In 1631, Charles de La Tour was named governor of Acadia. He built a trading fortress at the mouth of the Saint John River. In 1645 Fort La Tour was attacked by Charles d'Aulnay, who had a competing claim to be governor. The Battle of Saint John was the climax of the Acadian civil war. La Tour was away. Vastly outnumbered, his wife led the defence. After a stalemate, d'Aulnay offered them amnesty. He hung them all, forcing Lady La Tour to watch. She died soon afterward.

Fort La Tour was finally taken by the British in 1654. Active for over 5,000 years; occupied by the Maliseet and Mi'kmaq nations; attacked by the British, Scottish, and French forces, this site is of national significance.

Fort La Tour connects the integrated traditions that make up our nation. Working with Beth Kelly Hatt of the Fort La Tour Development Authority, Andy Dixon of the Port of Saint John, Mayor Don Darling, and Minister Ed Doherty, we hope they get shovels in the ground before Canada 150 to build this historic asset.

* * *

NORTH OKANAGAN—SHUSWAP

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the North Okanagan—Shuswap is an amazing place to live and work. It is amazing partly due to the variety of small businesses that thrive and support our local communities.

Whether on a snowmobile tour of the glaciers near Eagle Pass, or a scenic paddle on Kalamalka Lake; whether a grape grower, like Graydon at Recline Ridge, or a welder, like Wayne at Valid; or whether enjoying a Merlot on a wine tour with Mary-Jo, or a drink of milk with a dairy farmer, like Henry, we are part of supporting small businesses that keep our communities employed, fed, and sometimes wine and dined.

During Small Business Week, I salute the small businesses of the North Okanagan—Shuswap and encourage everyone to visit what I consider to be the best place on earth. Visitors may never leave.

On this, the one year anniversary of my first full day as a member of Parliament, I thank again the members of the North Okanagan for placing their trust in me. I promise to uphold that trust.

CENTENNIAL COLLEGE

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Centennial College in Scarborough revolutionized post-secondary education in Ontario, and this week it celebrated its 50th anniversary.

At its inception, Centennial College had 514 students and offered only 16 programs. Today, it has grown to be a world-class institution, with over 40,000 full and part-time students. It has an alumni base of over 120,000 graduates.

Centennial College currently offers a wide variety of programs across five campuses, including one in my riding of Scarborough—Rouge Park.

As a former student and instructor, and more recently, as an MP in Scarborough, I am incredibly proud of Centennial's role in being a gateway for success for people of all ages. It has prepared generations of Canadians to enter and advance their careers.

I want to thank the president, Anne Buller, and all the students and educators who have shaped Centennial College over the years into the incredible institution it is today.

* * *

• (1405)

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Wayne Stetski (Kootenay—Columbia, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week I was happy to spend Thanksgiving with friends and family in my beautiful riding of Kootenay—Columbia. On October 16, I celebrated World Food Day with the Kootenay conservation group, Wildsight, through its Food For Thought online summit.

The summit offered communities across the country an opportunity to engage in meaningful discussion on what we can do to raise awareness about food security at a local level. Supporting and celebrating local farmers, food manufacturers, and retailers is essential to achieving food security goals.

As we take time this week to celebrate National Small Business Week, we should also celebrate all levels of local food production in Canada. That is why I was proud to table my private member's bill, Bill C-281, which would designate the Friday before Thanksgiving each year as national local food day.

Food matters from farm to fork. I urge all members of Parliament to support our local food businesses and national local food day.

* * *

GERALDINE COPPS

Mr. Bob Bratina (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the east end of Hamilton has produced many outstanding Canadians, none better than those from the Copps family. Sadly, the matriarch of that great family, Geraldine, has passed away. She was the wife of our greatest mayor, the mother of a deputy prime minister, a member of city council, a citizenship court judge and, in my case, a good neighbour. As kids, we made sure to stop at their house on Halloween because Mrs. Copps gave out the best treats.

Later, when she entered politics, we learned that the nice lady was also a fiery competitor and never one to back away from a challenge.

Statements by Members

For her children, though, Sheila, Brenda, Mary, and Kevin, she was a kind, generous, thoughtful mother and grandmother, deeply loved by her family and all of those close to her.

How proud she must have been when her daughter, Sheila, became the first sitting MP in Canadian history to give birth, when Danelle was born in 1987; and proud to drop the first puck ever in Copps Coliseum. Gerry Copps was truly Hamilton's first lady and her gifts carry on through her wonderful family.

* * *

CARIBOO—PRINCE GEORGE

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am truly humbled to rise in the House today to say thanks to an incredible group of volunteers who gave their time and effort and believed in a guy from the Cariboo with big dreams, because without their help, I would not be rising in my seat today.

After 65,000 kilometres driven, over 30,000 doors knocked on, and over 60,000 phone calls made, one year ago yesterday the incredible people of Cariboo—Prince George elected me. I want to thank everyone who has joined me on this incredible whirlwind of a journey. I thank them for their calls, emails, Facebook posts, and tweets. I thank them for believing in me.

I hope that over the last year I have delivered on my promise of being visible and present. I hope I have demonstrated that I am willing to stand and fight for the Cariboo, to deliver the voice of the Cariboo to Ottawa. Moreover, I hope they have seen a member of Parliament who cares deeply about our region.

From Kelly, Kassi, Jordan, Kaitlyn, Josh and me, I want to say thanks.

* * *

HAMILTON FOOD FESTIVAL

Ms. Filomena Tassi (Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my ambitious city of Hamilton is making a feast of Small Business Week by hosting its first annual NOSH festival, a week-long celebration of the city's culinary scene.

NOSH is showcasing the variety in Hamilton's kitchens through a series of mouth-watering events. There are many diverse foodie scenes in Hamilton. I have had the pleasure of enjoying wonderful meals at the Ancaster Mill, Quatrefoil, Koosh Bistro, Carmen's, India Village, Sammy Jo's, and the Bean Bar, to name a few. The local stores that I shop at regularly, like Cumbrae's and Picone Fine Food, contribute to the incredible food scene in The Hammer.

Hamilton is just a delicious place to live these days. I invite you, Mr. Speaker, and all of my colleagues to come and taste what Hamilton has to offer.

*Statements by Members***DOUGLAS PETERS**

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with great sadness that I inform the House of the passing of Dr. Douglas Peters, my predecessor as MP for Scarborough East.

Born and raised in Brandon, Manitoba, Dr. Peters rose from humble beginnings to pursue a distinguished career as a banker, economist, and public servant. He took his first job as an entry-level bank clerk before graduating from Queen's University, and then earned a doctorate at the prestigious Wharton School of business.

In 1966, Dr. Peters became the chief economist and senior vice-president of the Toronto-Dominion Bank, a position he held for 27 years. He was elected to Parliament in 1993 and was in the cabinet until 1997. A committed Keynesian, Dr. Peters advocated a robust role for government in the economy. Following his retirement from politics, he volunteered with the Canadian Executive Service overseas. His task was to reform the post-Soviet banking system.

It is with a profound feeling of respect that we say farewell to this impressive parliamentarian. Our thoughts and prayers are with Dr. Peters' family at this difficult time.

* * *

● (1410)

SUICIDE PREVENTION

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I wish to acknowledge an incredible individual whom I have had the privilege of working alongside for many of my 10 years as a member of Parliament. I am speaking of Tana Nash, executive director of the Waterloo Region Suicide Prevention Council.

I thank Tana for sharing her personal story of grief and loss and for turning her loss into something so positive. Her personal warmth, coupled with her vast knowledge, make a difference for so many Canadians. In addition to her work in establishing world suicide prevention day and other initiatives in the Waterloo region, I want to recognize her work as executive director for the Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention.

As she focuses her efforts locally, once again I thank her on behalf of all residents of Waterloo region for her tireless dedication to suicide prevention across Canada and the great example she sets in the community. Tana is a hero to many, including me.

As the government prepares to report back to Canadians on progress regarding a national framework for suicide prevention, I look forward to working with her to offer hope to all Canadians.

I thank Tana.

* * *

[Translation]

VICTIMS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Louis-Hébert, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last weekend, at least 15 break-ins were reported at one of Laval University's residences, which is in the heart of my riding and my community. During four of these break-ins, sexual assaults were also

committed. To show solidarity for the victims, more than 1,000 people gathered yesterday evening for a vigil in honour of the courage of these young women who reported their perpetrator. On behalf of all members of the House, I wish to express our sympathy and solidarity.

October is Women's History Month in Canada. It is a time to honour the exceptional women and girls who built our country and who helped bring us closer to gender equality. However, we know that there is still much work to be done, and one of the first things we must do as a society is to combat rape culture in all its forms, today and in the future.

* * *

VIRGINIA CISNEROS

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès (Brossard—Saint-Lambert, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the occasion of Women's History Month, I would like to acknowledge the extraordinary contribution women have made to building our country and enhancing its presence in the world.

One woman in particular has inspired me for many years: Virginia Cisneros, head of the welcoming, integration, and community life department at the Maison Internationale de la Rive-Sud, which has helped thousands of immigrants successfully settle in our region. For over 25 years, Virginia has been central to the exemplary social and economic integration of newcomers to the south shore. Virginia is absolutely invaluable. She is a leader in promoting the benefits of diversity, one of the undeniable strengths of Brossard—Saint-Lambert. Again, I would like to acknowledge and commend Virginia for her years of devotion to our community.

[Member spoke in Spanish as follows:]

Felicitaciones, Virginia. Te admiro mucho.

* * *

[English]

TAXATION

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's devastating tax will make every single thing more expensive for everyone. It is regressive. It will hurt the most vulnerable and the poorest the most.

In Lakeland, so many people are hurting, losing their livelihoods, their homes, bracing for tougher times ahead.

While my constituents are struggling, wondering how to pay the bills, the Liberals are attacking Alberta's families, farms, businesses, municipalities, and charities, with even more costs at the very worst time.

A Vegreville restaurant predicts major increases, causing reduced staff hours and layoffs. A local feedlot says the carbon tax will wipe out its whole profit margin, hiking costs half a million dollars annually.

One county says it will take its already sinking revenues, so road and bridge upkeep will cease, crews will have to be laid off. An Athabasca family farmer said their costs will skyrocket over \$130,000 annually, at the least.

Albertans and Canadians cannot afford this dangerous Liberal scheme.

* * *

•(1415)

BIRTHDAY WISHES

Mr. Pat Finnigan (Miramichi—Grand Lake, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if anyone has read the wonderful novel, *The Nine Lives of Charlotte Taylor*, by Sally Armstrong, then they have read about the great-great-great-grandmother of Helen (Nellie) Harris of Tabusintac, a community in my riding of Miramichi—Grand Lake.

I was recently invited to Nellie's 110th birthday party.

Nellie is still a very fine, smart, beautiful lady who has spent her life on the picturesque but rugged north shore of New Brunswick. Having received congratulatory messages from Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth; Canada's Governor General, His Excellency David Johnston; and of course, our Right Hon. Prime Minister of Canada, it was a great day for Nellie who, surrounded by her family and friends, blew out all the candles on her cake.

I promised that I would rise in the House as soon as I could, so that members from across Canada could join with me in wishing her a happy 110th birthday.

Happy birthday, Nellie.

* * *

[Translation]

ARVIDA

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last spring I was very proud to be appointed to the Club des ambassadeurs d'Arvida, an exceptional heritage district in my riding of Jonquière.

I want to acknowledge the significance of this unique industrial heritage. Built in 1926, Arvida is the birthplace of Canada's aluminium industry. The old working-class neighbourhood stands out for the architectural quality of its housing. This is why Arvida won two prestigious awards in architecture, in addition to being designated a national historic site in 2012.

A committee seeking heritage recognition for Arvida is currently working on having Arvida included in the list of UNESCO world heritage sites. Now that the tentative list for Canada's world heritage sites has been reopened, we are convinced that Arvida has what it takes to be included.

* * *

[English]

TERRORISM

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today we remember and honour the lives of two members of the Canadian Armed Forces: Warrant Officer Patrice Vincent, who was murdered in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu on October 20, 2014, and

Oral Questions

Corporal Nathan Cirillo, who was gunned down two days later in Ottawa while guarding the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

These soldiers were targeted simply because they were wearing their uniforms. Many of us in this chamber were present when that terrorist threat entered this building. We are forever grateful for the quick and courageous response by the Parliamentary Security officers, RCMP, and Ottawa City Police.

When human instinct is to flee, these officers heroically ran toward danger. Less than 24 hours after the attack, my colleagues and I returned to Parliament to perform our duties to represent Canadians. Our determination in the work we do was only strengthened that day. So too is the resolve of the Canadian Armed Forces in their mission to defeat the evils of terror.

Terrorism will not stop the work of our troops, it will not shake our democratic institutions, nor will it intimidate us as Canadians.

* * *

SMALL BUSINESS WEEK

Ms. Gudie Hutchings (Long Range Mountains, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is Small Business Week, and we recognize the vital role small businesses play in our economy and in all our communities. As a former small business operator, I understand the risks that owners take when they start out. I know how hard it is to grow a business, yet how satisfying it is to hire that new employee to grow and thrive.

Small and medium-size businesses are 99% of Canadian businesses. They account for 40% of our GDP and employ 10.5 million Canadians.

I take this opportunity to thank all our small businesses from coast to coast to coast. They are doing great work in our communities.

[Translation]

Our government applauds your efforts. We are committed to working with you to help you grow and to help strengthen our economy.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

HEALTH

Hon. Denis Lebel (Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the relationship between the federal and provincial health ministers has gone from bad to worse.

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister wants to impose new conditions on the provincial health transfers. Respecting the provinces' jurisdiction means respecting the Canadian Constitution.

Why do the Prime Minister and his minister not respect the Canadian Constitution? Why do they want to impose more conditions on the provincial health transfers?

Oral Questions

•(1420)

[English]

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for 10 years there was a government in Canada that paid precious little attention to health.

We now have a government that is firmly committed to play the role that we have a responsibility to play in the matter of health.

We are active participants in making sure that Canadians are healthy, that they have health care systems that work for them. We have a responsibility to be good stewards of the public purse, and to make sure that when we make investments in health, they go to health care.

Hon. Denis Lebel (Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is totally false.

When we were in government, we had record levels of transfers to the provinces, but we did more than that. We respected provincial jurisdiction, which the Liberals are not doing now.

Health care is under provincial authority, and the Prime Minister and Minister of Health want to tell the provinces what to do from Ottawa. They do not just disrespect the provinces, they do not respect the country's Constitution.

Why is the Prime Minister putting other conditions on health transfers to provinces?

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during the decade of the previous government, tens of billions of dollars of new money went into health care, but it did not transform health care systems in this country.

I talk to Canadians all the time who say that while they are proud of our publicly-funded health care system, they know that it needs transformation, that there are actually better ways to deliver health care.

We have a responsibility to, of course, respect jurisdictions, but to work with our colleagues, as we are doing, to make sure that we invest in health, and that it actually goes to improve health care systems.

* * *

ETHICS

Hon. Denis Lebel (Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Mr. Speaker, she wants to change the health systems of the provinces. That is what she said. She wants to change the health system. That is a provincial jurisdiction.

[Translation]

What is even more important, when one has the honour of serving as a minister in Canada, is to be completely above reproach. Ministers, particularly the finance minister, must never put themselves in a position of conflict of interest.

However, for \$1,500, people had access to Canada's Minister of Finance to lobby him and ask him for favours.

Who was at that meeting? Can we have the names and titles of those people?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, events like this one are a part of every party's fundraising and engagement work.

Federal politics is subject to some of the strictest political financing legislation and regulations in the country, and our party is taking every action to comply with them.

[English]

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Finance had the audacity to say that his \$1,500 cash for access Liberal fundraiser was part of his budget consultation. What a sad joke.

To add insult to injury, the Liberals defended their Halifax appointee, Jim Spatz, who gave the Liberals \$1,500 to attend said fundraiser. This is completely contrary to all the rules.

If the Minister of Finance will not admit that what he did was unethical, will the Prime Minister do the right thing, and enforce his own rules with his own cabinet?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I just said in French, I will say English.

Events like this one are a part of every party's fundraising and engagement work.

Federal politics is subject to some of the strictest political financing legislation and regulations in the country, and our party fully complies with the Elections Act in all cases. These are the rules that the previous government put in place.

This event was open, and anyone who purchased a ticket was welcome to attend. The event was made public online.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): This is not the Elections Act, Mr. Speaker.

Let me read to my hon. colleague from the Prime Minister's own instructions to his ministers:

Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries must ensure that political fundraising activities or considerations do not affect, or appear to affect, the exercise of their official duties or the access of individuals or organizations to government.

It is clear the Minister of Finance was charging a price, and then giving special access to individuals who could benefit from that access. It is wrong.

When will the government start becoming ethical, accountable, and stop misusing the public trust?

•(1425)

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member knows very well that a part of every party's activities is fundraising.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Members may not like the answer, but we need to hear it. I certainly want to be able to hear it. I am having difficulty hearing some of the answers. I would ask members to listen to the answer, all the answers, but right now from the hon. government House leader.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, federal politics is subject to some of the strictest financing legislation and regulations in the country. The party fully complies with the Elections Act in all cases.

These are the rules that were put in place by the previous government, and if it worked for it then, why does it not work for it now?

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's ethics rules were very clear. I want to quote: "There should be no preferential access to government, or appearance of preferential access," for political donors.

Now it has come to light that the Minister of Finance has held cash-for-access fundraisers. These occurred at the same time and in the same locations as his budget consultation tour. No wonder the Liberals love consultations.

Are the new ethics standards promised to Canadians in effect for Liberal ministers as well? Yes or no.

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is very much true that the Minister of Finance is consulting with Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

In our election campaign, which concluded just a year ago yesterday, we committed to Canadians that we will consult with Canadians, we will listen to them, and we will improve the systems that are in place. The Minister of Finance has heard from record numbers when it comes to this budget consultation, and that is why we are delivering on the commitments we made to Canadians.

We will continue to do the good work that we are doing.

[Translation]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals were elected on a promise of real change, but it turns out they are fine with following the Conservatives' rules.

The Minister of Finance is just the first of many ministers planning to attend VIP fundraisers, and we are still not privy to the details of the Minister of Finance's private events.

Who was there, and, most importantly, what did they want from him?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member knows perfectly well that events like these are part of each party's fundraising and engagement work. Those are the rules that were in place when the previous government was in power, and they have not changed.

Ms. Sylvie Boucher: Not at all.

The Speaker: Order. I would ask the hon. member for Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix to listen to the answer.

The hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot.

Oral Questions

HEALTH

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, thanks to Quebec's health minister, we now know that, when it comes time for the Liberals to fund health care, the question is, "What is in it for me politically?"

Is that what it comes down to for the Minister of Health? She should not be playing politics with the health of Quebecers and Canadians.

Can the minister stand here today and tell us that the government is prepared to invest in mental health as the provinces requested and the Liberals promised?

[English]

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when I spoke to my counterparts, the ministers of health in the provinces and territories, I made it very clear to them that this is not a political discussion. This is about doing the right thing for Canadians. This is about good public policy. I am very committed to the matter of mental health care.

I have a mandate to make sure that Canadians have better mental health care, but I also have a responsibility to make sure that when we invest in mental health care, when we invest home care, when we invest in palliative care, that Canadians will see that they actually get better access to care.

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals may be walking away from a new commitment to mental health funding. Quebec's health minister said that he was worried that funding for mental illness is not a priority for this finance minister or this Prime Minister because "they don't see a political gain on that."

While it may not pay off like cash-for-access fundraisers, I can assure the House that for Canadians suffering from mental illness, there is much to gain.

Will the Liberals commit to real negotiations with the provinces based on that rather than based on political calculations?

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the matter of mental illness in this country, I will never play politics. I know that mental illness affects every Canadian. Every one of us in this chamber is affected by mental illness. This is a very serious matter.

When I met with my counterparts, they wanted to talk about money. I wanted to talk about health. I wanted to talk about how we can actually help Canadians to have better mental health care. I am determined to do that. I really look forward to working with my counterparts to make that happen.

* * *

● (1430)

ETHICS

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last year the Prime Minister said, "There should be no preferential access to government", but his finance minister disobeyed that directive with a \$1,500 per ticket fundraiser last week.

Oral Questions

While Canadians are struggling to put food on their tables and keep a roof over their heads, the finance minister is giving special attention to his fellow rich Liberal friends, who paid \$1,500 for the privilege of talking to him.

When will the Liberals stop padding their pockets and start listening to average Canadians who cannot pay his \$1,500 entry fee?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, events like this have taken place and take place in every single political party. It is important that we recognize that this was an open event available to anybody who wanted to purchase a ticket. That is the case. This event was made available online so that everyone was able to see what the information was.

What is important to note is that our party fully complies with the Elections Act in all cases, and that act was put in place by the previous government.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is clear that the Liberals prefer to listen to their wealthy donors, not to everyday Canadians.

The finance minister makes life more difficult for struggling Canadian families: more difficult to find a job, more difficult to save, more taxes to pay, more expensive to live. Canadians who have been hurt the most by the finance minister are the least able to pay the \$1,500 entry fee for his budget consultations. When will he start listening to average Canadians?

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to say to the hon. member that we have started our pre-budget consultations, and we are going to consult Canadians.

I am very happy to rise in this House today to speak about the great work the Minister of Finance has done in one year. In one year we reduced taxes for the middle class, we introduced the Canada child benefit, we enhanced the Canada pension plan, we invested in student grants, we invested in our seniors, we invested historically in infrastructure, and we invested in innovation. That is the record of this Minister of Finance, and we will continue.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I am having no trouble hearing the questions, but I am having trouble hearing the answers. I would ask members to settle down, or we may have fewer questions than normal.

[*Translation*]

The hon. member for Lévis—Lotbinière.

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government seems incapable of learning from its mistakes. In fact, it continues to engage in secret fundraising activities and to offer wealthy individuals privileged access to various ministers.

Yesterday the Minister of Finance defended the indefensible, and now, apparently the Prime Minister himself will be attending a secret fundraiser tonight in London that does not appear on his official itinerary.

Could the Liberals spend a little more time working on the economy and jobs, and a little less time selling privileged access to their ministers?

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind my colleague exactly what we have done.

In one year, our government has achieved an extremely enviable economic record. We reduced taxes for the middle class, we introduced the Canada child benefit, we enhanced the Canada pension plan, we expanded student loans and grants, and we invested in our seniors. We also made historic investments in infrastructure and we invested in innovation. That is the Liberal's economic record, and we will carry on.

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government was elected one year ago and the Liberal Party of Canada is already up to its old tricks.

These are not sunny ways. These ways are clouded by serious ethical problems. Not only are the ministers hosting cash for access events for the rich, but the Prime Minister is doing the same thing this evening.

Is it too much to ask for the Prime Minister to respect his own so-called ethics rules, which he implemented with the help of his cabinet?

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

I would like my colleague to focus on what Canadians want. During our prebudget tours, Canadians told us that they want us to work for the middle class.

In fact, they told us two things: we need to help families and grow the economy. That is exactly what we did by providing the Canada child benefit, cutting taxes, and improving the Canada pension plan. That is what we will keep doing. The Liberals' economic plan is applauded around the world.

I invite my colleague to learn more about it. He will see how much Canada's economic plan is commended—

● (1435)

[*English*]

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Red Deer—Lacombe.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the finance minister defended his cash-for-access scheme, claiming that it was part of the consultation process for the budget. Average Canadians will be disgusted to learn that they now have to fork over a \$1,500 donation to the Liberal Party to be heard on the upcoming budget.

If the event was part of the consultation process, as the finance minister claims, will he rise in the House and tell Canadians who attended the event and what was promised to his friends?

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for allowing me to talk about the pre-budget consultations.

Last year we did pre-budget consultations with Canadians. I went from Moncton to Yellowknife with the minister. We heard from more than 215,000 Canadians and had 5,300 submissions, and we are continuing. We started our pre-budget consultations in September, the earliest in history. Tomorrow I will be in Quebec City listening to Canadians about what they want for this economy. We will continue to do that, because that is what Canadians want.

Hon. Ed Fast: How much did you have to pay?

Mr. John Brassard: How much did you have to pay, François, to be there?

The Speaker: Order, please. I would ask the member for Barrie—Innisfil and others to listen carefully and not interrupt.

The hon. member for Red Deer—Lacombe.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have learned that at least 20 cash-for-access fundraisers have taken place within this year with senior cabinet ministers and even the Prime Minister. The finance minister defended these shakedowns as part of the consultation process. The finance minister did two of these events in August, and he will be doing another one in November. Even the Prime Minister is doing his own \$1,500 cash-for-access event tonight in London, Ontario.

Will the minister come clean about who he is meeting and what he promised his friends, or do I have to give him 1,500 bucks to get an answer?

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to respond to the question from my colleague. I actually invite him to Quebec City tomorrow. I can assure him that it will be free, as are all the pre-budget consultations we will be conducting in this country. We are on the road to hear about what matters to Canadians. Canadians want us to listen to them.

The previous government was not able to do what we are doing, which is engaging with Canadians to hear about their priorities and working for Canadians. It is working fine. That is why we are sitting on this side of the House.

* * *

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I think we can all agree on the amount of arrogance shown by the Republican candidate when he told Americans that if he does not win the election, then it must be rigged, yet after promising to end our unfair election system in his platform, in his throne speech, and now in the House of Commons many times, the Prime Minister now tells Canadians that because he won the last election, the system must now be perfect.

Canadians are tired of self-serving politicians making promises just to get elected. Will the Prime Minister honour his commitment to make every vote count, or will he use his popularity to trump promises he does not want to keep?

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his commitment to this file and for the work he is doing on the special all-party committee on electoral reform.

Oral Questions

This Prime Minister has, and is, honouring his commitment. We brought together a committee, made up of all parties, to hear directly from Canadians and hear from experts and academics. The member opposite knows well that it will be providing us with a report on December 1 with its recommendations, recommendations we are eagerly awaiting, and we will use that report to make a thoughtful recommendation to this House.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a ploy is a secret manoeuvre carried out with the intent of misleading people, or trumping people, if you will.

When in opposition, the Liberals said that the unfair electoral system had to be changed, and they were right. Oddly enough, once they were elected with 39% of the vote, they decided that the current system makes a lot of sense.

Will the Liberals stop laughing at Canadians and keep their promise so that the vote and the voice of all Canadians is—

• (1440)

The Speaker: The Minister of Democratic Institutions.

[*English*]

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is October 20. On December 1, the special all-party committee empowered to study this very matter will report its recommendations on electoral reform. We have been very clear all along about the respect we have for the independence of this committee. We have been clear that we will not move forward on any reforms without the broad support of Canadians.

I urge hon. members on the committee to work together and provide us with one report outlining the areas where they have been able to find common ground.

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IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during the special immigration committee study of the Yazidi genocide, a Liberal member suggested that, because of the Yazidi refugees' ancient culture, they might not integrate well into Canadian society. That suggestion was properly rejected by genocide survivor, Nadia Murad, and Canadians of Yazidi origin.

There are many Canadians, including descendants of the Holocaust and other genocides, offering private sponsorship of Yazidis, particularly widows and girls. Why is the minister and the Liberal government ignoring them?

Oral Questions

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, far from ignoring them, we are acutely conscious of the tragic situation facing the Yazidis. It was to that end that we had discussions throughout the day with the Conservative Party with the view to finding a motion that all of us could support, because in my view, this issue is such that it should go beyond partisan issues and we should be able to agree. In the end, no agreement was reached, but that does not diminish our concern and our determination to act on this issue.

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the allied coalition battle for the liberation of Mosul will, we hope, see the liberation of more Yazidi women and girls who have been enslaved and brutalized by the ISIS death cult, but the villages, towns, and cities that have been freed are largely uninhabitable. Any Yazidis freed will have only inadequate sanctuary in the Kurdish region of Iraq, unrecognized as refugees by the UN.

Why will Canada not fulfill its genocide convention obligations and circumvent unworkable UNHCR protocols?

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, far from not living up to our obligations, a group of officials from my department just returned yesterday from a visit to Iraq to the region, and it was there that they interviewed Syrian refugees. In addition, they consulted with UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration to determine the best way to bring over Yazidis and others who have been hurt by ISIL.

Therefore, we are doing everything we can, but the member would understand that with a war going on in Mosul, it is not the easiest region—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, doing everything they can means that the government brought nine Yazidis to Canada, and that is unacceptable.

Our party amended the motion before the House today. We took out a significant portion of the motion, which Liberal caucus members had a problem with, and we extended the timeline for the government to act to bring Yazidis to Canada to 120 days. That is four months.

Can the minister explain the difference as to why the Liberals could bring 25,000 Syrian refugees to Canada in a two-month period commitment, but cannot do this?

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said before, we made strong attempts to find an agreement with the opposition members. In the end, they would not agree to our position.

My position is that we will do everything we can to work in this area, but to guarantee a certain number by a certain date is not possible when we consider the war—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. John McCallum: What I am saying, Mr. Speaker, is that one cannot guarantee a precise date when a war—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, does 25,000 refugees by December 31, 2015, ring a bell? This is the epitome of hypocrisy.

My question to the minister is this. We have a reasonable motion that has been accepted by all parties in here, which has tangible action for the Yazidis. Why on earth can the government not stand up and say that it will bring Yazidi sex-slave girls to Canada?

• (1445)

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, nothing makes me prouder than the fact that we brought, in 2016, three or four times more refugees than the Conservatives did. In four short months, we brought in 25,000 Syrian refugees. I, as a Canadian, am very proud of that accomplishment. In addition, we will work to bring in Yazidis and others who have been oppressed by Daesh in the years going forward.

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INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Ms. Georgina Jolibois (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday students and faculty gathered to protest the cuts to NORTEP-NORPAC programs in La Ronge. These programs train many first nations, Métis, and non-aboriginal professionals in northern Saskatchewan. Graduates go on to be leaders in our communities and build great futures for northerners.

The Liberals promised to invest \$50 million in first nations post-secondary education. Where is it? Will the Liberals ensure that programs like NORTEP-NORPAC receive funding that strengthens education services for northerners?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her ongoing advocacy for students and for her constituents.

Our government is totally committed to improving access to post-secondary education for indigenous students and we are pursuing a whole-of-government approach to achieving this critical goal. We have increased the Canada student grants by 50% this year and are working with students, parents, educators, and indigenous groups to improve access to these funds for first nations students.

We are also committed to working with indigenous communities to expand the scope of post-secondary student support in the areas of—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if there are movements such as Deeds Not Words, it is because we hear only rhetoric in the House, and no action is being taken. According to the member's department, there is an immediate need of \$2 billion to repair 115 first nations schools.

The promise to invest \$800 million in first nations education has already been broken. What is the minister waiting for to take action and repair these schools immediately?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is very important to provide the best possible education to first nations students. We have invested almost \$1 billion in school infrastructure. It is just a first step, and we are working on it.

* * *

[English]

EMPLOYMENT

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, over the summer in my beautiful riding of Mississauga—Erin Mills, I had the opportunity to meet with many youth organizations to discuss the challenges that they face with respect to employment.

Could the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour please update the House on the activities she has carried out to break down job barriers and help youth get employment, and what steps have occurred to create an expert panel on youth employment?

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to point out to the member for Mississauga—Erin Mills that Canadian youth are facing unprecedented employment challenges. We all recognize that.

I am pleased to inform the House that we established an expert youth panel on youth employment this Monday. I encourage all Canadians and youth to participate in informing the council. The council will be reporting to me and to the House in the spring.

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THE ECONOMY

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today the finance minister will announce new recommendations from his so-called growth council because he knows so well that his current plan is not working. While there are many smart people on the minister's council, not one of them is an entrepreneur or owns a business.

Then there is the Prime Minister. Instead of meeting the Canadian tech companies that are in Ottawa today, he snubbed them to hang out with Amazon, one of their biggest competitors.

When will the Liberals pay respect to the real creators of wealth and jobs, our entrepreneurs?

• (1450)

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we very much welcome the recommendations from the growth council. I met with members this morning and they are doing astonishing work.

I would advise the member that we are going to be in his city tomorrow, Quebec City, to meet with entrepreneurs. I will be meeting with the youth chamber of commerce to talk about the budget. We are going to go from town to town in every region of this country because we want to hear from Canadians.

Last year we heard from 250,000 of them. Many of them were entrepreneurs. That is why we have measures in the budget that are going to grow the economy. We will do exactly the same this year.

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HOUSING

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have good contact with our chamber of commerce in Quebec. That is why five Conservative members were elected in Quebec City.

[Translation]

There are real estate problems in Toronto and Vancouver. In order to correct those problems, just a few days ago, the minister announced measures that affect all Canadians who are interested in buying a home.

There are problems in Toronto and Vancouver. However, elsewhere in Canada homes values are dropping and sales have slowed. For example, housing prices have dropped by 3.5% in Calgary, Edmonton, and Quebec City and by 4.5% in Halifax

My question—

The Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance.

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

We are well aware that buying a home is likely the biggest investment that most Canadians will make in their lifetime. That is why, as of December, we took measures to ensure the long-term stability of Canada's housing market.

The most recent measures announced by the Minister of Finance will make the rules governing mortgage insurance consistent and make the tax system fairer by closing loopholes. We are also going to hold consultations. Thanks to these measures, the most valuable asset a family owns will be there in the long term.

[English]

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is the dream of most young families to own their own home, but the millionaire Minister of Finance is putting that dream out of reach by making it harder to qualify for a mortgage and by introducing a carbon tax to make everything more expensive.

Oral Questions

What does the minister have against young families and why is he making it harder for them to get by?

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would invite the member on the other side to look at everything we have done for the middle class. The first thing we did was to reduce taxes and opposition members voted against this, but let me answer his question.

We understand for Canadian families that buying a house is the most important investment they will have in their lifetime. That is why we are taking measures to ensure the long-term stability of the housing market in Canada. The measures that we just introduced will make sure that we bring consistency to mortgage rules, improve tax fairness, and protect taxpayers. I am sure that the member believes that those are the right measures to protect people who own a house in this country for the long term.

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the finance minister is borrowing ever increasing sums of money to fulfill the Liberals' tax-and-spend agenda while lecturing Canadians about the risk of using credit and excessive debt when they just want to buy a home.

Why does he keep adding taxes and making it harder for young families to qualify for mortgages, instead of practising what he preaches and reining in his own out of control borrowing? He is the one mortgaging our children's future.

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am sure the member understands that when interest rates are low, that is the time to invest. That is exactly what we have done. We have invested in the Canadian economy. I would point out to the member that the IMF, OECD, and the World Bank think what Canada is doing to invest in inclusive growth, to invest in infrastructure, to invest in innovation, is the way to grow the economy. We will continue to do just that.

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STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is easy to call oneself a feminist, but standing up for gender equality takes action. My colleague from Burnaby South did just that with his bill designed to get more women into federal politics. However, yesterday, 126 Liberal MPs voted with the Conservatives to defeat the bill. Even the Minister of Status of Women voted to defeat the gender equality act. When women make up only 26% of the House, why did the Liberals vote to defeat the bill?

• (1455)

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleagues on the opposite side of the bench for their commitment to gender parity, for ensuring that we bring not only more women to participate as candidates but allow them to win and actually come to this place, and once they get here, allow them to succeed and feel like they belong.

While we agree with the spirit of the member's bill, the bill was flawed. I offered to work with the party opposite to bring forward measures after we have heard from the Special Committee on

Electoral Reform to ensure the unintended consequences that the bill presented initially are addressed. I remain committed to that and I look forward to working with members.

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INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals made real promises to first nations that were based upon respect. It has now been a year since the Liberals took power and we have seen nothing but disrespect from the government toward the Nuu-chah-nulth people. The government's own lawyers are trying to restrict and minimize their rights to catch and sell fish on their traditional territory, rights that were upheld by the Supreme Court seven years ago.

When will the Prime Minister take his own promises seriously, show true respect for the Nuu-chah-nulth first nations, and begin fair negotiations?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member knows full well that we have committed to renewing a nation-to-nation dialogue with indigenous people across the country. I had the privilege of meeting Nuu-chah-nulth leaders in Ottawa in June to continue the dialogue. We respect the rights that the courts have found for these important first nations.

We also believe that, through a nation-to-nation dialogue, we will be able to advance mutually satisfactory interests, in terms of conserving salmon and offering the rights-based access that we respect.

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JUSTICE

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when the Prime Minister announced his Supreme Court appointment process, he promised that members of the justice and legal affairs committee would have an opportunity to directly engage with the nominee. However, we now learn that nearly half of the members of the committee will not have an opportunity to ask a question, and those who do will be limited to one one-minute question. That is hardly meaningful parliamentary participation.

Why did the Prime Minister break his word yet again?

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to stand to speak about Justice Rowe, who is the Prime Minister's nominee, and the historic appointment of the first Newfoundland and Labrador justice to the Supreme Court of Canada.

We are following through with our commitment to ensure an open and transparent process, engaging with parliamentarians. That is why former prime minister Kim Campbell and I are appearing before the justice committee on Monday; that is why, on Tuesday, we are having an open forum wherein the public and members of this House and the other House can engage and get to know the next Supreme Court justice.

Oral Questions

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government's parliamentary vetting process has about as much credibility as an episode of *Judge Judy*.

Instead of an opportunity to engage in dialogue, members of Parliament are being invited to the University of Ottawa to be props before a live studio audience for a Q&A hosted by a non-parliamentarian.

Is this the government's idea of meaningful parliamentary participation, or is this an attempt at creating a reality TV show?

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am proud of the Prime Minister instituting a new process for the appointment of a Supreme Court of Canada justice, where no process existed before.

We have an eminently qualified jurist who is the nominee for the Supreme Court of Canada.

This is an open and transparent process, where there are multiple opportunities for members in this House to engage not only with me, but to engage and ask questions of the next Supreme Court justice. This is a fundamental institution of our system, and the respect conveyed to Justice Rowe is provided on Tuesday, and I look—

The Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. member for Banff—Airdrie.

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DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it seems the Minister of Democratic Institutions thinks she is different from every other Canadian. In fact, her own staff are saying that the rules that apply to every other Canadian do not apply to her.

Of course, I am talking about the minister providing the results of her cross-Canada consultations to the Special Committee on Electoral Reform.

When asked why she had not submitted, her staff said she's not the general public.

It is the same old story: one rule for the Liberals and another for the rest of us.

Why does the minister think she is above the rules that every other Canadian has to follow?

• (1500)

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the opportunity to stand to speak in my capacity as member of Parliament for the beautiful riding of Peterborough—Kawartha where, unlike the member opposite, I hosted not one, not two, not three, but seven town halls: two in Peterborough, one in Havelock, one in Buckhorn, one in Douro, and one in Apsley.

The reports from the results of those town halls, where nearly 500 persons engaged, were submitted to the committee on October 14, just like everyone—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please.

Members know that it is the responsibility—in fact, the duty—of the opposition to ask tough questions, and that is a good thing. However, the rules here provide we do not interrupt when someone is speaking. The member for Chilliwack—Hope and others know that, and I ask them to follow that rule.

The hon. member for West Nova

* * *

[*Translation*]

JUSTICE

Mr. Colin Fraser (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the judiciary plays a key role in Canada. It upholds the rule of law, ensures that laws are followed, and helps protect the rights and freedoms of Canadians.

[*English*]

We recognize that Canadians want and deserve a judiciary that reflects the diverse face of Canada. Would the Minister of Justice please update the House on the superior courts appointments process?

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I was pleased to announce that we have moved forward to fill urgent vacancies, and I am confident in the outstanding quality of these appointments and their dedication to ensuring that we have just outcomes for Canadians. Further, I am very pleased to announce that we have instituted a new appointments process, which will identify and work toward having a bench across this country that reflects the diversity of Canada, to ensure that we continue to be a leader in the world with respect to our independence and with respect to the quality of our justice system.

* * *

ETHICS

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians were surprised last spring when the agriculture minister appointed a failed Liberal candidate as his chief of staff; they were astonished when they learned she owned \$140 million of egg quota; and, they were speechless when they heard the minister say that he sure did not see that as a conflict of interest.

Now Canadians will learn that his chief of staff will be in court next week to face allegations of perjury over the purchase of egg quota. Canadians are curious. How deep does this rot have to go before the minister will act?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

The minister's chief of staff followed all of the relevant codes of ethics to the letter. I therefore do not believe that the chief of staff has done anything wrong.

*Oral Questions***RAIL TRANSPORTATION**

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, regarding the Belledune project, the Liberal members from Quebec do not seem to care much about the resolutions adopted by the municipalities calling for an assessment of potential risks to their residents. Some 220 rail cars transport crude oil every day, which is three times more than the number of cars that caused the Lac-Mégantic tragedy.

Since the Minister of Transport likes to boast that rail safety is a top priority, would he rather run the risk of another Mégantic disaster or order an assessment of the project?

[English]

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as mandated by the Prime Minister, our government is reinforcing the safety of the rail transportation system. As such, the Minister of Transport is investing \$143 million in budget 2016 to improve rail safety and the transportation of dangerous goods. Transportation officials will continue to monitor all federal railways for compliance to ensure safer levels of operation, and will not hesitate to act to enforce enhanced safety regulations.

* * *

FINANCE

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there has been much talk in recent weeks about the fall economic statement from the government. Can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance inform the House of any updates in this regard?

[Translation]

To reiterate, there has been a lot of discussion in recent weeks about the government's fall economic statement.

Will the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance update the House on this?

• (1505)

[English]

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles for her interest.

I am proud to inform the esteemed members of this House, first and foremost, that in just a few minutes the Minister of Finance will indeed announce that the fall economic statement will be presented to this House on November 1.

Our government is proud of what we have accomplished for the middle class and those working hard to join it, and we look forward to continuing on this path.

[Translation]

Once again, the Minister of Finance will present the fall economic statement to this House on November 1.

[English]

HEALTH

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, given their Ottawa-knows-best attitude, it is no surprise that the Liberals are telling the provinces and territories how they should invest in health care. Not only do the Liberals feel it is their job to control everything health care related, but shamefully, they have even begun accusing the provinces of misspending the money they already get.

This is far from the collaborative approach that the Liberals promised Canadians and the premiers. When will the Liberals stop trying to interfere in provincial jurisdiction?

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it was my privilege to have a meeting this week with my counterparts, the ministers of health in the provinces and territories. It is absolutely essential in the matter of health that we collaborate with all partners that are involved, including people in government. I am pleased to say that I also had consultations and meetings with stakeholders, and I met with patient advocacy groups.

It is when we all work together that we will be able to see improvements in the health care system, and for everyone to recognize their responsibility. It is a shared responsibility and we will certainly do our part.

* * *

[Translation]

INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal members from Quebec are working very hard to ensure that Quebec either goes into deficit or is unable to maintain its services.

After cutting health transfers, now Ottawa has decided to reduce its share of infrastructure spending from 50% to 40%. Once again, Quebec and the municipalities will end up footing the bill. We are talking about hundreds of millions of dollars less for Quebec.

We realize that it is the Liberal Party's favourite colour, but can someone from the government explain why their party is so determined to put Quebec in the red?

[English]

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are proud to work with the Province of Quebec to deliver on the historic commitments that we made to build and rebuild Canadian communities from coast to coast to coast.

In the case of Quebec, I have approved 17 projects with a total value of \$1.4 billion. We are working very closely to deliver on the commitments we have made.

* * *

[Translation]

GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals said they would do things differently.

However, they broke their promises about respecting provincial jurisdiction in health care, an infrastructure program funded at 50%, the Aveos workers, medical assistance in dying, and reforming the electoral system, a promise broken by the Prime Minister now that the Liberals are in power. This is the same party leader who said he was fed up with politicians breaking their promises.

Is that what real Liberal change looks like?

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to respond to my colleague from Montcalm.

I can tell the House what we have accomplished. We have cut taxes for the middle class, introduced the Canada child benefit, and enhanced the Canada pension plan. Furthermore, we have made historic investments in infrastructure and in innovation, in measures to help seniors, and in the student loans and bursaries program.

We kept all those promises. That is the Liberal government.

* * *

[English]

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the Honourable Clarice Modeste-Curwen, Minister of Tourism & Civil Aviation of Grenada.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the Honourable Volda Ann Lawrence, Minister of Social Protection of the Republic of Guyana.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, before I ask the Thursday question I want to congratulate my colleague, the member for Victoria, for his new position as House leader for the NDP. I also want to thank the member for New Westminster—Burnaby for the work he has done over a number of years as opposition House leader for the NDP. I was only privileged to work with him for a short time. He had a reputation of being tough and a little difficult to work with, but I do not know how my colleague the new government House leader feels, but I felt he was fairly good to work with. We definitely will miss him, but we are looking forward to working with the member for Victoria as the new House leader.

That said, I would ask the government to inform us what it will be doing for the rest of this week and into next week as well.

• (1510)

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have to agree with the opposition House leader. It has been quite delightful to work together, and I hope we can continue the relationship we have created so we can be productive in this place for Canadians.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

This afternoon we will continue debate on the Conservative motion. Tomorrow, we will begin second reading of Bill C-26 respecting the Canada pension plan.

[English]

We will call the bill on Monday and, hopefully, conclude debate on Tuesday. On Wednesday, we will commence debate on Bill C-25, the business framework legislation. Thursday shall be an allotted day.

Finally, I would like to thank all hon. member for the progress on legislation so far this week.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—GENOCIDE AGAINST THE YAZIDI PEOPLE

The House resumed consideration of the motion and of the amendment.

The Speaker: Resuming debate, the hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are on to questions, I believe. I had finished.

The Speaker: The member has three minutes remaining in questions and comments. I thank the member for that correction.

Questions and comments, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Government House Leader.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the day has proceeded, we have heard a great deal of sympathy for, and an attempt to really get a good understanding of, the situation of the Yazidis. It is important that we recognize as much as possible what this is all about. We need to continue what has been a fairly positive year, in which Canada has opened its arms in a very compassionate way to refugees, and recognize how important the situation of the Yazidis is in terms of the whole issue of genocide.

My question for the member is related specifically to that. Does she or her party have in mind the number of Yazidi refugees they would like to see arrive here?

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Mr. Speaker, rescuing every single Yazidi girl that could be rescued from being raped another day would be a positive step. I know we have done lots of good work in the past. We have shown that we can enable 25,000 to come in less than four months. I think that is commendable, and I would love to see as many Yazidis as we could possibly bring in in that time frame.

Business of Supply

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are having an important discussion about the situation facing Yazidis. I really hope that some government members will look at the situation the motion addresses, as well as the good faith efforts we have made to deal with some of their concerns, while still making this motion substantive.

The member also spoke about the situation impacting Syrian Christians. It is important that when we talk about Yazidis, we recognize as well the challenges facing other minorities, in particular the Syrian Christians, who also face genocide. It is not only the Yazidis.

I wonder if the member could talk a bit more about the context of what is impacting the Yazidis, but also about other communities, such as the Syrian Christians.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Mr. Speaker, absolutely. The Christians are suffering genocide. There are no Christians left in Mosul.

If we look at the reduction in the number of Christians in the area, it is 4.4 million. That is as many as the Holocaust, nearly. Their situation is equally dire. As for the number of refugees we have received, the Christians did not come in those numbers because they do not go into the camps because they are killed and persecuted there.

In addition to the urgency with the Yazidis, there is also urgency with the Christians. There are organizations in place that have already mobilized lists of these people, the Ezra organization, the Samaritan's Purse, and are ready to go if we can only act.

• (1515)

Mr. Marc Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Etobicoke Centre.

[*Translation*]

Since it has been one year since I was elected to represent the riding of Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs, I would like to take a moment to thank my constituents for their support.

[*English*]

I would also like to recognize the traditional land of the Kanien'kehaka or Mohawk people, on which my riding, Tiotake, is situated, with a small greeting:

[*Member spoke in Mohawk as follows:*]

Skana Sewagwewon.

That is appropriate in the context, because it is a peace greeting.

[*Translation*]

I have the honour, but also the heavy burden, of rising today to discuss a topic of great importance, genocide, and the motion moved by my colleague from Calgary Nose Hill.

When we talk about genocide, our thoughts immediately turn to the Shoah and the atrocities committed by the Nazis during the Second World War, particularly against the Jews.

As a human being, it is easy and even natural to get angry and upset. However, as legislators, we have to remain calm and

deliberate in our words and actions. Often, our words are all we have and they have a major impact not only here in Canada but also throughout the world.

In 1948, in light of the atrocities committed during the Second World War, the United Nations adopted the Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. This document has two important components: prevention and punishment.

Too often, in these debates, the emphasis is put on repression, on punishment for the crimes committed. However, that is not the most important thing. After the Shoah, when the entire world said, "never again", there was talk of prevention and a world where mass burials would be a thing of the past.

Yet it has happened several times since 1948. Srebrenica. Rwanda. And now, the Yazidis, and perhaps even other religious groups, such as Shia Muslims. As lawmakers, it is our duty to interpret the words in a legal sense, and the legal definition of the word "genocide" differs significantly from what most people think it means.

Here is the definition according to the convention on the prevention of genocide:

...genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

[*English*]

Whether genocide has taken place by mass killing or via any of the other categories I just mentioned turns on whether the perpetrator had a specific intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, or religious group. Crimes against humanity, on the other hand, include a much wider range of offences and lack the specific intent to destroy a group in question as such. Both are despicable.

The confusion between these two types of crimes in a previous motion by the official opposition was the reason that many of my colleagues on this side of the House voted against it. Unfortunately, today, we have been unable to achieve consensus among the parties, and partisanship has consumed us.

The motion we have proposed to the other side reads as follows: "That the House (a) recognize that ISIS is committing genocide against the Yazidi people; (b) acknowledge that many Yazidi women and girls are still being held captive by ISIS as sexual slaves; (c) support recommendations found in the June 15, 2016, report issued by the United Nations Commission on Inquiry on Syria entitled, "They came to destroy: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis"; and (d) call on the government to take action as soon as possible upon all the recommendations found in sections 210, 212, and 213 of the said report, undertake best efforts to provide asylum within 120 days to the victims of ISIS, including the Yazidi people who have experienced rape, torture, prolonged captivity, sexual slavery, and other atrocities."

Business of Supply

In the case of the Yazidis, the evidence not only of crimes against humanity but also of the crime of genocide is overwhelming, as detailed in the report of the UN Human Rights Council issued on June 15 of this year.

These horrific crimes cannot be ignored. We as human beings, not just as parliamentarians, have an obligation to turn the spotlight on the plight of the Yazidis. That is why, in the little time I have today, I want to share with you a small glimpse of the horrors they have lived and continue to live.

• (1520)

As the report indicates, on August 3, 2014, fighters from Daesh swept in across Sinjar in northern Iraq, home to the majority of the world's Yazidis, whose religious community and beliefs span thousands of years and who are publicly reviled and condemned by Daesh. Within days of the attack, Daesh is alleged to have committed systematic, unimaginable atrocities against the Yazidi community: men were forced to choose between converting or being killed; women and girls, some as young as nine, were sold at market and held in sexual slavery by Daesh fighters; and boys were ripped from their families and forced into Daesh training camps.

During its investigation in Syria, the UN commission determined that Daesh had forcibly transferred and continues to forcibly transfer thousands of Yazidi women and children into Syria. It is estimated that at least 3,200 Yazidi women and girls remain captives of Daesh, the majority of whom are held inside Daesh-controlled areas of Syria. It has not been possible to estimate the number of Yazidi boys who have been or are being trained by Daesh forces, though it is clear that many such boys are trained and then forced to fight during Daesh-led offensives.

The witness testimony is compelling. One of them wrote:

After we were captured, ISIS forced us to watch them beheading some of our Yazidi men. They made the men kneel in a line in the street, with their hands tied behind their backs. The ISIS fighters took knives and cut their throats.

That is testimony from a 16-year old girl who was held for seven months and sold once.

I think at this juncture, these acts and many others, coupled with Daesh's intent to wipe out this group as such, clearly establish for the House the undeniable evidence of genocide. Having identified these heinous crimes, we have an obligation as human beings, acting according to the dictates of our conscience, and as a nation that is party to the genocide convention, to act.

As outlined in the jurisprudence of the International Court of Justice, factors to consider when assessing whether we have discharged our obligations under the genocide convention include whether the state has the capacity to influence effectively the actions of persons likely to commit, or already committing, genocide. Therefore, let us discuss Canada's actions.

One year ago, Daesh was in control of significant territory in Iraq and Syria and was able to project an image of semi-permanence, attracting foreign fighters from around the world, and generating significant revenue from oil sales and illicit financial transactions. Now, almost a year later, Daesh is not the same organization it was at the end of 2015. The momentum against Daesh has clearly shifted along all lines of effort.

Our government's strategy, through the coalition of 65 countries, continues to make a difference as the situation on the ground shifts, in particular, for the millions of people who are suffering as a result of the conflicts in the region. By contributing to the military campaign, supporting stabilization efforts, and countering the flow of foreign fighters and Daesh's financing and its despicable narrative, Canada is helping to address some of the deeper drivers of the conflict and helping to build a stable and secure future for the region's people. We are taking this broad approach to ensure that another terrorist organization does not simply fill the void once Daesh is defeated. To that end, Canada has tripled the number of Canadian Armed Forces members advising and assisting the Iraqi security forces, and is providing assistance to the Kurdish peshmerga, in particular, through the provision of training and equipment. On the intelligence level, we have provided two CP-140 Aurora aerial surveillance aircraft to enhance the intelligence and reconnaissance provided to the coalition's military efforts.

Canada's efforts will also include the clearing of improvised explosive devices. As the Minister of Foreign Affairs announced at the July Iraq pledging conference, co-hosted by Canada in Washington, we will contribute to a U.S.-led initiative to clear IEDs in areas liberated from Daesh to facilitate the return of displaced populations. As of today, Canada will commit an additional \$2 million to removing IEDs from Nineveh, one of the most affected provinces in Iraq.

[*Translation*]

Canada is contributing \$3.3 million to the Commission for International Justice and Accountability's investigation of crimes committed by Daesh in Iraq. As indicated previously, Canada's contributions are comprehensive and integrated into the coalition's efforts. Now we have to keep up that support if we want to succeed, and the Iraqi people need to know that Canada is with them for the long haul.

May I be so bold as to conclude my speech with the words that General Dallaire used to sign off his fateful message to the United Nations, words that seem just as fitting here: "Where there's a will, there's a way. Let's go."

• (1525)

[*English*]

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank our hon. colleague for his comments and his participation in this discussion today.

I am the father of three incredible, beautiful girls. Time and again, we have heard the stories of the rape, murder, and enslavement of Yazidi women and girls. During his speech, the member said that things have changed, that because of the government's actions, things have changed. The facts of the matter are this. There are still women and girls being taken, enslaved, raped, tortured, and murdered. I implore my hon. colleague. Is he not a father?

Let us put politics aside and put ourselves in that place. It is unbelievable. Can the member not see that Canada must be doing something right now?

Business of Supply

If we could bring 25,000 Syrian refugees into Canada in that short time, surely we can do something to get these women and young girls out of such a terrible situation.

Mr. Marc Miller: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his intervention. I can truly sympathize. I am the father of three children, including a girl. I understand the personal nature of his implication, and it should inflect in part our actions and our thoughts today.

It is difficult for me to reflect on my family without thinking what I would not do to protect them. I am a legislator in this noble House to represent the people in my riding and their needs. But quite obviously, when we see what is in the nature of the report, things touch us on a very personal basis, and my thoughts immediately turn to my wife and particularly my daughter. I do sympathize with the member's emotions today.

There seems to be this notion that Canada can act alone. It is almost a comic-book approach to international relations. It is odd; it is misguided. It does not reflect the reality of what exists on the international level. We are working with 65 countries. We are doing what we can. This caucus will certainly push to do more, and clearly more needs to be done.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his speech, and the thoughtfulness with which he held himself today.

However, I did notice the member's response to the last question. He said we cannot act alone, and I understand that. What we do know, if we look across the world right now, is that Australia and Germany have created a very special program that is helping to get these young women into their countries and protecting them.

If we have a model out there that we can look at, not acting alone but looking at best practices, could we not see the current government take the initiative, work with those, and get those young people here and protected in Canada?

Mr. Marc Miller: Mr. Speaker, I believe the hon. member heard today from the Minister of Immigration that Canada just returned from a mission in the area, and is examining the possibilities, obviously looking at best practices.

I am not privy to the confidential discussions, but I have been given assurances that our intervention in this respect has been accrued. I hope to see concrete results within the timeline, at least, that we have agreed to in concept over the next 120 days.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his very moving speech.

I think every member of the House agrees that the Yazidis are in a horrible situation.

Could my hon. colleague elaborate on the importance of humanitarian and development assistance, as well as stabilization and security?

• (1530)

Mr. Marc Miller: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for the question.

Indeed, we have to look not only at our military contribution, which has tripled, but also our humanitarian contribution.

As I said, \$3.3 million have been invested in order to bring justice for past crimes, and several million dollars were committed to clear IEDs from the liberated areas. Obviously, this has to be done in concert with the other 65 countries and that is what we are doing.

[*English*]

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I begin by once again thanking the member for Calgary Nose Hill for her tireless advocacy on behalf of Nadia Murad, on behalf of the hundreds of Nadia Murads who have escaped Daesh's sexual slavery, and for giving voice to the thousands of women who continue to be enslaved by this genocidal death cult.

I would also like to thank the member and her colleagues for bringing this debate into our House.

All of our days are filled with busyness. However, as busy as we are in our institutions of caretaking and good governance here on the Hill, as much as we attempt to manage and control processes in this place, there will be events that intrude upon us, events that are beyond our control, events that require an immediacy of action by us, and that require hard decisions from us.

These will be decisions which will define us, decisions that carry a moral burden, decisions such as those of military engagement, of war and peace.

However, the most morally demanding of action occurs when confronting the darkest of evils, genocide. Genocide is defined as the destruction of a nation or an ethnic group. The simplicity of its definition is a stark contrast to the horror of its meaning.

It was a term coined and defined by Raphael Lemkin in 1944, a Polish Jew born in Vawkavysk, within the bloodlands of eastern Europe, the epicentre of mass killings in Europe's decades of death during the 20th century, where the Holodomor occurred during the 1930s, and where the unimaginable horror of the Holocaust took place in the 1940s.

Lemkin later served with a team of Americans working to prepare the Nuremberg trials, where he was able to introduce the word genocide into the indictment against the Nazi leadership when the word genocide was not yet a legal, criminal term.

These last two years, the world has once again faced the horror of genocide. During these last two years, Daesh publicly declared genocide against the peaceful Yazidi people of Syria and Iraq on the Internet, and then the mass murders began.

Genocidal massacres do not pause and wait for international legal processes to make criminal, legal determinations of genocide. I was a member of the Canadian delegation at the United Nations World Summit in 2005 when former Prime Minister Paul Martin stated before the General Assembly:

Too often, we have debated the finer points of language while innocent people continue to die. Darfur is only the latest example.

In 2005, Prime Minister Paul Martin made clear we could not allow another Darfur to occur. Yet, the Yazidi genocide took place during the last two years as we in the House debated the finer points of language while innocent people continued to die. In the next few days, we will be facing decisions requiring an immediacy of action on behalf of the Yazidi survivors of genocide.

This summer, the citizenship and immigration committee heard testimony from Nadia Murad. Nadia's mother and brothers were murdered by Daesh when they occupied her town, separated, and then slaughtered the men and older women. The younger women and children were horrifically abused and sold into Daesh's sexual slave markets.

● (1535)

This September, during the United Nations World Summit, a decade after former Prime Minister Paul Martin spoke at the World Summit, and the premise of the Responsibility to Protect, R2P, was introduced by Canada, Nadia told the horror of her story before the UN Security Council, the horror of the story of the Yazidi genocide at the hands of Daesh. As the UN Security Council chair noted at the conclusion of Nadia's testimony, it was the first time in its history that the Security Council had given a speaker an ovation.

Nadia's strength is inspirational and needs to be applauded. However, the clapping of hands is not a substitute for concrete action.

Yazidi genocide survivors and many of the women who escaped Daesh's sexual slavery are currently languishing in IDP camps, internally displaced persons camps, and refugee camps, where they often continue to suffer discrimination and abuse as members of a religious minority. However, they also face an even harsher reality, as Nadia stated during our committee hearings in early July three months ago, Yazidi women have no home to return to.

How can women whose villages have been razed, whose families have been massacred, whose neighbours stood aside, or worse, as they were chained and taken to Daesh's sex-slave markets, return to villages that no longer physically exist, to face neighbours complicit in their horror?

Every year on the Hill, we memorialize the Armenian Genocide, the Holodomor, the Holocaust, and solemnly pledge and declare, "Never again". Yet, Rwanda happened, Srebrenica happened, Darfur happened, and in the last two years, the Yazidi genocide happened.

We cannot predict what will happen in three years time when our elected mandate comes to an end. However, we can all agree that each and every one in this House will have changed during our time in this place. In those moments of quiet reflection three years hence, will each of us individually be able to say, "I passed the test", or will some of us look back and say, "What happened to me"?

To my colleagues of all parties in this House, this is the institution where the great debates of the day can take place, which can lead us collectively to find unity in motions that arrive at decisions of great moral imperative and immediacy.

Surely, for the sake of the Yazidi genocide survivors, we can rise above partisanship and the splitting of hairs on the finer points of language and details.

Business of Supply

One evening, after last summer's hearings into the Yazidi genocide, I brought Nadia into this chamber, with only the security personnel present. In fact, I invited her to sit in your chair, Mr. Speaker. As she looked out into the magnificence of this chamber, she seemed unsure. Perhaps she was thinking of where she had been a year prior, and where she found herself that summer evening.

As she looked out, I said to her, "Nadia, I'm sure that one day the child or grandchild of a Yazidi genocide survivor will stand in this place as an elected member of Canada's House of Commons and reaffirm humanity's pledge of "Never again". I believe I saw a tear in her eye.

● (1540)

Let us reach out with a Canadian helping hand, as has Germany, and bring a group of these genocide survivors to the sanctuary of Canada. Let us begin the process of restoring their shattered lives.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for his thoughtful presentation. Given every word that he said, it has to be difficult for him to be sitting here almost without a voice, because over the last year, the government could have acted. It could have done something.

I read a news article saying that 19 Yazidi girls were chained in a cage and burned alive because they would not have sex with ISIS militants. His presentation is exactly what Conservatives have been saying: action needs to take place now. It is one thing to be clapping and saying all the right things, but we need action now.

Given what my hon. colleague has just said, how is he going to vote on the motion? He said all the right things. Is he willing to stand behind them and put action to his words?

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member stated that we on this side are almost without a voice, in his words. In fact, we all have a voice. We all have the opportunity to voice our beliefs and concerns, especially on issues of this nature.

I began my speech by referencing the good work of the member for Calgary Nose Hill. I believe that, collectively, we have a responsibility to find a way to put forward a motion that brings all of us together. We can set our partisanship aside. This is the moment to do that. Pointing fingers at one side or the other does not help in that process. I absolutely believe that it is within our capacity to do what is right for the Yazidi genocide survivors.

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to follow up on my colleague's question. I would like the member opposite to explain what it is he objects to. The amendment says:

(c) support recommendations found in the June 15, 2016, report issued by the United Nations Commission of Inquiry on Syria entitled, "They came to destroy: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis"; and (d) call on the government to (i) take immediate action upon all the recommendations found in sections 210, 212, and 213 of the said report, (ii) provide asylum to Yazidi women and girls within 120 days.

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He seemed to indicate there was some sort of partisan or political interest in the motion and I am wondering if he can point out what that might be.

• (1545)

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member well understands, debating the precise words and trying to parse which words would work in a motion that would allow us to do what is right on this motion is not the way to do it. We need the House leaders to come together and arrive at that decision. My understanding is that we were very close. I believe we still have an opportunity to arrive at a motion that would allow us, as I said in my speech, three years hence, to look back in quiet reflection and say we rose to the occasion and we were able to do the right thing.

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, before I begin my speech, I will be sharing my time with the member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands.

I would like to recognize the fact that Nadia Murad is going to be arriving in Ottawa sometime later today and will be staying in the area for the next four to five days. We certainly want to thank her for taking the time to join us here in Ottawa.

I know it has been said before, and I want to repeat it because I think it is important. Nadia is a Yazidi woman who was captured by ISIS, endured unimaginable horrors, and by the grace of God escaped. She has told her story repeatedly around the world, hoping that decision-makers will listen and act to help the Yazidi community in Iraq and Syria.

The plight of the Yazidis is very real and extremely devastating. Even though Canada is thousands of miles away, I believe that as a country we have a moral obligation and responsibility to speak up for this vulnerable community as they endure systematic extermination at the hands of the murderous ISIS terrorists. ISIS, the so-called Islamic State, located in parts of Iraq and Syria, has been one of the most, if not the most, talked about global issue for the last number of years.

Many victims of ISIS atrocities have come forward and told their horrific stories. The horrors ISIS members have inflicted upon hundreds of thousands of innocent people, including Nadia will long be remembered. These events will be painfully added to the list of genocides of modern times. We see clear evidence and listen to personal accounts of genocide, systematic rape, sexual slavery, beatings, and mass graves inflicted upon the Yazidi people.

How is Canada helping the Yazidis? We say we are monitoring the situation and we are sending people on fact-finding missions. However, it is really not a difficult situation to grasp. The Yazidis are dying at the hands of ISIS barbarians and Canada must start playing its part, and not just through monetary aid that may or may not help Yazidis directly.

Canada needs to step up and bring more Yazidis here for safety. Given the circumstances, this needs to happen now. It has already been proven that ISIS terrorists have been deliberately and systematically targeting the Yazidi people. It is not up for debate. It is actually a fact.

In August 2014, ISIS invaded the Sinjar region of northern Iraq, home to the majority of the world's Yazidis. They are a community

that is thousands of years old, with its own beliefs and practices. For having a different set of beliefs and practices, along with a different religion, ISIS began systematically killing, raping, enslaving, and forcibly displacing Yazidis.

As a religious minority in the region, Yazidis were, and are still, caught in the struggle to survive ISIS brutality. Estimates say that at least 5,000 Yazidis have been massacred, and 3,200 women and children are still being held captive by ISIS. Sexual slavery is the most common role for the captured Yazidi women.

ISIS barbarians pay no regard to whether the women are married, unmarried, or have children or no children. Just to paint a picture, because it is absolutely necessary to expose ISIS, these murderous terrorists sell Yazidi women and girls in slave markets like cattle. It is unbelievable what has happened there. Sometimes ISIS fighters buy a group of Yazidi females, take them into rural areas that do not have a slave market, and sell them individually at higher prices. It is unimaginable that something like this is possible in 2016.

The Yazidis have suffered and continue to suffer immense physical and psychological torture. That is also not up for debate. It is also a fact. If they attempt to escape, the punishments are severe and extreme, including brutal beatings and sometimes execution.

There are far too many stories of horrific atrocities committed against the Yazidi people, things that we could never even fathom happening here in Canada. Personal accounts like that of a 16-year-old girl, which I know was mentioned by other members of the opposition and government members, who spent seven months as a sex slave to an ISIS fighter and was forced to watch them behead fellow Yazidis. There is the story of a Yazidi woman held for 16 months and sold three times, who then asked her captor about her children. She asked, "What did you do to them?" To which he replied, "They are kafir", meaning non-Muslim children, "It is good they are dead. Why are you crying for them?"

There are far too many heart-wrenching accounts of Yazidi women in ISIS captivity: Yazidi women scratching and bloodying themselves to make themselves more unattractive to prevent potential ISIS buyers, Yazidi women committing suicide in ISIS holding sites, Yazidi women and girls committing suicide by cutting their wrists and throats, while others are hanging themselves with their head scarves. Many of these accounts are detailed in the report of the UN commission on the inquiry into Syria.

• (1550)

The report makes it unequivocally clear that, "ISIS has committed the crime of genocide as well as multiple crimes against humanity and war crimes against the Yazidis".

The Yazidi community is still under threat of extermination by ISIS, especially now that ISIS is getting desperate and fighting for its own survival. Improving conditions and saving Yazidi lives must be made a priority for Canada now and into the future. Canada must play its part. We cannot turn a blind eye to the situation. History will not be kind to us if we do nothing for the Yazidis.

The government recently announced it will contribute \$200 million in foreign aid and that aid will go to the Government of Iraq for economic reforms. These funds are important and critical for security and stability; I understand that. However, it is hard to see how this money will actually help the devastation and desperation of the Yazidi people. The government has said very little regarding bringing more Yazidi refugees to Canada and at this point the only thing that it has done is send a team on a fact-finding mission, which actually returned yesterday, to confirm what we already know, that the Yazidis suffer genocide and that they are in desperate need of help.

So far the government seems to be in full support or willing to comply with everything the UN asked for, so why is it not acting on the UN report recommendations to “Accelerate the asylum applications of Yazidi victims of genocide” and “Put in place a protocol for the care and treatment of Yazidis”? These recommendations are not asking Canada to put money in the hands of Iraqi government officials and hope for the best thereafter. The recommendations are clearly asking for direct aid, direct help, and direct involvement in bringing Yazidis to safety.

That is why I call on the government to support the recommendations found in the June 15, 2016, report issued by the United Nations commission on the inquiry in Syria. In terms of humanitarian aid, I am not sure if the government really thought through the \$200-million plan to help Iraqi economic reforms, when that \$200 million or maybe even part of that could have gone toward helping the community that is under constant threat, desperately in need of aid, and systematically being massacred.

It is safe to say that the majority of Canadians would agree with this. I am also not sure if the Liberals really thought through their decision to vote down our motion in June of this year. The motion urged the government to take action on the ongoing genocide Yazidis are facing by recognizing the crimes against Yazidis as genocide. The motion was non-partisan in nature and it was supported by the NDP. Two days following the vote, the UN proclaimed what we already knew, that the Yazidis in Iraq and Syria were facing systematic extermination. The UN named these crimes against Yazidis for what they were, genocide. Only then did the government choose to call it a genocide.

Nadia testified in front of our Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration this summer. She said, “After I was freed, I thought that the world would bring justice to us, that the world would be fair to us. But still nothing has happened.” These are chilling words that paint a very real picture. The world needs to do more to protect the Yazidi people, so let us start right here at home.

Let us review the selection process used by the United Nations to identify refugees for the government-sponsored refugee stream and encourage changes if we think changes are necessary. The system can be improved upon to help Yazidis come to Canada faster and in larger numbers. After all, those who have suffered genocide are the Yazidis; therefore, it makes perfect sense to prioritize them for asylum in Canada.

The citizenship and immigration committee heard many concerns about lengthy, sometimes more than five-year waits given to the Yazidi victims of genocide by the UNHCR for refugee selection

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appointments. Many victims of genocide are unable to stay in refugee camps. This happens due to financial concerns and worries that they will be revictimized in camps. Revictimized once again because of who they are, Yazidis.

The committee also heard another disappointing fact, the fact of discrimination against Yazidis by UN representatives in the UN refugee camps. The sad reality is that very few Yazidis have been recommended for resettlement to Canada and the United Nations. This is the major issue the government must take a closer look at as soon as possible.

This past summer on the steps of Queen's Park, I, along with the hon. members for Thornhill and Calgary Nose Hill, marked the second anniversary of the genocidal attack on the Sinjar region. We called on the government to help the Yazidi people in Iraq and Syria. We now repeat this call and ask the government to once again consider a more focused approach to helping the Yazidis. That includes fully recognizing that ISIS is committing genocide against the Yazidi people, acknowledging that many Yazidi women and girls are still being held captive by ISIS as sexual slaves, and providing the House with a viable plan and the corresponding acts required to respond to this humanitarian crisis. Also considering the magnitude of the situation, the government must consider providing asylum for Yazidi women and girls within 120 days.

It is about time this happened and it is without a doubt the right thing to do.

• (1555)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am going to read something that we had proposed. I would be interested in the member's comment on whether he would support this:

That the House (a) recognize that ISIS is committing genocide against the Yazidi people; (b) acknowledge that many Yazidi women and girls are still being held captive by ISIS as sexual slaves; (c) support recommendations found in the June 15, 2016, report issued by the United Nations Commission of Inquiry on Syria entitled “They Came to Destroy: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis”; and (d) call on the government to (i) take action as soon as possible upon all recommendations found in sections 210, 212, and 213 of the said report; (ii) undertake best efforts to provide asylum within 120 days to the victims of ISIS, including the Yazidi people, who experienced rape, torture, prolonged captivity, sexual slavery, and other atrocities.

Would the member, in fact, support something of that nature?

Mr. Dean Allison: Mr. Speaker, what I would support is immediate action. I know that all sides of the House would support anything that would bring these women and children here to Canada as quickly as possible. What I would encourage the government to do is to move as quickly as possible, now that the fact-finding mission has taken place, and to act and to move very quickly to bring as many as possible of these young ladies and young children here.

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Ms. Karen Ludwig (New Brunswick Southwest, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question for the hon. member would be on the specialized treatment for the Yazidi women and young girls. What would be involved in terms of the specialized training, the preparation, pulling those resources together, as well as translators, so that when they do arrive here, we can adequately help them work through this process?

Mr. Dean Allison: Mr. Speaker, I would just ask what process was involved when the 25,000 Syrian refugees arrived. As soon as we get them here, I would ask the government to look at language training and all of the things that are required to make sure there is a smooth transition, and I ask that they be afforded the same things that were given when the Syrians arrived here as well.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thought the previous question was well thought out and thoughtful as well. Again, when the government committed to providing for and immediately bringing in 25,000 Syrian refugees by December 31, we saw what happened. There were indeed some refugees who were left in hotels and there were services that were not there. So I thought that was a very well-thought-out question.

For the life of him, can my hon. colleague understand why the current government has vacillated, delayed, and taken its time when we know that the atrocities are happening, that young girls are being enslaved, tortured, and raped? For the life of us, why are the Liberals playing politics with the Yazidi women?

• (1600)

Mr. Dean Allison: Mr. Speaker, I am not 100% sure. I know the concern in the beginning was why the Liberals would not recognize it as a genocide, because it was very clear to all of us in the House that it was actually a genocide that was happening. We are so grateful that they recognized it as a genocide, but it is unfortunate that it took time for them to wait until the UN declared it as such.

We have seen that, when the Liberals want to move refugees very quickly, they have the ability to do that, saying we want to have 25,000. It is a question of will, really, that we are talking about right now. As I said for my colleagues, we ask them to act as quickly as possible because this group is persecuted, this group is under serious threat, and this group needs help, needs help from Canada now.

The Deputy Speaker: We have time for one more short question and response.

We are out of time now, actually. I am sorry.

I had spotted another hon. member who was on his feet the last time around, and we had a few seconds left, but considering that I have taken half of that time now doing the explanation, I think we will move on, with due reverence to the hon. parliamentary secretary.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands.

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate the people at home could not see the scramble on the other side, but it seems to be indicative of the scramble on the other side today dealing with this issue.

As my colleague from Niagara West pointed out so eloquently, the government could achieve this motion if it really wanted to. It had

set a goal to have 25,000 refugees here in two months. It did not do it well, but it got them here. We know that it could do that again if it wanted to. The Liberals have claimed that this is not a hard thing for them to do. However, I do not think they are interested in pulling this off in the way it needs to be done. I think it is a bit of a demonstration of the cynicism of that first promise when they brought in 25,000 people. It was not about the refugees as much as it was about their trying to do a public relations exercise and get media attention for what they were doing. Certainly, a lot of people ended up spending time in hotels. They were sitting there without language training or job prospects. In fact, a lot of the private sponsorship opportunities that were in place were set aside because the system was jam-full with the government's program.

It is good that we are here. It is unfortunate that we are back here again talking about this issue. This is the third time I have spoken on this subject. We are all familiar with the history of conflict in the area. In 2005, an Iraqi government was appointed. I think there were great hopes for the government at that time. There certainly was hope that the government could bring the people together in the country. Rather than doing that, the Sunnis were excluded and, over time of course, that led to political disenfranchisement, and then eventually to people taking up arms.

ISIS has had a long development out of other jihadist organizations. We do not have time to go into that, but in 2011 it really began to expand and push out because of the deteriorating Iraqi security situation. In 2013, it was kicked out of al-Qaeda and became known as ISIL or ISIS or Daesh, as people have called it.

I think in 2014 the surprise was how quickly ISIS expanded its military capabilities. I do not think anyone expected it was at the level that it was. It began a quick expansion, especially in northern Iraq, and the general population was not prepared to defend the government, which left many people vulnerable to this military excursion. It was quick to capitalize on that and then to take over some of the oil production, which it used around some smuggling and those kinds of things to begin to fund its activities.

In August 2014, which is this sweep that we are talking about, it was able to move into the area around Mosul and Mount Sinjar, and the Yazidi people were directly impacted by that. We have heard a lot this afternoon about the impact on those 700,000 people who were concentrated in northern Iraq. Mount Sinjar for them is not just a place that they go to visit and to take a look at, but it really is holy ground for the Yazidi people. They have been there for a long time, dating back 6,000 years.

Obviously, it took a while for the world to react and to understand, but in June 2016, after we had been calling upon the current government for a couple of months to recognize this as a genocide, which it refused to do, the United Nations finally declared the Yazidis victims of genocide and laid out some recommendations for the international community. As we heard earlier, people in the Yazidi community thought that might make a big difference for them. However, it does not seem to have done that to this point.

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Nadia Murad is a young lady who will be with us for the next few days. She is one of the heroes of that time who has been able to come forward and speak about the incredibly horrible experiences and atrocities she had to go through. She talks about how on August 3, 2014, they were living normal lives in their village and all of a sudden that was shattered when Daesh attacked the village and, over the space of 12 days, it was conquered by Daesh. Members of the Daesh gathered the men together, and the estimates are that they killed up to 700 of the men in the village and then took the women and children captive.

We have gone over the resulting consequences of that. I do not think any of us can possibly understand what it means to have the women and children of an entire ethnic group taken, with many killed or sold into slavery and used as sexual slaves. The Syrian Christians were thrown into this as well. It is incredible that people can even come out of that and then speak about the situation that they found themselves in.

More than 500,000 Yazidi people are displaced, with 100,000 of them in UNHCR camps, but many others are not in the camps because they just do not feel comfortable going there.

• (1605)

That ties into the government's refugee resettlement program that it ran earlier.

The government insisted it was not going to consider religious or ethnic characteristics in deciding who it was going to bring here, but instead it went to the UN. As a result of the way it was done and because of the fact that most of the smaller minorities were afraid to be in those camps, the Yazidis were neglected and were not brought here. Only nine Yazidi families have come here in the last two years.

That alone speaks to the disinterest that the Liberal government has in addressing the issue. The Liberals knew about this. We talked about this last February and in June. We pushed them on declaring this a genocide. They cannot pretend they did not know about this. They had all summer and all fall to begin doing something about it, even after the United Nations declared this a genocide. None of that has been done.

So we find ourselves with today's motion. I do not understand how this could be considered unreasonable. The deputy House leader on the other side just came forward with some more wordsmithing and splitting of words. That is the kind of thing the offices of the House leaders are supposed to do. We have a solid motion here, and we are asking the government to support it. There is nothing about this that should be a threat to it in any way.

The motion has been read a few times, but I am going to read it again. It states, "That the House...recognize that ISIS is committing genocide against the Yazidi people...". The United Nations has declared that. We were calling it that long before it did. The government refused to recognize it and was basically forced to by the United Nations declaration.

It goes on, "...acknowledge that many Yazidi women and girls are still being held captive by ISIS as sexual slaves...". That cannot be argued against, because everyone knows that is the case. Many of those women suffer to this day. Many women have been killed. My

colleague from Niagara West gave a couple of examples. Children are being killed indiscriminately.

The motion goes on to ask that we support the recommendations found in the United Nations report on Syria. We all support that. Nobody here expressed that they would not. The motion calls on the government to take action on the recommendations found in that report. No one has spoken out against those today either.

The motion asks the government to provide asylum to Yazidi women and girls within the next four months. That is not a difficult thing for the government to do.

The motion is not a difficult thing for the government to support. If Liberal pride and arrogance will keep them from supporting a motion like this, then I do not know what it would take to get them to consider this issue as seriously as it needs to be considered. We are going to have some of these folks around in the next few days. Maybe they can talk to the Liberals and convince them of the seriousness of this issue.

This continues to go on for the folks who are living under the rule of ISIS. The good news is that ISIS has been pushed back. A fight for Mosul is going on right now.

All most of these people want is to go back to their homes. I was on the foreign affairs committee in the last Parliament, and we talked about this issue numerous times with both Syrian refugees and some of the Yazidi refugees. They told us they want to go home. They told us it is great to come to Canada, but they really want to go home. We need to see over the next few weeks that ISIS is pushed back through Mosul, pushed off Mount Sinjar, and that we can hopefully bring them back to their homes in peace.

I am concerned with the government's response to these things. We could be playing a major role in this battle around Mosul, but instead our jets are on the ground and our troops are supposedly in some sort of training regime. We could have been playing a major role in trying to get the country back for these people so they can go home.

Our immigration system has ignored these people. There is no way that anyone can say that the immigration system has treated these people fairly over the last year.

I am calling on the government to set aside its partisanship, agree that we are right, accept that the motion is valid, and move quickly. I want the government to say that it will give these girls and these women a new home, give them an opportunity to make a new life, and hopefully at some point in the future they will be able to forget most of the horrible activities that have been a part of their lives for the last two years.

• (1610)

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are many wheels within wheels in this issue.

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Part of what the member said involved the notion that what these women really want is to regain their homes, in their homeland. In considering the motions, etc., and all of the information from the United Nations, I am wondering if perhaps there is a strategy whereby, rather than bring them all the way over here and then perhaps one day try to replant them back in their homeland, we could find them a safe haven in Iraq. That could help to re-establish them more quickly and more effectively in their homeland, which is where they want to be.

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Speaker, I think the wheels within the wheels are grinding inside the Liberals' heads today in trying to find a way out of supporting this motion. I just said that when the committee hears from refugees, they typically say they want to go home. The reality on the ground around Mosul and Mount Sinjar is that people cannot go home right now. We do not know if they will be able to or when they will be able to. Any one of us who was separated from what we consider to be our homes would just want to get back there.

These ladies need protection. They need asylum. Many of them are in camps. They are not safe in those camps. We are going to hear these stories in the next few days, and I would urge my colleagues opposite to listen carefully to them, because these people are not in safe places. It is not like they are coming from a middle-class existence somewhere in the Middle East to a middle-class existence in Canada. If we bring them here, they are going to need lots of help.

My colleague talked a little earlier about language training, employment prospects, and those kinds of things. Those are the kinds of things the Liberal government should have learned from with its last project. It should be able to deliver those things fairly quickly and effectively for this smaller group of people.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague, who sits with me on the Subcommittee on International Human Rights, for his excellent speech, especially with regard to the increasing role the international community sees as extremely crucial in combatting Daesh, aside from what we call traditional combat.

The hon. member alluded to a very complex problem with regard to refugee camps and the challenges they create. Could he expand a little more on what he thinks is an important role and responsibility Canada could assert in improving conditions in those refugee camps so that people feel safe and secure, whether they are going home or have to flee to a new home?

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Speaker, this is a very interesting question. I do not have enough time to address it properly. We had a conversation today at the subcommittee about the United Nations camps in another country. One of the issues is that the really small minority ethnic groups did not feel comfortable going into the camps, because they did not feel that they would experience anything other than the discrimination they had already faced. It left them in a spot where it was hard to identify them as refugees, which then made it difficult for them to get into an immigration stream.

I think the international community needs to do a better job. In many places around the world, women and children are at particular risk, even in the camps, because they do not have the kind of protection they should have. Those are bigger issues than I can

address in the next minute, but in this situation, I would say generally that the international community failed to recognize both the Syrian Christian community and the Yazidi community, in particular, and give them the kind of relief they needed.

• (1615)

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have heard some well-thought-out and honest discussion from all sides of the House. I am going to go back to what was said before, which is that it is good that we are having this discussion, but it is time for action now.

We have mentioned these girls and the incredible atrocities they have experienced. Often they are seen as having little value. We have seen it. They cannot go home because of the atrocities that have been done to them. We need to bring them to Canada to give them a safe haven.

We have heard the government say that all the Syrian refugees wanted was a chance. All the Yazidis want is a chance, and Canada can do that. We can and should be doing more.

I would appreciate my hon. colleague's thoughts on what we can do immediately to get these Yazidi girls out of this terrible situation.

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Speaker, the simplest thing we can do is support this motion. This is not a partisan political motion. It is not unrealistic. It is not something the government cannot take seriously. It could implement it within four months. It would be pretty simple for it to take this seriously and provide asylum for these young Yazidi women and girls. They have already been identified. It is not like it is going to be a big challenge for the government to find the first few groups of women, young and old, who could come here and gain asylum in Canada.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh. I thank her for her work on the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. I know that she does very good work.

I want to begin by saying that I support the motion moved by the hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill. Obviously, Canada has a moral and legal duty to try to stop the genocide of the Yazidis. After the genocides in Rwanda and Bosnia, the Canadian government sponsored and took on the responsibility to protect people. I know a lot of people, mainly soldiers who served in Bosnia and Rwanda, who are still deeply affected by what they saw there. When it comes to genocide, we have to do everything in our power to try to stop these situations that leave indelible marks on the victims and on those who eventually step in. We have a responsibility to protect these people so that such horrible things never happen again or at least are stopped as soon as they come to our attention.

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In 2016, the Yazidi population was estimated to be around 600,000, 400,000 of whom are in the Sinjar district in Iraq. On June 16, 2016, the UN report entitled “They Came to Destroy: ISIS Crimes against the Yazidis” concluded that the atrocities committed by Daesh against the Yazidis constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes. The Canadian government finally formally recognized that Daesh is committing genocide against the Yazidis.

A number of colleagues have repeatedly expressed how horrific and unimaginable the extreme violence the Yazidi people have faced has been. We are talking about torture, sexual exploitation, sexual slavery, slow, violent death, separation of families, as well as various means of forced sterilization. What is going over there is absolutely horrible, and no one can deny how serious and sad the situation is.

As MPs, we also sometimes have a duty to educate so that people know more about certain things. I want to take a few moments to talk a little about the Yazidi people so that anyone who is listening to my speech can learn a little more about who they are. It is important to take the time to do that. A better understanding of their reality could also help guide our actions.

The Yazidis believe in a form of Christianity. However, in Sinjar, they are considered to be of Arab origin since it is believed that they came from Syria. Their religion is supposedly derived from Islam. They consider Jerusalem and Mecca to be holy cities. Their religious calendar dates back over 6,500 years. They are very attached to their beliefs and their language, Kurmandji. Like us, the Yazidis from Sinjar and the northeastern region of Mosul are farmers and live in small towns. When I say “like us”, I am perhaps referring more to my region, which has a large number of farmers and where most people live in small towns. Like many of us, the Yazidis drink wine and eat pork. The women have a lot more freedom than women in the Orient in general. They do not wear veils and they will speak to strangers. I think that helps us to better understand the Yazidis and what makes them different.

• (1620)

The magnitude of the genocide is even more sad when we know that it is being committed against people with a different culture. Daesh ruthlessly attacked not only many buildings and historic sites but also an entire population. Daesh clearly indicated that it wants to commit genocide against this people.

We therefore have the duty to protect the Yazidis and to ensure that they survive this horrible situation and are able to return to their homeland and practice their traditions and culture once something has been done about this situation. We can do a lot more, particularly by helping Yazidis relocate to Canada. As I said before, they are farmers who live in small towns.

In my riding, many constituents were more than happy to volunteer to welcome Syrian refugees into their spacious homes. I am certain that that would be the case if Yazidi women and girls fleeing violence wanted to come here as refugees. I am certain that my fellow Canadians are still willing to take action and to welcome them. I could easily, no matter the circumstances, find several people who are willing to do their part to help them.

Resettling the Yazidi people is very important especially when we consider that they are extremely vulnerable. At first, they were a

minority in Iraq and Syria. Now, an enemy is shamelessly attacking them and wants to wipe them out. We therefore have no other choice than to do our part to welcome these people and to protect them.

We have to bring everything to bear so that humanitarian aid gets to these regions and helps those in need. It is another scourge. In addition to being exposed to the possibility of extreme violence, these people are often condemned to living in truly awful conditions. They have little food and other resources. We must do everything we can to ensure that humanitarian aid reaches these regions.

Another very important measure has to do with processing times for refugees' immigration applications. Every day counts for these women and girls. We need to speed up processing times for their applications as much as possible. Obviously, security is important, but we need to figure out how to work more efficiently so we can spare these women weeks and months in stressful, terrifying situations.

When they get here, they are going to need psychological support and care. Canadian experts will be able to help them. Health professionals can be trained if the government chooses to use regions that were not initially targeted for Syrian refugees. They helped us gain experience. We learned from our mistakes, and now we can work hard to bring these women here quickly. We have to act fast, and there are many things Canada can do.

• (1625)

As I said several times, every day counts for these women given what they are experiencing. As parliamentarians, we should be thinking of better ways to help them every day.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her very thoughtful speech.

All members certainly agree that the situation of these women and girls is just horrible.

Could my colleague tell us more about why it is important to develop short-term and long-term plans to help these women in need?

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Speaker, this situation requires a short-term and a long-term plan.

In the short term, the priority is to quickly get them out of dangerous situations. Long-term plans should include care, education and everything we can provide them with here to help heal their wounds and help them start a new life.

Of course one day the conflict will end and they may wish to return. However, the short-term plan should consist of finding solutions to get them out of their vulnerable situation and to ensure their safety. After that, they will need treatment and the necessities of life.

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[English]

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her passionate speech on this very important issue. I agree that Canada is a very welcoming country. The story of the Yazidi women touches us all. Action is long overdue. One concern is processing delays.

Would the member not agree that we need to urge the government to waive the additional level of screening and bring Yazidis to Canada following the UNHCR screening process?

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question.

As I stated several times in my speech, for many of these women, every day counts. If we have reasonable assurances, any additional security screening could be done in Canada before their status is finalized. In their situation, every day counts. It is important that we get them out of their dangerous and vulnerable situations in order to save lives.

• (1630)

[English]

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, at this point in the debate I will be re-asserting facts that have already been stated here, which I think are important.

Where are we at this point this afternoon in this honourable chamber after speaking about something so desperately alarming? As my hon. colleague just said, every day counts for these Yazidi women.

After more than two years of publicized atrocities, as well as several UN reports and an official declaration that genocide was occurring against the Yazidis, our response as a country has been overwhelmingly insufficient. It began with our reluctance to acknowledge that genocide was occurring, and we have proceeded now to a point where we know that we have to assert our Canadian identity. We have to assert our responsibility in the international community.

Oftentimes, in many other situations that we contemplate here, we say we are complicit when we are silent, so I am glad this afternoon that we know where everyone stands at this point in the process. I want to talk a little bit more about it and the next best steps to move forward. I hope we will see some common sense and some compassion in the government's action, because this is extremely frustrating, as it is one of those situations that are no-brainers.

It was back on April 20, 2016, that the Leader of the Opposition first presented a motion to the House of Commons that mentioned the atrocities by ISIL. Unfortunately, that motion failed to receive unanimous consent. Immediately following that, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs presented a similar motion, but with a different intent. From there we moved on to yet another motion on June 14, in which the Leader of the Opposition again asked the House to recognize the actions of ISIS as genocide. Despite significant support from the Conservative Party and the New Democratic Party, and a handful from the Liberal Party, the motion failed.

The day after the second motion was voted down, the hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs stated that he was proud of the House of Commons and he defended the defeat of the motion by underscoring that the Liberals wanted an assessment of genocide to be done properly. He referenced another of my hon. colleagues who sits on the Subcommittee on International Human Rights, and a motion that he had referred the matter to the International Criminal Court, to formally determine the existence of genocide and to bring the perpetrators of these crimes to justice.

That is a little bit of the history of how long we have been beating this dead horse, so to speak. The following day, on June 16, 2016, the commission of inquiry released its report, "They Came to Destroy: ISIS Crimes against the Yazidi". The report detailed a multitude of horrific experiences and presented a number of important findings and recommendations to the international community.

• (1635)

In consequence, it is important for us now to understand our role and responsibility if we are to be significant actors in the international community.

Canada has an important role to play in addressing the threat that ISIS poses to the global community and in alleviating the suffering of civilians caught in the conflict. We have heard some of the very compelling descriptions of the vulnerable people, the young women and girls specifically, who have been targeted. It is very confounding to understand that in the House, strategy and political process can take precedence over expediting such a human rights issue for these women.

Forced displacement and forced recruitment of children, destruction and desecration of places of religious or cultural significance, and denial of fundamental freedoms have all been recorded in territory under the control of ISIS. This ongoing crisis seriously jeopardizes regional peace.

The NDP has called on the Government of Canada to work in partnership to support the development of responsible, peaceful, and democratic governance in Iraq, and to address the issue and combat the threat posed by ISIS, but also to take that role and responsibility in helping displaced and damaged people who need reprieve and who need Canada to step up as a compassionate actor in the international community.

In response to the humanitarian and security threat posed by ISIS, we know that part of our responsibility has been through a coalition of over 60 countries, which President Obama put together, with the objective of degrading and destroying ISIS. Many members of the coalition, including Norway, South Korea, and New Zealand, are making solely humanitarian and non-combatant contributions.

Some of us here today have already alluded to the face-to-face witness testimony we have had in a variety of different committees that we are privileged to sit on. It is very important to hear those testimonies, because those people will tell us things that may seem insignificant, but which have been powerful actions, nonetheless, despite not being military in nature. They have been actions of compassion. We are accountable to the global community, and we can be doing so much more.

I would like to talk quickly about the role that the NDP believes Canada can play in addressing the threat that ISIS poses to the global community, and in alleviating the suffering of civilians who are caught in the conflict.

Of course, we have been saying for a long time, and I will champion this again, that Canada must focus on stopping the flow of arms, funds, and foreign fighters, including by improving our anti-radicalization efforts right here at home. We should be providing considerable help to the vulnerable populations in Iraq and Syria, including basic humanitarian support, but also long-term support for recovery, such as psychosocial support to help these groups return to their communities and rebuild.

The NDP believes that the Canadian government, through the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, should exercise discretionary powers under section 25 of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act to immediately take action and bring the Yazidi people fleeing genocide to Canada, with the goal of immediately resettling 3,000 to 4,000 direct victims of genocide; and within the year end, a target of 10,000 through a special measure utilizing credible on-the-ground organizations to identify and select victims of genocide for resettlement in Canada.

● (1640)

These measures are to be above and beyond any pre-existing initiatives or policies.

We also believe that the additional level of Canadian screening is leading to severe delays, and we urge the government to waive the additional level of screening and bring Yazidis to Canada following the UNHCR screening.

Governments, like individuals, are defined not by their words or intentions but by their actions, particularly in the case of genocide, and it really is a matter of put up or shut up. When an entire people are being wiped out, the global community has an obligation to do what it can to protect them. If it is true, as the Prime Minister has stated, that Canada is back and the world needs more Canada, then this is something we can act on quickly.

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the question to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment is as follows: the hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue, Health.

The hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

[English]

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech. I appreciate her commitment to international human rights issues in general. Certainly we have found a number of cases in this House when Conservatives and New Democrats have been able to find common ground on those kinds of issues.

I want to ask the member a question on the approach to the debate we have had today. We have really tried to move this in a nonpartisan direction. We accepted an amendment that removed some of the language that the government saw as more critical. Now we have a motion that should be supportable by all parties. It talks

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about the fundamental issue of protecting Yazidis. It gives the government a relatively extended timeline, and it gives a reasonable approach that is not from one party or another but really represents what the House should do together.

I really hope, and I would like to hear the member's thoughts, that we will see members of the government stand up and support this motion that gives them every reason to support it: reasonable targets, reasonable timelines.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle: Mr. Speaker, I come from a riding, Windsor—Tecumseh, where there is huge awareness of social justice and social responsibility. There is also an awareness and an acceptance that it is almost implied that Canadian citizens have a role in activism. Members can imagine how perplexing it is for me coming to this honourable place and seeing some of the political strategizing that takes place.

We know that we are capable. We have laid out, all of us here today, some very practical ways. I even heard some mention of amendments being suggested by the governing party. We are capable here. Whatever is going on in terms of gamesmanship, I say let us set that aside and let us work to do what is compassionate and what makes sense in our role in the international community.

What it turns out to be, whether we have an alliance on—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, as it is my first time to rise today on this question, I want to register that I will be supporting the motion.

I am very concerned, as we all are, about the humanitarian crisis and the genocide of the Yazidi as a people. There is so much we can put in the category of crimes against humanity occurring in the region. We want to do whatever we can for the Yazidi. I will put a question for my friend from Windsor—Tecumseh in a moment.

I just want to also register that the ongoing devastation in Syria and the assault on Aleppo is a constant source of concern, and the world community has failed there. This is the closest I have seen to what might be called a hot war between superpowers in a very long time, and we should all be concerned.

My question is this. Do we know if the Yazidis want to come to Canada? I understand that their family ties are much closer with relatives in Germany.

● (1645)

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her comments with respect to the whole situation and how alarming it is.

Sometimes there are ulterior motives that exacerbate the lives of people and families that are separated in several different countries. I would agree. People want the freedom to be reunited wherever they are.

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Canada has a role to play in the transitional justice that is required so that people who want to stay in their homeland, in their hometown, are part of the informal caregiving and support they need after suffering PTSD from this life. They also need to be eased into reuniting with their families or settled with families who are secure in other countries, no matter where they are across the globe.

It is part of our global responsibility to make sure that we are considering not just our military strategy but our humanitarian strategy. What do we do about the fallout that is humane? That is a big question, but it goes to the transition and the transitional justice Canada has to play a role in, definitely.

Mr. Earl Dreesen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC): Mr. Speaker, to start, I would like to mention that I will be sharing my time with the member for Kitchener—Conestoga.

It is an honour to speak to today's opposition day motion on the plight of the Yazidi people. I would like to start by reflecting on how Canadians have helped the oppressed around the world.

A good friend of mine worked with an NGO in Afghanistan for decades. Her role with this NGO was to help widowed women and their families, especially young girls, and teach them how to run businesses and look after their families as they survived war-torn Afghanistan.

When the Taliban took over, she was forced to leave and ended up working with displaced Afghan women and children in Pakistan. It was the world's military effort to go after the Taliban, including Canada's great sacrifice of our own men and women in our Armed Forces, that made it possible for her to return to Afghanistan and restart her courageous work. This has also helped return millions of young girls to school and to the beginning of a normal life.

I say this for three reasons. First is the need to recognize the need for a military presence in conflict areas. Second, humanitarian aid provided by Canadians is crucial. Third, people with big hearts make a difference. That passion, that commitment, that dedication is something we can show the Yazidi people with our words and our deeds as we debate this motion.

Today's motion dealt initially with five critical elements. It has since been amended.

First is that we recognize that ISIS is committing genocide against the Yazidi people. I know that when this discussion was first presented, the government was reluctant to use the term "genocide", but I welcome its acceptance of the horrors and systemic crimes against humanity.

The June 15, 2016, United Nations Human Rights Council report, "They Came to Destroy: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis", made clear what we have been saying, which is that the Yazidis are victims of genocide, and it spoke of recommendations for the international community to embrace.

Second is acknowledging that many Yazidi women and girls are still being held captive as sexual slaves. As Canadians, and I am thinking specifically of our former colleague, Joy Smith, we have been champions in the fight against human trafficking, but the atrocities being perpetrated in an evil and systemic way upon Yazidi

women and girls has taken this to the cruellest level of slavery and physical and sexual abuse.

To quote Nazand Begikhani, "These women have been treated like cattle. They have been subjected to physical and sexual violence, including systemic rape and sex slavery. They've been exposed in markets in Mosul and in Raqqa, Syria, carrying price tags".

Dr. Widad Akreyi confirmed that ISIL uses slavery and rape as weapons of war.

The third point speaks about how urgent it is to have the government act. At the end of June, just two weeks after the UN Human Rights Council report, I, along with colleagues in the House, were part of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Parliamentary Assembly, the OSCE, in Tbilisi, Georgia. Canada and the U.S. play a vital role in that organization, and I was honoured to speak at the OSCE on behalf of Canada about our action on human trafficking. We also heard about the treatment of ethnic and religious minorities, the plight of migrants, and those who have been stuck in refugee camps, many for years and years, and how that was a grave concern.

In other areas, the organization Defend International reached out to Yazidi refugees in Iraqi Kurdistan, in December 2014, to provide humanitarian aid. In September 2014, Defend International launched a worldwide campaign, entitled "Save The Yazidis: The World Has To Act Now", designed to raise awareness of the tragedy of the Yazidis in Sinjar and to coordinate activities to intensify efforts amid the rescuing of Yazidi and Christian women and girls captured by ISIL, and we should do no less.

● (1650)

The next part had us supporting recommendations found in the June 15, 2016 report issued by the United Nations Commission of Inquiry on Syria entitled "They Came to Destroy: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis".

To this end, there is an additional concern that Yazidis face. Some Yazidis struggle to obtain adequate protection because they are internally displaced, rather than being refugees under the United Nations definition. They do not have the resources to reach another country, and also have difficulty obtaining passports and other official documentation.

These points, in their own right, speak to the urgency of this crisis, and underline the need for the final part of the motion, that the government be called upon to take immediate action upon all of the recommendations found in sections 210, 212, and 213 of the report, and do so with great haste using its full authority to provide asylum to Yazidi women and girls within the next 30 days. We have amended this to 120 days.

It is important that we look at what those options are. In section 210, the commission recommends that parties fighting against ISIS in Syria and Iraq strongly consider rescue plans that are required for targeting the Yazidi captives. Second, that they ensure coordination between local and international armed forces where military operations target ISIS controlled regions where Yazidi captives are held. Third, that they use all means available to ensure Yazidis held captive by ISIS in Syria are rescued during on-going military operations, and that we put in place a protocol for the care and treatment of Yazidis rescued as areas are seized from ISIS. This is the military aspect of what is required.

Section 212 speaks of the definition of genocide, the humanitarian assistance, and of course, the support that is important as we discuss the international community. First, recognizing ISIS's commission of the crime of genocide against the Yazidis in Sinjar. Second, for those states that are contracting parties to the genocide convention, to engage with article 8 of the convention and call upon the competent organs of the United Nations, including the Security Council, to take such action under the charter of the United Nations to prevent and suppress acts of genocide. Third, that they provide expertise on request to assist in the preservation and documentation of mass grave sites.

Going further, and looking after the needs of individuals, it is required that they put funding in for psychosocial support programs with increased emphasis on trauma therapy for children, noting that Yazidi children suffered different violations depending on their sex. It requested funding and expertise to support the training of psychologists and social workers in Iraq and Syria.

The commission also recommends that organizations involved in the care of internally displaced Yazidi build and provide skill training programs aimed at allowing Yazidi women greater financial and social independence.

Section 213 deals with integration and safety, where the commission recommends that states and organizations involved in the care of Yazidi refugees and asylum-seekers ensure that Yazidi victims of genocide, including but not limited to sexual violence, are identified, and treated as a vulnerable group for the purposes of housing, psychosocial support, and with regard to the asylum process.

As we look at the needs of the Yazidi people, it is so important that we look at things that we can do. I have outlined the three parts of the UN report, but can we expedite the asylum claims of the Yazidi people to Canada?

Will we treat the declaration of genocide as an immediate call to action for Canada, in which a whole of government approach to humanitarian aid, military intervention, and resettlement would be acted upon?

Will we act upon the June 2016 UN recommendations to accelerate the asylum claims of the Yazidi victims of genocide?

•(1655)

Will we review the selection process used by the UN to identify refugees for the government sponsored refugee stream?

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Will we examine the need to restore the exemption for Syrian and Iraqi refugees from the mission cap under the privately sponsored refugee program in order to fully harness the generosity of Canadian private sponsors?

I am thankful for the opportunity to speak on this very important issue.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since I took part in the same mission of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe as my colleague, I heard his speech on human trafficking before the OSCE general assembly in Georgia.

I can attest to his commitment to the issue of human trafficking and the huge impression his speech made on all the OSCE delegates.

He touched on the support programs for young Yazidi women once they arrive here in Canada. In the member's opinion, what services should Canada put in place to support these girls and women who, let us face it, have faced such hardships? I would like to hear his thoughts on that.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Mégantic—L'Érable for his very relevant question.

[*English*]

As a former school teacher, I am very concerned about the issues surrounding young people as they try to get a basis for where they are going in the future. When we see those individuals who have been tormented and have gone through terrible stress, opportunities for them are something we should be extremely concerned about.

There has been discussion over the last number of hours about how Syrian refugees are being looked after. I know that in so many ways it has been left to the school system to help coordinate and provide training, but it is even more important when we think about the terrible atrocities that have taken place against women and girls who have come from such a difficult place.

I know that if we work together, we will find ways to assist.

•(1700)

Ms. Karen Ludwig (New Brunswick Southwest, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question involves the support services for Yazidi women and girls if and when they arrive in Canada.

Quite often this afternoon, I heard a comparison being made of another refugee group to Yazidi women and girls. As a teacher as well, I know there is a need for socialization, for groups to be cohesive.

How much preparation is required and what is involved in having services here on the ground that best meet the needs of these women and girls arriving in Canada, when they do not travel with families?

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They leave one isolated area, some of them having lived in camps, and others having been through horrendous circumstances, and come to a foreign land, where they know no one.

In my experience, with the Syrian families in my riding, they were well-accepted and supported by families. They had not been involved in the level of violence that the young Yazidi women have, so they were more easily accepted, prepared, and supported within the community.

Support services really need to be seriously looked at. What is the best fit for the needs of these women and girls arriving in Canada?

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Mr. Speaker, that is important. Even in the case of the Syrian refugees, it was very difficult. The school system was not ready and had to make many changes.

We should start by looking at private sponsors. Many of them put their hearts out, and are looking for opportunities to assist. They understand the need to bring in refugees, and are looking to help those who have been hurt the worst in some of these situations.

It is true that it is difficult for people to leave their homes, but to suggest that it is any different for the Yazidi women and girls to find a place of refuge than it would be for any other refugee perhaps goes beyond the point that needs to be made.

We have the good hearts of Canadians, and they will make sure it gets done.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have had the honour in the past 10 years that I have served in this House to stand up many times for vulnerable groups. It has been said that a government can be judged best by how it treats its most vulnerable.

Today, I rise in the House to stand up for one of the most vulnerable people groups in our world today. I have had the opportunity to meet several Yazidi people. They are a very brave and courageous people. Yazidis have experienced things that we could not even begin to imagine, and here they are asking, in fact they are pleading for us to step forward, and for Canada to provide the assistance that we are more than capable of providing in this very devastating time in their lives.

Time is running out for the Yazidis. Canada must act now. The Minister of Immigration cannot start a new study or hold consultations on this topic. The Yazidi people are on the brink of extinction, and their time is almost up.

Concentrated in northern Iraq, the Yazidi people, a religious minority, is made up of around 700,000 people. They practice one of the oldest religions in the Middle East, dating back 6,000 years. If this genocide, being committed by ISIS, is successful, thousands and thousands of years of culture, language, and history will be wiped off the face of the earth. We must do everything we can to preserve this distinct and unique culture, and ensure that their lives and way of life are protected.

On June 15, 2016, the United Nations Human Rights Council issued its report, "They Came to Destroy: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis", which declared Yazidis are victims of genocide, and outlined a number of recommendations for the international community.

With respect to the motion put forward today by my hon. colleague, the member of Parliament for Calgary Nose Hill, we are calling on the government to take immediate action on sections 210, 212, and 213.

I will not read all of the sections in their entirety, but will point out a number of crucial actions that are called for in each of the recommendations:

210. The Commission recommends that parties fighting against ISIS in Syria and Iraq:

- (a) Strongly consider rescue plans targeted at Yazidi captives;
- (b) Ensure coordination between local and international armed forces where military operations target ISIS controlled regions where Yazidi captives are held;
- (c) Use all means available to ensure Yazidis held captive by ISIS in Syria are rescued during on-going military operations; and
- (d) Put in place a protocol for the care and treatment of Yazidis rescued as areas are seized from ISIS.

212. The Commission recommends to the international community:

- (a) Recognize ISIS's commission of the crime of genocide against the Yazidis of Sinjar;
- (b) For those States that are contracting Parties to the Genocide Convention, engage with Article 8 of the Convention, and call upon the competent organs of the United Nations, including the Security Council, to take such action under the Charter of the United Nations to prevent and suppress acts of genocide;
- (c) Provide expertise, on request, to assist in the preservation and documentation of mass grave sites;
- (d) Provide further funding for psychosocial support programmes, with increased emphasis on trauma therapy for children, noting that Yazidi children suffered different violations depending on their sex.

213. The Commission recommends that States and organizations involved in the care of Yazidi refugees and asylum-seekers:

- (a) Ensure that Yazidi victims of genocide, including but not limited to sexual violence, are identified and treated as a vulnerable group for the purposes of housing, psychosocial support, and with regard to the asylum process.

I cannot say it enough, the time for action is now. The NDP and the Conservative Party have unanimously moved forward on this topic. It was the Liberal Party that did not support our previous motion on June 9, more than four months ago. No action.

The motion was as follows:

That the House agree that ISIS is responsible for: (a) crimes against humanity aimed at groups such as Christians, Yazidis, and Shia Muslims, as well as other religious and ethnic minorities in Syria and Iraq; (b) utilizing rape and sexual violence as a weapon of war and enslaving women and girls; and (c) targeting gays and lesbians who have been tortured and murdered; and, as a consequence, that the House strongly condemn these atrocities and declare that these crimes constitute genocide.

At that time, we were asking for an acknowledgement that a genocide was occurring, but the Liberals did not support our motion. In fact, they defeated it. Imagine, not even an admission that a genocide was occurring.

● (1705)

Only two days after the motion was defeated in the House, the United Nations issued a report that proclaimed what we already knew, that Yazidis in Iraq and Syria were, in fact, facing systemic extermination. The UN named these crimes against the Yazidis for what they were, genocide. Only then did the government finally choose to call it a genocide. So much for Canada being back. So much for Canada actually leading.

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In any event, I am glad the government finally made the change and recognized this as a genocide. However, words are not enough. We need action. We need to walk the talk. Let us see some action today.

One of the disturbing accounts we heard was that of a UN goodwill ambassador, Nadia Murad, a young Yazidi of 22 years of age. At the Standing Committee of Citizenship and Immigration she gave her testimony about the genocide and sexual slavery. She shared the very real and personal account of her story.

Ms. Murad described how her normal life of studying, friends, and peaceful coexistence with other religions was shattered when ISIS attacked her village in Sinjar, northern Iraq, on August 3, 2014. According to Ms. Murad, after 12 days under siege, ISIS gathered the villagers at the school, separating men from women. The men were shot, more than 700, in a matter of two hours. Young girls and women were taken to Mosul, Iraq, where they were held captive, forcibly converted, raped, and sold into slavery.

This is only one account of the atrocities that are currently happening in that region. In its recent report on the genocide of the Yazidi people in Sinjar, Iraq, the United Nations documented that thousands of men and boys were slaughtered in the streets, shot in the head, or even beheaded. In some cases, family members were forced to witness these killings.

The UN reports witness accounts of roads littered with corpses, the bodies of Yazidis who had refused to convert to Islam. For those Yazidis who are still in that region, rape, torture, and murder are everyday experiences. However, an audit of the Syrian refugee camps found that only three identified as Yazidi. The executive of the advocacy group Yazda has called this process flawed, unfair, and unacceptable. He has called on Canada to impose a quota of 5,000 to 10,000 Yazidi refugees, targeting the most vulnerable survivors of the genocide.

However, we know that immigration is not the only avenue through which we can help this vulnerable group. An article in *The Washington Post*, written by Ameena Saeed Hasan and Khaleel Aldakhi, outlines the need for military involvement. The article states:

We save as many victims as we can and provide care to help rehabilitate them. Thus far, however, we've been able to help only a small number of the 3,700 who are enslaved. We believe most are in Mosul, which is Iraq's second-largest city, the Islamic State's most important stronghold...and the largest urban center under the Islamic State's control. So intense is the suffering of these women and girls that they tell us that they want the United States and other countries to attack Mosul....

Let us remember the cause of this crisis is ISIS. It was shameful to see how one of the first acts the government took was to withdraw Canada and our CF-18s out of the fight against ISIS. Canada's men and women in uniform serve our country with great distinction. When called upon, the Canadian Armed Forces have played a leading role on the world stage, protecting and promoting the Canadian values of freedom, democracy, and the rule of law.

Our military personnel, under the previous government, provided strategic airlift support for military supplies to Iraq. We provided \$10 million in non-lethal security assistance to Iraq, including equipment like helmets, body armour, and logistical support for vehicles. We

also contributed critical humanitarian aid to directly benefit the people of Iraq who are impacted by the ongoing conflict.

In conclusion, I would plead with the Liberal government that it immediately expedite the asylum claims of the Yazidi people to Canada and take immediate action upon all the recommendations that I listed above under the UN report titled "They came to destroy: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis".

● (1710)

I call on my colleagues to pass the motion tabled by my colleague from Calgary Nose Hill. The time to act is now.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada understands the plight of the Yazidi people. We understand the horrors that are taking place and we want to provide assurances to all Canadians that the government is doing whatever it can to ease the plight of what is taking place.

If one wants a demonstration of the goodwill of the government, all one needs to do is to take a look at the approach of the Prime Minister, the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, and in fact the cabinet to dealing with refugees. When the commitment was there to help Syria and the refugee crisis that loomed there, Canada came up to the plate. We have demonstrated leadership in the past. We will continue to do that into the future.

It goes without saying that Canadians have set a high bar, which we plan to achieve. What is happening to the Yazidi women and girls in particular is horrific. We understand their plight and we are doing the very best we can to address that very strong need.

Would the member not agree that at the end of the day what is most important is that the government uses whatever it has as its means to demonstrate that it not only cares but it will act. Actions speak louder than words. One of the best things we could do is to do exactly what we did with Syria and bring refugees to Canada.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Speaker, I could not agree more. In fact I said during my remarks that actions speak louder than words. I said that we need to walk the talk.

I applaud the resettlement of the refugees who have come here from Syria, but my question to my colleague is this. Why do we have a cap on the private sponsorship as it relates to the Iraqi and the Yazidis in Iraq? Under our government, there was no cap.

My family has had the privilege and the honour of helping refugees settle here in Canada. We have hosted them in our home. They lived with us until they were able to find accommodation. We helped them with their logistical needs, getting OHIP coverage, finding a place to live, and all of the things that go with that.

However, this method of resettling refugees is one of the most effective there is. Private sponsorship, where a family can actually walk alongside a refugee family or a refugee person for at least a year to help them get settled here in this great country, is what we need.

Private Members' Business

• (1715)

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:15 p.m., pursuant to an order made earlier today, all questions necessary to dispose of the opposition motion are deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Tuesday, October 25, 2016, at the expiry of the time provided for oral questions.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I am sure if you were to canvass the House you would find there is a will to see the clock at 5:30 so that we can begin private members' hour.

The Deputy Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

INCOME TAX ACT

The House resumed from June 2 consideration of the motion that Bill C-240, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (tax credit—first aid), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise in the House today on behalf of my constituents of Kingston and the Islands and perhaps on behalf of all Canadians. I rise on behalf of all Canadians because of the national impact that this private member's bill would have.

I want to commend the member for Cambridge for his excellent work on this legislation and the leadership he has demonstrated on this issue.

Bill C-240 recognizes that Canadians need to better prepare for emergencies and disasters. Now is the time to take action on this issue, and this legislation provides an excellent opportunity to do exactly that.

It is critical that we start a national conversation on how to better prepare for emergencies and equip our communities for the kind of everyday challenges that many Canadians face. This legislation, at its most basic level, is a means of encouraging all Canadians to be properly trained with first aid skills. These challenges come in many forms.

When I talk about first aid and emergency preparedness, I am talking about being better prepared for sprains and breaks, cuts and bruises, strokes and cardiac arrest, occasions when someone slips on ice in a parking lot or drops a glass and cuts a finger, or when a child chokes on food or falls at the playground. These are the types of accidents that can and do happen every day, and Canadians need to be prepared to effectively handle them when they arise. We have to be prepared for these, as well as natural disasters like floods or fires, or even the most basic recreational activities like hiking, playing hockey, or canoeing.

There is absolutely no question that a critical part of preparation will be first aid, CPR, and AED training. We need to create an environment with the proper initiatives so that Canadians can take advantage of these life-saving courses. That is exactly what my colleague's excellent bill aims to do.

In every type of emergency, from the commonplace to widespread disasters, all Canadians would benefit from an expanded appreciation and understanding of first aid, CPR and AED training. The reality is that we will never know when we will need to put these skills and abilities into practice, but we should all be prepared in case the need arises.

Accidents are by definition unpredictable, but that does not mean we cannot prepare ourselves and equip as many people as possible with these valuable skills. We need to start having a national conversation, in part because we have an aging population and we know this means there will be a greater need for first aid as we move into the future.

Any ordinary individuals could have the need for first aid or CPR at any point in their lives, and it is incumbent upon all of us to prepare for that possibility. To be honest, I consider it "Canadian" to help out our neighbours, and I am certain most would agree that having this preparedness is essential.

To get trained in first aid should be similar to shovelling people's driveways, or to taking them soup when they are sick. It is just something we should do when we see the need arise. That is why I am proud to support the private member's bill put forward by the member for Cambridge. It displays the need for the government to provide an incentive for something that we should all be doing.

When the member for Cambridge first approached me about this legislation, I admit I was surprised. I thought that something as commonplace or as common sense as a first aid training tax credit would already exist in the tax code, so I was quite surprised when I realized that it did not. What speaks to me and what is appealing about the bill is a sort of equality with which anyone can take first aid training to help others and benefit from the tax credit.

I am asking all members of the House to join me in voicing their support for Bill C-240, not only because it is the right thing to do but because it makes financial sense. It would provide a tax benefit that can yield big results. If this encourages only a handful of people to get training and that goes on to save one life, then I consider it a project well worth the time and effort.

Private Members' Business

It is easy in the House to see the work we do as having only a limited effect on some of the more pressing issues of our time. The member for Cambridge has created a bill that is clean and elegant and directly addresses the need I have heard spoken in the House on many occasions, that being better preparedness. That is why I consider it critical to give this private member's bill full consideration and why I am prepared to give full support and my voice today in support of it.

• (1720)

This is also a bill that does what we ask of all private member's bills: it is simple, it is focused, and it addresses a pressing societal need with precise action. Private members' bills are supposed to make a direct but small course adjustment, and I applaud the member for Cambridge who has clearly spent time creating a bill that seeks to fix a specific pressing problem in a manner that is just, measured, and targeted.

We are just about to enter the winter season, and that means Canadians will be spending a lot of time outdoors. Most people think about the winter as a time for fun, relaxation, and vacation. I think all Canadians want those memories to be present throughout the winter months.

However, the reality is that the increase in recreational activities means more Canadians will be exposing themselves to a lot of risks and potential emergency situations, whether they are camping, hiking, skating, playing hockey, tobogganing, or snowmobiling, to name a few. These are all situations where potential risk could occur, and first aid would be required to help somebody who needs it. We participate in each of those activities that I mentioned without a second's thought, and we should absolutely be encouraging Canadians to do this.

No matter what we will be doing this year, first aid training is just a good idea. As we spend time with our families and friends, loved ones and acquaintances, children and grandchildren, we should take a moment to consider how small the investment of time is for their lives to be saved.

I have spent a lot of time talking about the benefits of this bill and why I think it is the right thing to do. However, I would also like to take a brief moment and thank all those who already have first aid training, and the millions of Canadians who are ready to step up on a moment's notice to help others.

This is not something we often think about as we go about our lives, but consider just how many of our fellow Canadians would come running if we were to fall down. Canadians instinctively want to help, and putting the right tools in their hands to do so is the difference between heart-wrenching tragedy and a heroic nightly news story.

I am proud to offer my support for Bill C-240, and I encourage all members of this House to do the right thing across all parties and vote for Bill C-240 next Wednesday evening. It is the right thing to do, and it would benefit many Canadians.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the people of the great riding of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke in the heart of the Ottawa Valley, I am pleased to participate in this debate on a private member's bill that

would provide for a more educated populace, in this case in the area of first aid.

I am pleased to acknowledge the great work of the previous member of Parliament for Cambridge, Gary Goodyear. It is a cruel irony of this place that a fine MP like Gary has been given a brief time out until the next election. There should be no doubt in the minds of the good people of Cambridge. Having served with Gary for a number of years in the Parliament of Canada, I know that the current MP for Cambridge has big shoes to fill. It is truly unfortunate that his shoes have been filled with sand, after the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, a member of his own party, publicly rebuked him in this place. I was shocked when I heard the member's own party tell Canadians it has no intention of supporting him.

I cannot wait to see the video, as we have seen from the member for the Toronto riding of Beaches—East York, telling Canadians to vote against Liberal MPs who do not support their party's private members' bills, to vote against them, starting with the Prime Minister and his cabinet who led the chorus of nos. After such a public putdown from the member's own party, I am surprised this debate is even going forward. If the rebuked member for Cambridge believes in Bill C-240 and he has brought it forward with his name on it, it is clear that the only honourable thing to do, given what his party has done, is to resign.

I can tell the member that, unlike his fair-weather friends on the government benches, I will support this bill at second reading.

So what is it that the member's own party finds so objectionable in this proposed private member's bill? This bill proposes to amend the Income Tax Act to provide a non-refundable tax credit to individuals who complete a first aid or other health and safety instructional program or course. St. John's Ambulance alone certifies more than 550,000 Canadians a year in more than 100 locations across Canada, including locations in Pembroke and Renfrew in my riding. The proposed tax credit would be similar to the federal student tuition tax credit. Anyone who takes a lifesaving, first aid, CPR, or automated external defibrillator, AED, training would be able to apply.

I am pleased to observe that this legislation builds on the good work of the previous Conservative government, a government that was committed to the health and safety of Canadians. It was our government that initiated the national automated external defibrillator, or AED, program that saw \$10 million funded through the Public Health Agency of Canada in partnership with the Heart and Stroke Foundation to install AEDs in rinks, arenas, and recreation centres all across Canada. In my riding of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, I participated in assisting a number of municipalities to acquire automated external defibrillators.

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Defibrillators are electronic devices used to restart a person's heart that has stopped beating. They are safe, easy to use, and while they can be safely operated by the public, training equips people with the knowledge and the skills to confidently use these devices and to deliver quick CPR. With Bill C-240, individuals who are trained to operate an AED would be able to apply for a tax credit. Unlike in urban ridings, where medical facilities are close by, in a rural riding like Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, precious minutes are lost driving to a hospital when every minute counts. The Heart and Stroke Foundation tells us that each year up to 40,000 Canadians experience sudden cardiac arrest. Without rapid and appropriate treatment, most cardiac arrests will result in death.

• (1725)

Access to early CPR and defibrillation, preferably in the first one to three minutes after cardiac arrest, increases the chances of survival by as much as 75%. Although AEDs are easy to use, training on how to use these devices is important, so that bystanders have the knowledge and skills to confidently step up during emergency situations. Just one second can make all the difference in a person's life.

This Conservative program was responsible for the installation of 3,234 AEDs and the training of 25,360 Canadians on how to respond to a cardiac arrest situation. In my riding of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, the automated external defibrillator program allowed for over 54 AEDs to be installed in public areas. These locations include the Round Lake Recreation Park; the Chalk River outdoor rink; the Eagle's Nest Hall in Eganville; the Forester's Falls arena; the Westmeath Recreation Centre; the Horton Outdoor Arena; the community resource centre in Killaloe; the Combermere and Area Community Centre; the Rankin Culture and Recreation Centre; the Paul J. Yakabuski Community Centre in Barry's Bay; the Greater Madawaska Public Library; the Town of Petawawa Municipal Hall; St. George's Anglican Church; the Ma-Te-Way Activity Center in Renfrew; the Alice and Fraser Recreation Centre; the Shady Nook Recreation Centre; the Cobden Arena; the Nick Smith Centre in Arnprior; the Palmer Rapids Community Centre, Rink and Hall; and the Kinsman Pool in Pembroke, to name just a few of the locations. I had the privilege of assisting to receive an automated external defibrillator.

The AED program has already been responsible for saving lives across Canada. Thanks to Robert Blackwell, public access defibrillator program coordinator and trainer in the County of Renfrew Paramedic Service, for his role in contributing to the local success of this program.

It is also my privilege to recognize three Renfrew county paramedics who were honoured recently at the Ontario Association of Paramedic Chiefs' fall meeting with exemplary service awards for 2016. Paramedics Gary Sutton, a primary care paramedic with 20 years' experience; Mr. Andy Brown, an advanced care paramedic with 26 years' experience; and Mr. David Ostroski, a district manager with 30 years' experience, each received the Governor General of Canada Exemplary Service Medal at the Ontario Association of Paramedic Chiefs Ceremony.

If I understand the intent behind this legislation, it is to encourage Canadians to be trained in first aid, so that we can help each other in

emergency situations that require some first aid knowledge. While the parliamentary secretary has reduced the intentions of the member for Cambridge to one of cost only, it is really about helping our fellow citizens.

The government is happy sending billions of taxpayer dollars to other countries to fight climate change, yet it thinks that a tax credit for first aid training is a frivolous expenditure. In some of the small, particularly rural, communities found in my riding of Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, many firefighting departments are completely run by volunteers. These Canadians sacrifice their time and safety to help protect others. Training gives people the confidence to volunteer in their area.

This past Saturday was Scouts Canada Apple Day in Cobden in my riding. The challenge that too many youth programs have in Canada today is not a shortage of youth who wish to participate, but a shortage of leaders. Scouts Canada asks that leaders be trained in first aid, as do many other programs that work with young people. A tax credit is a small recognition for community-minded individuals who step up to the challenge to be positive role models for our future citizens.

Increasing the number of Canadians who have the financial ability to be trained in CPR, first aid, and AED use will help Canadians, especially in remote and rural areas where medical assistance is not always around the corner. The Conservative Party highly values life and life-saving capabilities. If this proposed legislation gives Canadians an increased opportunity to be certified in first aid, CPR, and AED use, and reduces a barrier to their volunteering in their home communities, it deserves support.

I thank the Red Cross, St. John Ambulance, and all the organizations that promoted this program.

• (1735)

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Madam Speaker, coastal communities, especially like the ones in my riding of North Island—Powell River, offer many opportunities to work and play in nature. Whether it is fishing, logging, hiking, skiing, or simply enjoying the outdoors, the general ruggedness presents many unique dangers. The advantage of knowing first aid can mean the difference between life and death.

I am glad to be speaking about the importance of first aid this afternoon. I wish to thank the member for Cambridge for tabling this private member's bill.

While nearly 80% of Canadians believe that first aid is a very important skill to have, only 18% of Canadians are actually certified. The bill we are debating aims to provide a financial incentive to encourage more Canadians to receive first aid and other emergency health and safety training courses. Taxpayers would be eligible for this credit, and so would their qualifying children.

Private Members' Business

Bill C-240 proposes to introduce a non-refundable tax credit of up to \$200 for first aid courses, CPR training, and automated external defibrillator, or AED, training. According to the Red Cross, Canadians with first aid training and certification are considerably more confident in their skills and ability to help someone experiencing a medical emergency.

Life emergencies are generally unexpected and can be life changing. Having the know-how to prevent, manage, and respond is profound. Whether in the wilderness or at home or at a workplace, having someone with first aid creates a safer environment for everyone.

Agencies in Canada offer a wide variety of courses and are often accessible to smaller communities. This is important, because being trained in first aid techniques allows us to determine the immediate course of treatment required until advanced medical help arrives.

While I support this initiative at this current stage of debate, I would like to point out four concerns I have about the bill and its unintended consequences.

New Democrats are concerned about the excessive number of boutique, non-refundable tax credits that have been added to the Income Tax Act in recent years. The Conservative government was well known for introducing a myriad of these tax credits. The trouble is that often these tax credits make the tax system less transparent and they add to the complexity of the income tax system, yet once they are put in place, there is little public accountability with respect to their effectiveness or the amount of money spent on them.

According to the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, whether or not these measures are desirable and effective in achieving their objectives, they have distributional impacts in that they affect the taxes paid by different income and demographic groups, and indirectly, they reduce available revenues that could be used for income transfers or public services.

These kinds of tax credits are believed to primarily benefit middle- and upper-income families who would not face the same financial barriers as low-income Canadians in accessing this training.

If the goal of this bill is to increase the accessibility of first aid training by means of incentives, we must therefore look at the question of who could be left out. The cost of undergoing training is prohibitive for many large families or lower-income Canadians, meaning that they may not have enough income to benefit from a non-refundable tax credit. This is problematic. All Canadians deserve access to first aid training and the incentives that would go with it.

I hope the committee studying Bill C-240 will be able to broaden the reach of the bill.

According to a 2012 Ipsos Reid survey undertaken for the Canadian Red Cross, first aid training for 53% of the respondents had been arranged by their employers, in which case the employers likely financed the cost of the course. The sponsor of the bill acknowledged this fact in his speech to this House.

This initiative may also have the unintended consequence of subsidizing the corporate sector by inadvertently encouraging employers to abandon their existing first aid training programs.

This may be a second potential drawback of Bill C-240. I would be keen to hear stakeholders speak to this if the bill makes it to committee.

• (1740)

The third concern I hope the committee will commit to study is costing. Canadians have a right to know and as parliamentarians we have a responsibility to stay on top, and see how much this is going to cost.

I truly believe that all bills that amend the Income Tax Act should be properly and transparently costed for parliamentarians and the Canadian public. As of this moment, the Library of Parliament estimates there will be a potential cost of between \$30 to \$60 million a year. That is concerning for me.

I wish to highlight a possible omission in the bill. I regard first aid as help given to a person until treatment is available. The bill, as drafted, supports a limited vision of first aid: standard first aid, mariners first aid, CPR, etc., but what about mental health first aid? MHFA is excluded. I hope the sponsor of the bill will be able to explain this.

One in three Canadians will experience a mental health problem at some point in their life. Just as physical first aid is administered, MHFA is given until appropriate treatment is found or the crisis is resolved.

Whether we are talking about the skills taught by the Mental Health Commission of Canada, or different distress centres across Canada relying on applied suicide intervention skills training, let us not forget that these workshops do save lives.

In rural and remote communities like the ones that I serve, having people with all types of training in first aid is significant. The need to support people during times of distress, whether it be mental health issues or physical health issues, is key in the regions where the help that is required may take some time to access. Many service organizations in my riding work hard to provide these supports and benefit from MHFA training.

I would like to finish by commenting on the reasoning given by the member for Cambridge for tabling his bill. In his speech he talked about the approaching demographic shift, and the associated challenges with an aging population.

Emergency preparedness is indeed a crucial element to this, and I commend the member. Having performed numerous consultations in my riding, specifically, on seniors issues, I can share with full confidence that what is needed and what seniors want is home care.

The 2016 federal budget does not include any additional provisions for home care or palliative care, even after the Liberals promised \$3 billion for home care during the campaign. It is time for the Liberal government to act.

Private Members' Business

Mr. Dan Ruimy (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am proud of our government and all of my colleagues. I am kind of embarrassed by the efforts of the member opposite in trying to shame my colleague from Cambridge who is putting forward a good bill. We are a lot stronger on this side of the House, and comments like that will not divide us.

I appreciate the opportunity to rise in the House and speak today on this important piece of legislation. I am incredibly proud to represent my constituents of Pitt Meadows and Maple Ridge, and today I rise to speak to Bill C-240, a bill that would serve the members of my community and all Canadians.

I want to thank the member for Cambridge for putting forward Bill C-240. It is a bill that fits the bill, something we can be proud has advanced in the House. It would use government and taxation as a positive incentive to encourage people to do the right thing, to be able to help their friends, families, co-workers, and neighbours when faced with emergencies, big or small.

I believe that, when we come to the House as representatives of the people who have elected us, we have a responsibility to get all of the big things right—foreign trade, defence, immigration—but we have just as much of a responsibility to get things right for the daily life situations in which our constituents find themselves. Those kinds of policies have the ability to reach into someone's life and make an actual difference.

Bill C-240 is that kind of bill. This legislation would give a tax incentive to those who take the initiative to get trained in basic first aid. It addresses a clear problem, which is that not enough Canadians are trained in first aid. We can lessen the financial burden of taking a first aid course by allowing Canadians to claim the cost of the training course on their taxes, a solution to the problem that can be applied within the existing tax code, so it would be seamless, easy to understand, and quick to administer.

I also believe that when we come to the House we have a duty to remember where we come from, the experiences in the past that have brought us to this place. First aid has always been a part of my life. I am proud to say that as a youth I was in the army cadets, in the Royal Montreal Regiment. At one point I was captain of the first aid team. As a young adult, I volunteered with St. John's Ambulance for all the special events, where I was able to put to use my first aid skills. I assure my friends in the chamber that they are in good hands. As a business owner and a restaurant operator who has opened more than 140 restaurants in my career, I can say that first aid skills are also important to have in the workplace. From a cut in the kitchen to a customer choking on food, first aid skills both reduce the extent of injury and have the potential to save lives.

One of the things that was so important to me as a young man was that part of first aid is helping us to develop our own self-esteem. I remember, as a 12- or 13-year-old, there was an emergency. I had just started my training, but I was too scared to actually get up and react to the situation. I looked around the room to see if someone else would do it. Eventually, an ambulance came and everything was good. However, that was a lesson I had to learn, and it gave me perspective on what is good and what needed to happen in my life.

Now, as a member of Parliament, I am working with the Katzie seniors network in my riding. It is one of the recent recipients of the new horizons for seniors grant in my riding. It is developing an emergency preparedness program for seniors across Pitt Meadows and Maple Ridge. Think about that: we have an emergency preparedness guide for seniors, and if they were all able to have that first aid training, in an emergency they could rely on each other and actually help each other, rather than waiting for one of our three ambulances to come.

First aid plays a vital role in our communities. Whether hiking in the UBC forest, boating on Pitt Lake, or playing a Saturday morning football game at Albion Sports Complex, the residents of Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge would benefit if more members of our community were equipped with first aid training.

●(1745)

I know this is true of all communities across Canada, and I am sure that hon. members on all sides of the House would agree.

Bill C-240 is a little thank you that will reward Canadians for taking the time and money to get trained in first aid, because quite honestly the life a person saves with that training most likely would not be his or her own. It could be a neighbour, a child, a colleague, or a stranger at the hockey rink. There is no good reason why we should not be saying thank you. That is why I am supporting the bill, and everyone in the House should do the same.

I am supporting Bill C-240 because I have to face my constituents and tell them that every day that I come here I am doing my best to make their community and this country a better place to live. Bill C-240, in its own little way, does just that. It meets the test. There is no good reason why the bill should not pass unanimously next Wednesday in the House.

There are those in the House who would say that the bill is based on compassion without heeding the costs. However, Bill C-240 takes into account both the costs and benefits of equipping more Canadians with first aid training. Every life saved, every wound healed, all add up. From the numbers that I have seen, Bill C-240 is estimated to cost taxpayers a maximum of approximately \$29 million in lost revenue. The real costs would likely not be much lower than that.

When we account for the lives that would be saved and the injuries that would be limited, it would reduce preventable visits to the clinics or hospitals. We know that our hospitals and clinics are overwhelmed at times. All we need to do is go to any emergency room to see the lineups there. Being trained in first aid gives us the opportunity to take control of our own lives at that point.

The member for Cambridge has made a compelling argument why the bill is fiscally responsible, and it is why I am encouraging all of us to vote in favour.

Madam Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to rise in the House and advocate today for Bill C-240. I look forward to having it brought forward for a vote next Wednesday, and I applaud my friend, the member for Cambridge, no matter what the outcome, for his dedication to this issue and his work on behalf of all Canadians.

The bill is not a band-aid solution to a real Canadian problem. I encourage all of our hon. colleagues in the House, whether former first-aid captains or not, to rise in the House and vote in favour of C-240. Safety first, my friends.

• (1750)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to Bill C-240, which was introduced by the member for Cambridge. This is an extraordinary initiative. I look forward to seeing how much support this bill will get because it is absolutely essential and we have needed legislation like this for a long time.

I truly believe that one of the reasons why it is good to be in Parliament is to be able to come up with bills that could change people's lives. I therefore tip my hat to my colleague from Cambridge. When we vote on this bill either this week or next, I hope that all my other colleagues will join me in supporting it.

This bill seeks to provide a non-refundable tax credit to individuals who complete a first aid or other health and safety instructional program or course. In other words, it will ensure that care can be given as soon as possible when an incident occurs or someone feels unwell. It will save lives and protect the health of all our constituents.

Whether at work, at home, or taking part in recreational activities, we all run the risk of getting into a situation where we need other people's help because something has happened to us and we do not know what to do. As my colleagues are beginning to see, I really like to talk about my constituents and the things that happen in my riding in the House to show just how much the work we do here can affect the people in our ridings.

I have three stories to tell, which explain why I think that Bill C-240 is becoming increasingly important. First, I used to be the president of the gymnastics club where my two daughters had the honour of practising the sport. When I became president, I was surprised to learn that none of the coaches had any first aid training, even though gymnastics is a relatively dangerous sport and can inflict many injuries on the young girls who participate in it. Nevertheless, none of the coaches had the training to help someone while they wait for the ambulance to arrive, for example.

One of the first things I did as president, together with the Amigym gymnastics club's board of directors, was require all coaches, be they 14 years old or 30, to get first aid training. All of the coaches at the club now have first aid training.

My second story is about a specific incident. Soon after the hon. member for Cambridge introduced his bill, my daughter was in a gymnastics competition in Lévis near Quebec City. After warming up on the uneven bars, she decided to get up there one more time because she wanted to do well in her first competition of the year. Unfortunately, she had an accident. As she was dismounting, her foot hit the bar and she fell.

I was in the next room, and people rushed in to tell me that something had happened, but they did not tell me what. When I got there, my daughter was crying and surrounded by people. I had no idea what had happened. When I reached her side and saw her leg, I

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realized right away that it was serious. Unfortunately, I have no first aid training. Even if I did, seeing my daughter like that, I would have been in no position to administer first aid because I was so upset.

As I was trying to comfort my daughter, some people appeared out of nowhere wanting to move my daughter's foot. My first instinct as a father was to tell them not to touch it. Then I heard someone say she had training and could help my daughter through these difficult moments. It was such a relief to know that there was someone close at hand that was able to help. She was not a coach, but someone with more advanced medical training. However, before that person arrived at my daughter's side, things got quite intense.

• (1755)

Fortunately I can reassure my colleagues that my daughter is grown up and doing well. She started teaching gymnastics again and now she is a coach. She no longer does gymnastics, but she is still coaching. I am pretty sure that there will be some great gymnasts in Thetford Mines thanks to my daughter.

My third story makes me a little more emotional. Yesterday, during the lengthy votes, I got a call from my wife. She told me that our youngest daughter was taken to hospital by ambulance after a cheerleading practice. Again, who was there? No one around her was equipped to administer first aid. Someone managed to immobilize her and tell her to wait, but that was all. Someone phoned my wife, who was very far away. When things like that happen, Ottawa seems quite far from our riding. My daughter was immobilized. My wife arrived on the scene, but she was at a loss as to what to do. Someone decided to call an ambulance, which transported my daughter to the hospital. Fortunately, she is also doing well. Her arm is broken, but she is strong and will recover. She will be able to go back to cheerleading.

It is exactly at such times that it is reassuring for a parent to know that those nearby have first aid training and know what to do and when to do it. First aid training is needed not just because it might be useful, but because we never know when an incident will happen. It could happen at home or at school. It happened in a place where many accidents such as this one can happen. Even in these places, there are never enough people with first aid training.

That is why this bill hits home with me. I truly believe that we should provide more people with the opportunity to learn first aid and, above all, we need to know that they are well trained. It is worrisome to be approached by people intent on providing medical care without knowing if they really know what to do.

My colleague's bill will ensure that more people have the skills to intervene, more people will know what to do, more young women will be able to do gymnastics or be cheerleaders, more young people will be able to play hockey, and more people will ski because one day there will be no shortage of first responders.

Private Members' Business

Before arriving today, I wondered how many of my colleagues here have first aid training. How many of us have had a chance to take this training? Are there many? I know we have firefighters, nurses, doctors, and engineers in the House. However, we are not always with them. Sometimes there are committee meetings, and sometimes those members are not with us.

We are no longer kids here; we are all getting older. All kinds of things can happen after the age of 50. We need to know that people can help us. The moment that no one wants to happen can in fact happen to any one of us, or someone we love, our children or our parents. This moment eventually happens to everyone. To ensure that someone is there to help us right when we need it, incentives are needed. We need a bill like Bill C-240. It will give people the opportunity to take first aid training that may well one day save someone's arm or their leg, or possibly even their life.

I will therefore enthusiastically support the bill introduced by my colleague, the member for Cambridge. I also urge him to promote it amongst his colleagues, so that the bill can pass next week at second reading.

• (1800)

[*English*]

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Madam Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to speak today on this important piece of legislation, which I will be supporting.

The bill reflects the work of the hon. member for Cambridge, which he has done his whole life on behalf of his community. He has worked for the YMCA and YWCA, the organization in Canada whose new logo is "For a better us".

I have been familiar with Bill C-240 since the member for Cambridge and I spoke in the early days of Parliament about good ideas to bring forward as private members' business. What we are looking at here is a topic that is positive. It reaches across partisan aisles and would accomplish something for our constituents and, indeed, all Canadians.

I spoke with the member for Cambridge soon after the election, who was excited to be bringing this forward in the PMB process. Indeed, he and I are in neighbouring ridings. He is excited about it because he will not table many private members' bills and wants to get it right. He is excited because he could see the possibilities that developing a PMB on this topic would bring, and for the opportunity to speak to everyone across the country about what kind of people we are and want to be.

I want to thank the member for Cambridge for bringing forward the bill, Bill C-240, which addresses a clear problem. Enough people are not training in first aid, something that we have heard from stories around the House this afternoon. This bill poses a clear, intuitive, and positive solution. Would it not be great to be able to provide a mild incentive to individuals to help them to be trained in first aid? What if we embedded that policy within the existing tax code so that it was seamless, easy to understand, and easy to administer? I really have to applaud the member for putting together a policy that not only makes sense, but also is clearly explainable and efficient.

When I was first out of school, I worked in some physically demanding jobs. I was going into factories and servicing equipment. I was working in environments where it was critical that everyone around me was trained in first aid. Fortunately, I was never hurt in a serious accident, but it was sure nice to know that the people around me would be able to step in if I had a problem. Indeed, at one point I had to save a person's finger. The person had an accident in one of the machines, and those around us knew how to do first aid. We were able to recover the finger, get him to the hospital, and get it re-attached.

For people in our communities who do not have the training to put to work or through their profession, the bill at the very least would help them get trained in first aid so they can help the people around them.

When I have spoken to others about Bill C-240, they are immediately supportive and see its value. People understand that our tax dollars go directly to things that benefit everyone in our society. They go to benefit the fabric of our society itself, and Bill C-240 is saying at its very core that whenever an individual gets trained in first aid to help fellow Canadians, they are doing something that benefits us all. The country has decided to thank them by helping to pay a little piece of their training.

It is a simple thing we can do that would have a big ripple effect in our communities. I am not alone in thinking this either. Bill C-240 has been endorsed by non-profits, including the Heart and Stroke Foundation and DeafBlind Ontario. I would like to cite a brief quote from DeafBlind, that their "interveners", the name of the direct service employees who work for them, "are required to maintain up-to-date first aid and CPR certification at their own cost. Bill C-240 will make that training more accessible to them, and more accessible to the broader public." It is so important for those working in the not-for-profit sector especially.

I want to take a moment to speak about an incident in my riding and one of the reasons I am supporting the bill today. This summer I was knocking on doors in Guelph. On Saturday morning I was invited into a home. There was a gathering of people around the kitchen table. There were a lot of people at 10 o'clock on a Saturday morning. What was going on? They were there because of a young boy, 12 years old, who in the last week of school had heart failure at his school. The people around the kitchen table that day were the people who had saved his life, the people who had provided CPR while he was on the floor at school, the people who had connections to the first aid from the emergency services, the people who brought him to the hospital, the people in the hospital who had saved his life, and then the people who had helped with his recovery process.

Today that person is alive. He is now 13 years old, because of the first aid that was administered at his school on the last week of class.

Private Members' Business

• (1805)

Stories like this sound like a once-in-a-lifetime or freak accident of nature, but really they are happening behind the doors of houses and businesses, and within schools across our country. They are happening every day in every riding. In each and every case, there is a real world difference that can make an outcome positive or negative, and that difference can be the difference in whether a person survives or not.

I am thankful for the opportunity today to advocate for the bill, and I look forward to voting in favour of it next Wednesday. I applaud the member for Cambridge for his work on the bill and for making our neighbourhoods safer.

Mr. Garnett Genus (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to briefly put on the record my strong support for the bill. I think it is an excellent bill and I appreciate the work of the member for Cambridge in bringing it forward.

At the same time, I understand that some members of the government oppose it, so I expect we will have an interesting vote next week. I would encourage all members to take the time to read the details of the bill and appreciate its importance.

Briefly in my comments I want to say that there are some who question and dispute the value of what they call “boutique” tax credits, or specific tax credits aimed at specific things. I think that is really the heart of the debate. I do not think any member here is opposed to first aid or opposed to encouraging more first aid, but it is this question of whether we should have specific tax credits to help encourage people in a positive direction.

I would defend the value of certain specific tax credits that provide an effective incentive to encourage people to take advantage of opportunities that they might not otherwise and to make it easier for people to afford things that we regard as socially positive. I think there is good economic as well as social logic to these kinds of things.

From an economic perspective, economists identify something called “positive externalities”. In other words, if in an economic interaction there is a positive social effect, then it is in society's interest to create additional incentives to encourage people to make those kinds of interactions. Then there is a corresponding analysis for negative externalities, where if there is an economic interaction between two parties that has a negative effect on a third party, it is in society's interest to try to discourage it.

Therefore, when we have something like people taking first aid training, which generates positive external social benefits beyond the individual receiving the training and the individual providing the training, then there is a social interest in providing that additional incentive, and that is what the bill would do. It would provide that extra economic incentive in that direction in terms of a positive externality.

This tax credit would also make the thing for which the tax credit exists, in this case first aid, more accessible to individuals who might not be able to access it. Therefore, that is obviously a positive.

I want to say as well that when it comes to the question of tax cuts and how we cut taxes, we should not just be looking for a smaller

government but we should be looking for a stronger society as well. The bill would achieve both of those objectives. It would provide a tax reduction and would give money back to ordinary Canadians, but in the process, it would create a stronger society, a society with people with the capacity to help each other within their own communities.

This is what we should be looking for. It is not more government, not simply less government for its own sake, but a reduced role for government and a corresponding strengthening of society. That is why I like these kinds of tax credits, because they provide that additional incentive for people to build up and be active within their communities at the same time as they provide a tax reduction.

• (1810)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bryan May (Cambridge, Lib.): Madam Speaker, first of all, I thank my opposition colleague for his kind words.

[*English*]

I am very proud and blessed to represent the fantastic people of Cambridge, North Dumfries, and North Brant.

I would like to take a moment to thank all the speakers here today and all those who spoke in the first hour of this debate.

Today it is my pleasure to rise and speak to my private member's bill, an act to amend the Income Tax Act, to provide a non-refundable tax credit for those who take first aid courses.

From the very beginning, I have said that it is key to starting a national conversation in this country about emergency preparedness. I have tried to prepare a PMB to go beyond partisan goals and achieve something that will work for all Canadians. I am proud to say that I have received support from all sides. People in this House and across the country realize that we must work to develop our human infrastructure.

The financial benefit of the bill would include faster recovery times, lower health care expenditures, and more lives saved.

More than half of adult Canadians live in a household in which no members have up-to-date first aid or CPR training. According to Ipsos Reid, only 18% of those who have ever taken first aid courses are current. In fact, one-third of Canadians have never taken a first aid course. Those statistics are shocking.

There is a solution, which is fiscally responsible, immediate, and well-targeted, and that is Bill C-240.

Bill C-240 is a bill that is moderate in scope, low in cost, and potentially massive in outcome. The bill is designed to provide a modest change, innovate within a sector, and improve lives in a measured and specific way. The bill has the potential to make a lasting impact on the lives of Canadians without making a lasting impact on their wallets.

I hope that my attempt to create this bill, however humble, will save lives and achieve far grander benefits than might otherwise be apparent.

Adjournment Proceedings

When people undertake first aid training, what they are ultimately doing is gaining skills and knowledge to serve their communities, but they are also developing the confidence to act in an emergency situation, when literally every second counts.

This House has the opportunity to recognize, incentivize, and facilitate, these selfless acts by reducing the costs incurred by these civic-minded individuals.

The bill proposes a non-refundable tax credit of 15% to anyone who takes an accredited first aid, CPR, or AED training course. This tax credit would come at a relatively low cost to the government but would make a difference in the affordability of lifesaving training for individual Canadians.

Approximately 1.8 million Canadians will take lifesaving training this year. At \$15 per person, the bill would cost the government a maximum of \$26.5 million this year. Compared with the value of lives saved and injuries healed, this is miniscule.

Of course, not all course participants would be eligible, nor would all owe taxes. The most significant fact is that over half of all of those who take this training have it paid for by their employers and therefore would not be eligible for this credit.

When these facts are considered, we can see that the cost to the government would actually be much lower, likely less than \$13 million.

This House has an opportunity to safeguard the lives of Canadians and display our commitment to emergency preparedness. Training leads to confidence. Confidence leads to action in an emergency. Action leads to lives saved, people healed, and more Canadians looking after others, which is something we can all support.

I thank members for their support on this issue. I look forward to the vote on Wednesday and to speaking with all members of this House.

I want to take the last few seconds I have to recognize a group of people who often do not get recognized, and that is my staff. They have put a lot of work into this, and I would like to thank them.

•(1815)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): It being 6:15 p.m., the time provided for debate has expired.

[*Translation*]

The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): All those in favour of the motion will please say ye.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, October 26, 2016, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*Translation*]

HEALTH

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Madam Speaker, my question is about health.

I think it is particularly important to talk about health, even though the Government of Quebec dealt with the matter of ancillary fees on its own. The fact remains that access to free health care is constantly threatened.

Unfortunately, the position that the Minister of Health is currently taking is not helping because she is refusing to provide the provinces with financial assistance, she is trying to impose conditions on them, and she does not want to commit to covering 25% of the cost of the health care system, as recommended by the Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada, led by Roy J. Romanow in 2002.

In practical terms, when the provinces are strapped for cash, they have to make difficult decisions and try to make budget cuts and reorganize everything without affecting public services. This has an impact on wait times and the proximity of services.

For example, services are being consolidated in health care centres that are farther away. In Abitibi—Témiscamingue, all of the health care centres have now been grouped under one banner. We have heard rumours that services are going to be consolidated. That means that people may have to travel 100 kilometres to have access to care that they used to be able to get in their own town.

In theory, health care is still free, but in practice it costs money to get health care. For example, psychologist positions are being cut. It is still possible to get treated by a psychologist for free at a hospital, but the wait times are often so long that people end up turning to the private sector. This happens all the time because of the government's bad decisions and lack of commitment. Free health care is on the line and patients are increasingly driven to pay for care that they should be able to get for free.

As I said, it is even harder in rural areas. Service managers are no longer being asked to be managers. They are being asked to be magicians, to find solutions so that they can provide the same services to the public, the same access, and all for free, when their budget is constantly being cut. They have to do more with less.

Adjournment Proceedings

Unfortunately, the turmoil in the health care system is causing more and more workers to go on sick leave. They need to be replaced but there are no replacements, putting hospitals in the position of paying overtime hours and forcing people to work those hours. In the end, more people are getting sick and costs are increasing. This is an extremely difficult situation.

Considering what is happening right now with health transfers, I think it is high time for us to stand up and say that we are here to protect Canada's free public health care system, and for the federal government to do its part, while allowing provincial administrations to do their work as they see fit.

● (1820)

[English]

Mr. Sean Casey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, this government has been very clear in our support for the principles of the Canada Health Act and the values that they reflect. These values of accessibility, equity, and solidarity form the foundation for both our publicly insured health care system and for the nation as a whole. They are the values that reflect the belief that, regardless of how much money they make or where they live, health care should be available for all Canadians when they need it.

Our commitment to the publicly insured health care system is reflected in our actions. This means restoring leadership at the federal level by revitalizing and setting solidly in place strong collaborative working relationships with our provincial and territorial counterparts to realize the aims of the Canada Health Act.

The Canada Health Act continues to be the cornerstone of the Canadian health care system. The aim of the act is to ensure that all eligible residents of Canada have reasonable access to medically necessary insured services without direct charges. The act is very clear: any charges to patients for publicly insured services are considered extra billing or user charges and are prohibited under the act. Our government wants to see all such charges eliminated.

Canadians depend on and expect all governments to work together to ensure that citizens across this country can readily access and rely on a health care system that ultimately supports them in leading fulfilling and productive lives. When Canadians are in good physical and mental health, they are able to work better, be more productive, and contribute more fully to our economy while living healthier, happier lives.

Our health care system is one that Canadians across the country continue to take pride in and to cherish. Statistics Canada confirms this point in its 2015 report on Canadian identity, which states that close to 80% of Canadians have pride in our health care system.

Respecting the value that Canadians place on our health care system, this government's commitment to Canadians is having a federal government that is fully engaged with provinces and territories on matters related to the Canada Health Act. Our approach to the administration of the act emphasizes transparency, consultation, and dialogue with provincial and territorial health care ministries to resolve potential issues.

As I mentioned earlier, extra billing and user charges are prohibited under the act, as these fees create barriers to accessing

health care. Part of the reason Canadians take pride in our health care system is that they know the system will provide them with the care they need regardless of their ability or willingness to pay.

This government is committed to ensuring that Canadians across this country continue to have access to the health care they need, when they need it. That is why the Minister of Health wrote to the Quebec health minister in September, underscoring her commitment to publicly funded health care without charges to patients for insured services.

Proactively holding such discussions with provinces and territories on compliance issues provides real opportunity to resolve potential problems before they become more fully developed. It should also be noted that independent action on the part of provinces and territories can also lead to good outcomes. This government was pleased that the Quebec minister of health recently announced concrete action toward removing barriers to access, by eliminating fees charged to patients for insured services at the point of delivery.

It is important to remember that the ultimate goal of enforcement is not to levy penalties but to ensure compliance with the principles of the Canada Health Act, so that Canadians can have access to the health care they need when they need it. The Minister of Health did not levy penalties in her letter to the Quebec government.

● (1825)

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore: Madam Speaker, here is another reason why the federal government is off base.

Several provinces decided to give more authority to other health professionals such as pharmacists and nurses, for example. Recently, thanks to the efforts of the Ordre des infirmières et des infirmiers du Québec, graduate nurses won the right to write prescriptions for such items as contraceptives and prenatal vitamins. However, clients under federal jurisdiction, such as first nations, cannot be reimbursed for these medications unless they are prescribed by a doctor.

Once again, patients are required to pay for these medications out of pocket because the wrong professional prescribed them, and that professional is more expensive. There are problems with the fact that the system is free, and the federal government lags behind when it comes to making it fully accessible to patients.

We must protect our public health care system. However, that requires a certain degree of autonomy. We have to understand the incredible work done by the provinces to expand the scope of practice of other professionals. Unfortunately, the federal government lags behind by several years in many cases.

[English]

Mr. Sean Casey: Madam Speaker, I want to reiterate that the Government of Canada is unwavering in its support of the Canada Health Act.

We are committed to defending our publicly funded health care system. In our work, we are striving to eliminate extra billing and user fees, which create barriers for Canadians in accessing health care. We are actively re-engaging with the provinces and territories. Our government knows that this approach is the best way to resolve potential compliance problems.

Adjournment Proceedings

We strongly believe that all Canadians deserve access to timely, quality, universal health care and to receive health care services based on an individual's need and not the ability or willingness to pay.

[*Translation*]

Finally, I want to thank my colleague from Abitibi—Témiscamingue for raising this question. There is no doubt that it is an

important issue and we are fully committed to upholding the principles of the Canada Health Act.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:27 p.m.)

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