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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, November 2, 2006

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, November 2, 2006

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*English*]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to three petitions.

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Gerry Ritz (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour today pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) to table a report on the golden nematode situation in Quebec.

The second report I am tabling today is the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food. In accordance with the order of reference of Tuesday, April 25, I am reporting the main estimates to the House.

* * *

[*Translation*]

PETITIONS

SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present today. The first is an initiative of the Maison d'accueil pour les sans-abri, and it concerns the SCPI program.

Approximately 1,025 people have signed this petition. I would also like to take this opportunity to say that the petition was put together by Sylvain Plourde, who obtained the signatures in support of this initiative.

It is unacceptable that we cannot help the homeless. I therefore ask the government, with this petition, to make permanent the SCPI program, which is due to end in March 2007.

The second petition concerns the organization of street workers and runs along the same lines. It asks the government to reinstate the SCPI program in order to help people who are homeless and need shelter.

[*English*]

AGE OF CONSENT

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a couple of petitions to present.

One petition is signed by a number of people from my riding who are asking me to table this petition in the House in support of raising the age of consent to 16.

AUTOMOBILE INDUSTRY

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have another petition signed by a couple of hundred people from across the country who want the government to revisit the whole question of our auto strategy and actually begin to deal with our auto industry in a way which indicates that the government appreciates the very important contribution it makes to our economy. The petitioners are calling on the government to act quickly and aggressively to develop an automotive trade policy that protects jobs and communities.

COPYRIGHT ACT

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to bring forward to the House today two petitions.

The first is signed by people from right across this country in regard to developing new copyright legislation that recognizes the careful balance between the rights of the creator and fair public use. Given that digital technologies have recently given copyright holders the ability to upset the traditional balance in the Copyright Act by preventing Canadians from accessing works that they should have fair access to, the petitioners are asking Parliament to ensure that users are recognized as interested parties in any future copyright decisions and to ensure that any material changes in copyright legislation preserve the concept of fair use and the rights of users to fairly access works.

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AUTOMOBILE INDUSTRY

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition I would like to bring forward today concerns the need for an auto policy in Canada, particularly the rise in concern over current free trade negotiations with Korea and what that will do to our domestic auto market, because we are very dependent in this country on our auto industry. There has been major bleed-off in this sector and we are not seeing any replacements for the lost jobs.

The petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to, first, cancel negotiations for this agreement with Korea, which would worsen the one-way flood of automotive products into our country, and second, to do as we in the New Democratic Party have called for some time, which is to create an automotive trade policy. Part of this would require Korea and other offshore markets to purchase an equivalent volume of finished autos from North America as a condition of its continued access to our market.

I am very pleased to present this to the House.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to present a petition from well over 100 individuals, many of them from southwestern Ontario in communities such as Windsor and London, which are being very hard hit by the lack of a strategy around auto policy in this country.

We have waited for a very long time, with many promises, but of course the result has been that we are losing auto manufacturing jobs throughout that region in devastating numbers. My most recent visit to the area underlined that with the thousands of jobs lost. The petitioners are calling for a cancellation of the negotiations for free trade with Korea, because this would preserve the one-way arrangement which currently is hurting our market as we cannot sell to Korea but their cars can come here. The petitioners are calling for a new auto policy for Canada so that we can actually enjoy a much more successful auto industry than we have been experiencing lately.

I am honoured to present this petition.

* * *

● (1010)

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Question No. 89 will be answered today.

[Text]

Question No. 89—**Mr. Charlie Angus:**

With regard to the Canadian Heritage program announced in December 2002 that allocated \$172.5 million in funding to establish and operate a new Aboriginal Languages and Cultures Centre: (a) what were the year-by-year funding totals to this program; (b) what was the status of this program when the current government came to power; (c) what funding changes have taken place since January 2006; (d) what, if any, future plans are there for this program; and (e) what initiatives is the government currently undertaking to help preserve Aboriginal languages?

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in response to (a), in December 2002, the Minister of Canadian Heritage announced that she would invest \$172.5 million over 10 years towards the preservation,

revitalization and promotion of aboriginal languages and cultures. A ministerial Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures was appointed in 2003 to make recommendations on priorities for this investment.

To date, \$12.5 million has been disbursed for the administration of the Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures, \$2.5 million, and for a two year extension of the current federal funding program, the aboriginal languages initiative, \$5 million in 2003-04 and \$5 million in 2004-05.

In response to (b), the program was in a holding pattern when the current government took office. Apart from the \$12.5 million, the initial allocation of resources had not been accessed. The previous government had no plan on how to spend the money. Between 2003 and 2005, the Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures consulted extensively with first nations, Inuit and Métis communities across Canada. The result of these consultations, and the collective knowledge of task force members themselves, culminated in the task force report "Towards a New Beginning", which was released in July 2005.

In response to (c), in March 2006, an additional \$5 million was committed to extend the aboriginal languages initiative for the 2006-07 fiscal year. This new money is permanent. The original \$160 million had been earmarked by a previous government. However, the implementation was not completed. As announced in 2002, the funds remaining from this commitment were to have supported the creation of an aboriginal languages and cultures centre, with a mandate to provide support for all aboriginal languages. The current government is not of the view that this approach is the most appropriate means of working toward the revitalization and preservation of first nation, Inuit, and Métis languages. The \$5 million in permanent funding will mean stable funding for aboriginal languages, while they are considered in the wider context of the new government's approach to meeting the needs of aboriginal people. Through the aboriginal languages initiative, aboriginal communities across Canada have access to funding in support of activities to revitalize their languages. In 2005-06, this initiative provided funding to over 300 community-based aboriginal languages projects.

In response to (d), the Government of Canada recognizes that the revitalization of aboriginal languages will require working in partnership with aboriginal people. Department of Canadian Heritage officials are currently discussing approaches to support aboriginal languages with first nations, Inuit and Métis individuals and organizations across the country.

In response to (e), Canadian Heritage invests approximately \$4 million per year through language accords with the three territorial governments. These accords fund community-based language activities and support for programs working towards language revitalization in the territories.

Support for aboriginal languages and cultures is also provided through the northern aboriginal broadcast program. This program enables 13 northern aboriginal broadcasting societies to produce and distribute radio and television programming in seventeen aboriginal languages that is reflective of aboriginal cultures, community issues, concerns and current affairs. These communications societies serve over 400 communities in the three territories and the northern portion of seven provinces.

The Government of Canada is taking other action to improve the quality of life of aboriginal women, children and families, including the recently signed tripartite agreement with British Columbia and the B.C. First Nations Education Steering Committee. This historic agreement will enable children to receive a better quality education, and one with a strong cultural component.

This recent agreement builds on broader education-based language promotion activities taking place across government. For children, aboriginal head start includes culture and language as one of six program components. This preschool language foundation is strengthened with support provided by the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada to first nations schools for language learning in the K-12 classroom and curriculum development.

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, through the cultural education centres program, supports 110 cultural centres which undertake work in communities across Canada that promote school-based language learning. The \$8.7 million annual investment leads to the development of curricula for first nation schools that is more culturally relevant to first nation and Inuit student populations and that enhances cultural environment and understanding within communities. The program also supports activities that contribute to increased knowledge and use of traditional languages, increased development of linguistic learning resources and culturally oriented educational curricula.

Together, these initiatives have enabled first nations, Inuit and Métis peoples to take steps to revitalize and promote their languages and cultures and will contribute to creating the conditions that enable them to participate fully in Canada's prosperity.

* * *

[English]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if Questions Nos. 106 and 108 could be made orders for returns, these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Deputy Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that Questions Nos. 106 and 108 be made orders for returns and that they be tabled immediately?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 106—**Ms. Dawn Black:**

With regard to the Canadian presence in Afghanistan: (a) what is the goal of the Canadian presence in Afghanistan; (b) what is the strategy employed by the government; (c) what are the tactics that are being used; (d) who is the enemy; (e)

Routine Proceedings

what is the operational centre of gravity of the enemy; (f) does the government have a political strategy to attain its goal; (g) is terrorism the greatest security threat that Canada faces; (h) does the government consider that Canada is at war; (i) what is the condition that the government would consider to be "civil war"; (j) what does the government deem to be the nature of counter-insurgency warfare and does this condition exist in Afghanistan; (k) what Canadian Forces (CF) manuals deal with counter-insurgency; (l) what are the current rules of engagement for the CF in Afghanistan; (m) what has been the change in rules of engagement since Canada left Operation Enduring Freedom; (n) is the government aware of the presence of foreign fighters in Afghanistan who help the Taliban; (o) if there are foreign fighters where do they come from on the whole; (p) what is the opinion of the government regarding the security of the Afghan border with Pakistan; (q) what is the opinion of the government regarding Pakistani cooperation in achieving the objectives of the mission; (r) does the government have an opinion as to when the goals of the Canadian presence will be achieved; (s) when was the decision to deploy a combat mission to Kandahar made by the government; (t) how well are CF capabilities matched to the conditions in the southern region of Afghanistan and to counter insurgency; (u) what is the size and configuration of task forces available for use in Afghanistan through to February 2009; (v) what has been the effect of increased training throughout the forces on the capability of these task forces; (w) how has the training of new recruits been effected by the extension of the mission until 2009; (x) does the CF use dogs in combat missions; (y) what are the protocols used in relation to dogs and civilians and detainees respectively; (z) would Canadian lawyers be allowed to contact and represent detainees while they are held by CF and, if not, what legal authority or doctrine would justify this refusal; (aa) is the arrangement concerning detainees of December 18, 2005, still the current policy of the Department of National Defence following the handover of command to NATO; (bb) what reconstruction projects are underway in Kandahar province under the supervision of the CF; (cc) are there any plans to increase the size of the Provincial Reconstruction Team before 2009; (dd) what is the government position with regard to support by the government of Pakistan, particularly the Directorate for Inter-Services Intelligence for the Taliban; (ee) what is the length and nature of extra training that is provided for CF personnel going to Afghanistan; (ff) what is the number of enemy captured since the CF arrived in Kandahar; and (gg) has the CF engaged Al Qaeda fighters since moving to Kandahar?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 108—**Ms. Dawn Black:**

With regard to the Canadian presence in Afghanistan: (a) what is the allotment of money set aside in the fiscal framework for the remainder of the mission; (b) how does the mission effect the fiscal framework; (c) what new weapons systems have been purchased, or will be purchased for the remainder of the mission; (d) was there a M777 howitzer purchased for the mission in Kandahar and, if so, what was the cost of the system; (e) does the Canadian Forces use the Excalibur ordinance system developed by Raytheon and, if so, what is the unit cost per shell of the Excalibur ordinance system; (f) what is the added cost associated with the deployment of a leopard tank squadron; and (g) what are the project names and budgets, itemized by project, for each foreign aid project that Canada is financing in Afghanistan?

(Return tabled)

[English]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Deputy Speaker: Is it agreed that the remaining questions be allowed to stand?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

*Business of Supply***GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—CANADIAN FORCES

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP) moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should immediately take the following steps to assist members and veterans of the Canadian Forces and their families:

1. amend Section 31 (1) of the Canadian Forces Superannuation Act so that second spouses of CF members and veterans have access to pension rights upon the death of the Canadian Forces member or veteran;
2. extend the Veterans Independence Program (VIP) to all widows of all veterans, regardless of the time of death of the veteran and regardless of whether the veteran was in receipt of VIP services prior to his or her death;
3. increase the Survivor's Pension Amount upon death of Canadian Forces retiree to 66% from the current amount of 50%;
4. eliminate the unfair reduction of Service Income Security Insurance Plan (SISIP) long term disability benefits from medically released members of the Canadian Forces; and
5. eliminate the deduction from annuity for retired and disabled CF members.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is indeed an honour and a pleasure to rise today in the House of Commons on behalf of our leader and our party from coast to coast to coast to have a full day of respectful discussion in this House. There may be some disagreement, but we will have a respectful discussion on veterans and their families. It has been a long time coming for the House to dedicate a whole day to the discussion of those brave men and women who served our country with great distinction, courage and pride over the many years that we have been a country.

I first want to give a brief background on why this is so important to me and to my colleagues within this party and, I am sure, to many colleagues in the House of Commons.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, I was born in Holland. My parents and oldest brother were liberated by the Canadian military and its allies, the Americans, the British and the Poles, during the liberation of the Netherlands in 1944-45 in World War II.

Shortly after that, my dad was liberated from a work detail camp and came across a Canadian soldier. That Canadian soldier could have been from anywhere in the country. My dad asked him, in his best English, "Why did you come over and help us? Why did Canada do so much to help us?" The young Canadian soldier said, with typical Canadian modesty, "Sir, we had a job to do". And he walked on.

In 1956, 11 years later, the Dutch government made the decision for the closure of the coal mines where my father had been working in the south of Holland in the province of Limburg over a four to five year period. The only answer in those days for thousands of people and their families was out-migration or, as we say in Dutch, "off you go", not to another part of the country but to another part of the world.

The choices we had were Rhodesia, New Zealand, Australia, the United States, and Canada. As my father said to my mother, remembering the military fellow from Canada he met many years before, if Canada has a military like that, imagine what kind of country they have.

So in 1956, at the age of nine months, I, with five brothers and sisters and my mum and dad, came through Pier 21 in Halifax on September 18, 1956. We immediately took a train and settled in the area near Vancouver, British Columbia.

My father taught me right from the get-go about the sacrifices made by Canadians and their allies and by their families who stayed home. It is indeed an honour on behalf of my late father and my mother, who is still with us, and my brothers and sisters and all citizens of the world who were liberated by the Canadians to bring this motion so effectively forward today in the House of Commons.

I encourage all members of Parliament to support the initiatives of this motion. If they have disagreements of any kind on the technicalities, that is fine. Let us bring it to a committee where we can discuss it further so we can improve the lives of veterans and their families.

Of course, the number one item that we wish to talk about briefly is what we call "the clause of marriage past 60". When we have the privilege of being married to someone for many years, that is a wonderful thing, but sometimes a spouse passes away or the marriage ends in divorce or whatever. If those individuals remarry at 58 or 59, when they pass on later their second spouse is entitled to their pension benefits, but if they remarry at age 60 or beyond, they and their children are not entitled to any benefits. That has to change.

Changing this is something that is supported unanimously by the Royal Canadian Legion, the Army, Navy and Air Force Veterans in Canada Association and the National Council of Veterans Associations. I would like to give a tip of the hat to Jack Frost of the Royal Canadian Legion, Mr. Lorne McCartney of the Army, Navy and Air Force Veterans Association, and Cliff Chadderton, a decorated war hero of World War II and a tireless fighter on behalf of all veterans and their families.

The other item is one that should seem very familiar to my Conservative colleagues because their leader, the Prime Minister, actually made this promise. It is the extension of VIP services for all widows and widowers of veterans, regardless of the time of a veteran's death.

Mr. Speaker, I do not know if you or the people who are listening have had a chance to see the Clint Eastwood movie called *Flags of our Fathers*. There is a very poignant scene at the beginning of the movie when an elderly war veteran is shaking in his bed, having a nightmare, and shouting out, "Where's Iggy, where's Iggy?" And here I do not mean the current candidate for the Liberal leadership. He is shouting for his friend, who was left on the beaches of Iwo Jima.

● (1015)

The person comforting that veteran is his wife who is elderly. She looks after him in the home and is the primary caregiver of this individual. When the veteran passes on we should not abandon or forget about the caregiver and the spouse who looked after our dedicated heroes.

Business of Supply

The extension to the VIP allows individuals to stay in their homes even longer, and that is caring for someone with respect and dignity. In the end, if we want to talk about fiscal arguments, it actually saves the government money. The least we can do is provide housekeeping and groundskeeping services for all veterans and their widows, regardless of the time of death of the individual.

We would also like to talk about the elimination of the SISIP LTD services, the service income security insurance plan, long term disability. When veterans receive this, there is actually a deduction from another form of income. We do not believe that disability payments for our veterans should be taxable. Those should be given to veterans for the service they have done for our country.

The other day the defence ombudsman came out with a report that was very damaging to the government. It basically said that for the Medak Pocket and those who served in Kuwait, veterans' medical records were missing, changed or not there at all. When military personnel serve their country, in sound spirit and body, they need to know that if they return with an injury, either physical or mental, that the government, and especially this Parliament, will look after their needs and the needs of their families. That is extremely important.

What I would like to focus on the most in terms of my discussion is the elimination of the deduction from annuity for retired and disabled veterans. In 1966, when the Canada pension plan was introduced, the pension programs of all federal and provincial public servants, with the exception of members of Parliament and Senators, were blended. They paid a portion of CPP and a portion of superannuation and when they reached the age of 65 they received their superannuation of, for argument's sake, \$2,500 a month from the Canadian Forces. They then would receive their Canada pension plan at age 65. However, the amount they received from CPP, which, for argument's sake, we will say was \$700, was deducted from their superannuation. We believe that needs to change.

The arguments we get from governments, the previous one and the current one, is that they never paid enough into their programs to qualify for both. That is simply not correct. The reality is that these veterans in 1966 and 1967 never had an opportunity to even debate this. This was done without consultation with them. What cost do we put into people who serve our country with courage and distinction?

Veterans pay into the superannuation, the Canada pension plan, and the EI program and yet at age 65 they end up collecting just one. We are saying that if at age 65 they can collect their superannuation and a reduced CPP, because everyone can collect CPP at age 60, they already lose one-third of their CPP benefits. Therefore, if their superannuation pension is, for argument's sake, \$2,500 a month and their Canada pension is \$500 a month, they get to collect them both. There is no deduction. The deduction happens at age 65 which is when they need the money the most. These are elderly men and women. They do not need to be clawed back as we say or the official term is a benefit reduction.

I personally want to thank the following three individuals from my riding who came to me a year and a half ago on this very same issue: Mr. John Labelle, Mr. Roger Boutin and Mr. Mel Pittman, three ex-servicemen who served their country with distinction. They asked me if there was anything that could be done to raise this issue in the House of Commons, such as introducing a private member's bill or

something to address this issue. We have done that in the form of Bill C-221. Their website has over 82,000 individual names of ex-servicemen and current service personnel, who are serving or have served, who support the initiative.

• (1020)

We would also like to see this to eventually include all RCMP officers who not only serve our country mostly at home but also overseas sometimes. They serve with great pride and distinction and we should not ignore the services of our RCMP officers as well.

The Army, Navy and Air Force Veterans in Canada Association and the Royal Canadian Legion have supported this endorsement. We are looking at hundreds of thousands of individuals across the country who want this issue revisited. They want it addressed and they would like it done now.

On a more personal note, a good friend of mine, Mr. Reid Myers of Fall River, Nova Scotia, was a liberator of the Netherlands. He is now 83 or 84 years old and his wonderful, beautiful wife, Marion, is his prime caregiver. I would like everyone in the House to look at veterans, or maybe someone in their own family, in terms of their sunset years, as we call them, their golden years, look at them straight in the face and say that we cannot do any of these things.

We should ask these veterans about their younger days when they joined the services and went overseas to fight for peace, freedom and democracy. Did they question how much it cost? Did they question the technicalities of legislation in the House of Commons? No, they did not. At that time they went overseas for King and country. They knew they had a job to do and they did it voluntarily. These veterans are our greatest heroes and Canada's greatest volunteers.

As Rick Mercer once said, if we are going to take the very best of Canada and move them into the worst parts of the world in war and conflict, we might as well give them the gold card. It is the least that they deserve.

As well, when they come back and they suffer through various disabilities, mental challenges or old age, we should be looking after them. That is the time to ensure that all services and all support programs adequately meet their needs, and there should not be any hesitation on that. We have the fiscal capacity to do it and it is time to restore economic dignity to the men and women of our services and the men and women who look after our brave veterans. We believe that is the minimum we should do.

We will all soon be gathered at cenotaphs and monuments around the country and, in many cases, around the world. At the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month we will be bowing our heads in respect, honour and dignity of those who have passed on. Over 117,000 Canadian men and women, who are buried in over 70 countries around the world, have paid the ultimate sacrifice. We call that day Remembrance Day.

Business of Supply

I remind the House of the parents of Nathan Smith, of Braun Woodfield and of Paul Davis. Those are just 3 of the recent 42 Canadian service personnel who were killed in Afghanistan. For their parents, their brothers and sisters, their other relatives and their friends and family, Remembrance Day is every day for them. They live with that every day and the least we can do in the House of Commons for those young men and women who gave us the greatest gift of all, an unfinished life, is to give them the respect and dignity they deserve for their ultimate sacrifice. Their sacrifice allowed us, you and I, Mr. Speaker, and my colleagues in the House of Commons, to come here in a democratic way and discuss our differences in a parliamentary fashion .

Our freedoms do not come cheap. These brave young men and women know that. They have the ultimate liability when they sign on the dotted line. We, as members of Parliament, should have the ultimate responsibility and not just to the time when they wear the uniform. Our responsibility carries on all the way through their natural lives, including that of their families.

● (1025)

I will give the previous government and the current government credit, along with other members of Parliament from all parties who have passed along the new veterans charter that was enacted in April of this year. The charter will go a long way in addressing some of the issues that some veterans have, along with their families.

However, as in all legislation, it does not go far enough. The five points that my party has addressed today would go a long way in addressing many of the issues that have been brought to the attention of all members in the House of Commons. I do not believe there is one member of Parliament in the House who has not had a veteran, a current armed forces personnel, the spouse of a veteran or the children of a veteran come to them with an issue regarding the military or veterans affairs.

Everyone in the House supports the troops. What the motion asks is that we support them even longer, right to the end of their natural lives, including that of their spouses. If we do this, we will be truly saying on Remembrance Day that we honour them and we respect them. We know for sure that this House can work in a cooperative fashion in doing something that we should all agree with without hesitation.

The fact is that these are our bravest Canadians. They are the ones who lost their lives so we could live in peace, freedom and democracy. Just maybe there is a little kid somewhere in another country who looks up at a Canadian soldier and says the same thing that my father said in 1944, "if they have a military like that, imagine what kind of country they come from".

This is the type of image that our Canadian military men and women have around the world. This is the image of our veterans when we see them standing in the cold at the cenotaphs and memorials on November 11 from coast to coast or when we see them in the hospitals if they have become shut-ins and cannot make it out.

I know many veterans who stay at home, put their medals on and then watch the ceremonies that take place here in Ottawa on TV. We all know that the men and women of the military and the veterans

wear their medals with pride and distinction. They wear their medals because of service to their country but, most important, they wear them because of their friends and comrades who never had the chance to wear theirs.

When we see these veterans and the current armed forces personnel and their families, we should shake their hands, give them a hug and say thanks or merci beaucoup for the services they have provided.

We know all too well what happened to many veterans when they returned from the wars. We know exactly what happened with our aboriginal veterans. Many of them were not treated with the greatest of respect. We know that these things are slowly changing but we are hoping this particular resolution will move things even faster with the cooperation of members of the House of Commons.

I may be a little emotional on this but it is because everything I have, everything my parents were able to do and everything my brothers and sisters have has been because we moved to Canada. Canada gave us everything. God has blessed my mom and dad and my family and they have blessed this country. Canada has been blessed with Canadian soldiers, Canadian airmen, Canadian merchant mariners and Canadian navy personnel and their families who gave us and still give us the greatest gift of all. The least we can do in this House of Commons is to honour them and look after them in their final years. We need to ensure that when they become injured in any capacity that Canada will look after them. We must not argue about technicalities, legislative concerns or whatever. This is the minimum we can do.

I know some members in this House have served in our services and for that I respect and honour them. I know everyone in this House of Commons will stand proud with our veterans on Remembrance Day but we must remember that for them Remembrance Day is every day.

The NDP is proud of the five points that we have filed in our motion today on behalf of all veterans and service personnel. We believe it is fair, respectful and balanced. As we say in various cenotaphs throughout the country on November 11, at the going down of the sun we will remember them.

● (1030)

Hon. Stephen Owen (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise to first of all congratulate the hon. member for his eloquent, emotional and immensely important speech supporting these resolutions. As he has mentioned, he expects all members of this House to support these resolutions, and I for one will stand to support them. I would like to make a brief comment and then I have a question for the hon. member.

Business of Supply

The hon. member came to Canada as an immigrant. Many countries sent soldiers and armed forces to liberate Europe. My father was one of those who went over. As a result of those people who fought for freedom in Europe and in the Pacific, I am one of the first generation of Canadian-born people who have never had to face war in that sense. We have had, of course, many military and peacebuilding missions, but we and our children have never been faced with the concept of a world war where, either by conscription or simply by national imperative, we have had to march off to war other than by personal choice and commitment.

While I heartily endorse these resolutions, I wonder if we can use them as a bridge to have a broader appreciation in Canada of people who are not in the armed services, but who are also spreading issues of peace and poverty alleviation around the world, whether they are working for things like CPAR, Canadian Physicians for Aid and Relief, CUSO, World University Service of Canada or World Vision Canada.

Canada's presence in the world is not simply our armed forces, although they provide perhaps the most visible example of that sacrifice. There are many Canadian humanitarian workers going abroad to make the world a better place and to provide a better quality of life, in fact any quality of life for people in many areas of despair around the world. Would the member care to comment?

• (1035)

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Speaker, yes, it was not just military personnel. There were also a lot of civil servants and other people in other aspects of our society who served as well with great distinction. I remember quite clearly that we lost one of our federal public servants who served over in Afghanistan. We need to remember all of them as well.

On this issue, it is quite clear to us on this side, and I believe for others, that now is the time to reflect upon the great and valiant efforts of our Canadian men and women in the military. Now is the time to ensure that we do not get another ombudsman's report like we did the other day. Now is the time to ensure that when young Canadian men and women sign up for the military, if they become injured, either physically or mentally in any way, they know that they and their families will be well looked after by this country.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to greet you and wish you a good day.

My colleague opposite sits with me on the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. We are currently looking at creating the position of ombudsman for veterans.

I would like my colleague to say what he thinks of that possibility. I would also like to know whether the future ombudsman would report I see to the House or to the Minister of Veterans Affairs.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague from the Bloc Québécois. He is a very respected member of our Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs and I thank him for the question.

Yes, the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs is studying the possibility of the installation of an ombudsman for veterans affairs. I want to thank the hon. member from Kamloops who raised this issue several years ago and has brought it very succinctly not only to the House but to the committee as well.

We believe, and I believe, that there is consent within the veterans affairs committee that an ombudsman for veterans affairs is necessary. An ombudsman for veterans affairs would play a very important role. We believe that the ombudsman for veterans affairs should report to Parliament. That way we will have a very concise and succinct report that we can all deal with at the same time.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for bringing this motion before the House today. Since I became a member of Parliament we have discussed all manner of issues from the profound to the tawdry in this House, but this is the first time I can remember that we will spend a day dealing with issues concerning veterans.

As members of Parliament we owe our veterans, past and present, a great obligation. Yet, it seems that the glaciers are moving quicker than we are in terms of dealing with their needs and the needs of widows, and in dealing with the clawbacks to their pensions and the taxing of their disability payments.

I have question for the member. What do we need to do in the House of Commons to show a clear commitment to our veterans right across this country? What are the steps that need to be taken?

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Speaker, we chose one particular item and that was survivor benefits. Right now a survivor only gets 50% of the veteran's pension. In some cases these survivors are forced into poverty. That is unacceptable. The Royal Canadian Legion indicated that the amount of the benefit should be at least two-thirds of the pension amount, or 66%, and we believe that as well so their families do not slip into poverty.

This seems rather ironic. We ask our veterans to do so much for us. We ask their spouses and families to look after them. Yet, when those same veterans pass on, we start taking money away from their families and they slip into poverty. Sometimes they have to rely on other services for support. That is unacceptable.

We could have included at least 30 or 40 other issues dealing with veterans in this particular motion. We chose these five because we believe they are important and affordable. We believe that the government, with the cooperation of the other political parties, will move on this agenda very quickly. We should be able to see many of these items in the next upcoming budget.

• (1040)

Mrs. Betty Hinton (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my first duty in responding to the hon. member is to thank him because we share a passion for veterans. The Government of Canada deeply appreciates the opportunity to share information about the important work that is being done on behalf of Canada's veterans and serving members.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to inform you that I will be splitting my time with the member for South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale.

Business of Supply

Our history books proudly recount the generations of brave men and women who have risked life and limb, both at home and abroad, to safeguard freedom, democracy and the rule of law.

Today, as the world continues to look to Canada for leadership and courage against oppression, we turn to our Canadian Forces, the best-trained soldiers in the world, and rely on their discipline and expertise to carry on Canada's proud military tradition.

In a very real and powerful sense, each and every member of this House owes veterans a debt of gratitude. For without their sacrifices and achievements, would we have the right to come together today to debate issues that hold importance to all Canadians?

In raising this motion for discussion, I cannot help but think that a great tribute has been made to the remarkable success of the veterans independence program.

VIP, as it is commonly known, is one of the most innovative and popular programs offered by Veterans Affairs Canada. By the way, Canada is the only country in the world that has a veterans independence program. We are very proud of this program.

As many will know, the goal of VIP is to help veterans remain healthy and independent in their own homes and communities for as long as possible. This is a worthy and noble goal.

Like most members of this House, I have the privilege of representing many veterans who value their independence. Many have lived in their communities most of their lives. They have friends who visit them, maybe family close by, and precious memories to share. They expect and deserve a high quality of life in their later years. VIP helps make this possible.

Since being introduced in 1981, the program has grown in both stature and numbers of clients. In fact, it is now available to more clients than ever before.

Today, about 94,500 Canadians across the country receive VIP. About 70,500 are veterans. This includes war service veterans and younger Canadian Forces veterans. Another 24,000 primary caregivers benefit from the program. Caregivers are provided with housekeeping and/or groundskeeping services, depending on what the veteran was receiving at the time of death. These programs are available for as long as they are needed.

I do not know how one measures the real value of independence, but in dollars and cents, the cost to provide VIP to these thousands of Canadians is \$270 million a year. It is an investment we are happy to make. For example, veterans who qualify for the program may receive home care, housekeeping, groundskeeping, meals on wheels and home adaptations, among other things. The exact services depend on the veteran's needs.

In fact, one of the most unique things about VIP is that it offers the customized plan for each client based on a needs assessment. This assessment is done with support from Veterans Affairs staff and is self-managed by recipients in cooperation with provincial and regional health authorities.

Today, the program has become a model for home care, both in Canada and throughout the world. It is applauded for its ability to help senior citizens live independent lives in their homes and their

communities until long term care becomes an absolute necessity. Its goal is achieving nothing less than healthy living within the community, an emphasis that was all but unique in North America in 1981 when the program began.

In addition to VIP, Veterans Affairs provides a wide range of support to veterans. If any veterans, or their primary caregivers, feel that they have a need that is not being met and for which they are eligible, we will work with them to assist them to receive the care they need.

• (1045)

The government remains committed to ensuring its programs and services meet the changing needs of its clientele. In its continuing effort to achieve this goal, Veterans Affairs is currently conducting a comprehensive review of its health care programs and services. This review will include a thorough examination of access to VIP services. The impact of the review will undoubtedly lead to a transformation no less profound than the one we have achieved through the consultations and planning that brought us the new veterans charter.

Let me be clear. Canada's government is committed to veterans and their families. The government stands by our military. Our record of achievement speaks for itself.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the speech of my hon. colleague, the parliamentary secretary for veterans affairs, was very poignant and well thought out speech.

She has said one thing on which I would like further clarification. She has talked about the eligibility for those who have VIP now. Is the government contemplating an enhancement to the VIP program so all spouses of deceased veterans would be eligible for VIP, regardless of the time of death?

Right now it goes to 1981, but others have passed on before that time. Will the government contemplate changes to the VIP services to include more widows and widowers of deceased veterans?

Mrs. Betty Hinton: The short answer, Mr. Speaker, is yes. We are always looking to improve the services we can give to veterans. Veterans built our country and they built its reputation. They are known worldwide for being freedom fighters, defenders of the weak. Those are all things of which we as Canadians are very proud.

I had some difficulty when the hon. member was speaking earlier. I know how deeply he feels about veterans. When he talks about his roots, about how his family came here and what it means to him, he gets emotionally charged as do I.

Business of Supply

When we stand on November 11 with a veteran, there is no greater honour. These are people who put it all on the line for the things we take for granted in our country every day, such as the freedom to speak our minds and say whatever we want, the freedom to do exactly what we are doing in the House today, debating an issue that is important to all Canadians.

If it is any assurance at all to the hon. member, I have not changed one iota about my dedication to veterans. The minister has not changed one iota about his dedication to veterans. And the Prime Minister is probably the biggest cheerleader that veterans could ever have.

We will make a difference in the lives of veterans. After 13 years of inaction, we will correct the problem.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the parliamentary secretary for her active and enthusiastic support for our veterans, which I think all members in this place share.

On a specific matter, the third item within the motion before the House right now refers to the survivors' pension amounts, to increase it to 66% from the current 50%. Has the government considered the motion in regard to that specific item? Is it a matter which the government is prepared to specifically support?

• (1050)

Mrs. Betty Hinton: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member has not been a part of either the defence committee or the veterans affairs committee, this could be a bit confusing. Of the five items that are mentioned, only one is covered under Veterans Affairs. The other four are all defence issues, and my colleague will speak to that a little later on today.

We have a long row to hoe. One of the biggest problems I hear, and I am sure the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore also hears this, is the access to the VIP program and the problems that veterans have run into over the years.

We are attempting, at this point in time as a new government, to correct a lot of those problems. The Liberals stacked the Veterans Review and Appeal Board with friends and cronies. The former executive assistant to the former prime minister and MP for LaSalle—Émard, Denise Tremblay, was appointed to a five year terms. In fact, a total of nine Liberal politicians or their assistants were on the board when we took office. That was 50% of the serving members.

We believe very firmly that if individuals are to sit on the Veterans Appeal Board, one needs to have the right skill set. The skill set that is required to listen to the appeals of veterans is not who they know politically; it is what they know about veterans issues. It is having served our country and knowing what the problems are after they have come out of service. It is about medical issues, somebody with some medical background who can actually understand what post-traumatic stress syndrome is all about.

We are attempting to do this, but we have to do it slowly. I can tell the member opposite and the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore that sometimes it feels like running through mud up to our knees, but we are making progress. I do not care how long I have to run through this mud, we will fix the problems that veterans in our country face and we will make this the very best place in the entire world to live if

one is a veteran. We need to show them every day how much we care, and we are attempting to do exactly that.

Mr. Russ Hiebert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak to the issue of benefits for our Canadian Forces members and veterans. This issue is very important to me because I believe that as Canadians we all owe a great deal to our men and women in uniform.

• (1055)

[*Translation*]

Our government is firmly committed to ensuring that the people who sacrificed so much receive appropriate compensation and care.

[*English*]

Let there be no doubt that the government will ensure their pension plan, the Canadian Forces Superannuation Act, fulfills their needs and the needs of their families.

Canadian Forces men and women have more than demanding careers. They undergo significant stress. The jobs are dangerous. The physical demands are great. They deal with long separations from their homes and families.

The pension plan developed for our men and women in uniform reflects the reality of their jobs. It acknowledges the service that Canadian Forces members provide. The fact is military careers, robust careers lasting decades, can end while members are still relatively young. We do not want our veterans worrying about the future of their spouses or their children.

This is an excellent pension plan with many features that average Canadians do not have access to within their own pension plans. The plan contains a solid basic pension formula, generous early retirement provisions, benefits payable to survivors, spouses and children, and it is fully indexed to the cost of living.

In this motion, my hon. colleague wants the Canadian Forces Superannuation Act to be amended to allow second spouses of Canadian Forces veterans to access pension rights upon the death of a Canadian Forces member or veteran. We are examining how we can best meet the needs of all Canadians. We need to take into consideration several critical factors, including cost, precedence and existing provisions.

We need, for example, to consider what the typical Canadian private pension plan provides. I feel, perhaps, the hon. member may have overlooked the act's comparatively generous terms. Most private pension plans do not make significant allowances for their members' spouses. If a person marries after his or her job comes to an end, in the eyes of a typical pension plan, that person's spouse or children just do not exist. They get nothing.

Business of Supply

The idea is that an employer's responsibility under a pension plan should be to the family that existed during the employee's career. Average Canadians, working for typical Canadian companies, cannot claim benefits for families they acquired 15 years or 20 years after they have left their jobs. Still, we recognize that Canadian Forces members are not average Canadians and their work is far from average.

The job descriptions of Canadian Forces members include sacrifice and risk. It takes a lot out of their youth. Because of that, Canadian Forces members tend to retire at a much earlier age than average. The provisions of the pension plan are responsive, no matter what age a Canadian Forces member retires. We have made generous allowances.

Normal benefits are payable to surviving spouses and any children provided that the marriage takes place before the age of 60. If members marry after the age of 60, they may still ensure their survivors receive a benefit. They may accept a small reduction in their own benefits to make this happen. This choice to provide for survivors is not available to the majority of Canadian pension plans.

Even so, I note that Conservative MPs have recognized this matter as an issue worthy of deeper consideration. For instance, our former colleague Werner Schmidt, the member for Kelowna, introduced a private member's bill, Bill C-362, in the previous Parliament. Mr. Schmidt felt that the decision of some forces members to marry later in life should not penalize their spouses in terms of receiving benefits. He felt that the age 60 cutoff was arbitrary.

Indeed, his private member's bill was inspired by the real life case of a veteran and constituent of Mr. Schmidt, Gordon Read. Mr. Read's story is compelling. Mr. Read served 24 years in the RCAF and fought to defend civilization in the Battle of Britain.

That private member's bill was taken up in this Parliament by another Conservative colleague, the member for Prince Edward—Hastings. His bill, Bill C-202, also seeks to eliminate section 31-1 of the Canadian Forces Superannuation Act to remove what many believe is an injustice in the system. However, before we can act we must pause to consider what we are doing, how we should be doing it and how much it is going to cost.

[*Translation*]

This new government has demonstrated its strong, unwavering support for our soldiers, sailors and aviators.

We have nothing but respect and gratitude for our veterans. We want to meet their needs and their families' needs. Our responsibility to Canadians is to consider the possible repercussions before making changes to an exhaustive and extremely generous plan.

[*English*]

The government is not ignoring this issue. There is a certain reality to the work that our Canadian Forces members do, one that earns them special consideration. The poppies that we wear every year, the yellow ribbons on the backs of our cars, the rallies that have been held across the country have tremendous significance.

During this year, as parliamentary secretary, I have learned a lot about our men and women in uniform and what they endure and what their families sacrifice. I have had the opportunity to cross the

country and visit various military bases. The most vivid memory I have, from all my base visits, was my visit to Canadian Forces Base Edmonton when some of our troops returned home from Afghanistan. I saw smiles and tears that expressed a wealth of emotion. I watched as families were reunited. I actually saw fathers meeting their newborn children for the very first time. What struck me was the absolutely unwavering and unconditional support those families gave to our troops. I will not forget that.

If the very families who suffer heartbreak when troops are deployed can support our men and women in uniform with such determination, then we should certainly be able to do so. We have heard the concerns voiced by our veterans, by Canadian Forces members and by their families. We know the sacrifices they have made, and we are listening to their concerns.

Our government is considering this issue carefully. We want to help our families. We are reviewing the alternatives to find the best options and then we will act.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, obviously this motion will go to a vote. Sometimes governments follow through on motions and sometimes they do not. It is one of the problems we have with our current democracy where the spirit and the will of the House of Commons vote on an issue, such as this series of veterans improvements, some that affect the parliamentary secretary's department in particular, is not respected.

Will the government respect this vote? Will it ensure the proper legislation and action immediately takes place? This chamber is protected by our veterans. It is one that has been created through a democracy with a history of vibrancy. Is the member going to live up to the vote on this issue?

• (1100)

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned in my speech, the government is closely considering this issue. We are looking at ways that we can act. We recognize the sacrifices made by our men and women in uniform.

There is no doubt that we will do everything we can to support our troops and their families when the time comes. I would encourage the member opposite to recognize that some responsibilities need to take place when in government. We have to look at all the considerations, the precedents and the costs. It is not simply a matter of emotion. If it were, we would all act without hesitation. However, the government has to act with responsibility, and we will do exactly that.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary said a couple of things which frustrates the veterans, such as when he compares their pension plans to the private sector pension plans. I remind him, very respectfully, that these veterans serve the government and the people of Canada. They do not serve private corporations.

When it comes to the deduction of annuity, I will give him a quick example of one. If military personnel or RCMP officers get severely injured and they can no longer work in their line of duty, they will exit the service with a pension. If their injuries are so severe that they can no longer work again, period, they are advised to apply for Canadian Pension disability.

Business of Supply

For argument's sake, say the individuals get \$3,000 a month from their pensions. They apply for Canada Pension disability, say at the age of 41, and if their injuries are so severe and they can no longer work again, there is a chance they will receive Canada Pension disability. However, the CPP amount they receive is deducted immediately from their superannuation. It does not matter whether they walk out or get carried out of the RCMP or military. It is simply not fair.

Will the member at least say today in the House that the government would be seriously willing to look at this issue in the near future?

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Mr. Speaker, as I tried to explain in my short speech, the pension plan that the members benefit from does in fact reflect the dangerous circumstances of their work. It has a solid basic pension formula that has very generous retirement provisions and benefits payable to survivors that are indexed to inflation.

We all want to do more for our forces, for our men and women in uniform and their families. That is why this government is taking the time to look at this issue. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs has been working on this file for many years. She has been to my constituency and has talked to the many veterans there about how we can improve things.

The member should have no doubt that we will do everything we can within our means to support our men and women in uniform.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask our colleague a question. To begin with, I recognize that the charter brings significant improvements to the lives of our veterans. However, the charter says nothing about one major concern: it does nothing about veterans or former military personnel.

The problems at Canadian Forces Base Gagetown with agent orange and agent purple; or the people, the young people with post-traumatic stress syndrome—these are not mentioned in this charter and there is no plan to improve their situation.

I would like to ask my colleague who just spoke whether the government is planning to help these young people by modifying our basic charter, which is pretty good despite all this.

•(1105)

[*English*]

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Mr. Speaker, to answer the question most directly, I can tell the member that the Minister of Veterans Affairs is working very actively on this file to address the needs of the people at Gagetown and those who served there in the past. The member can rest assured that we will get to the bottom of this as quickly as we can.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise in the House today and join in this very important debate. It is a very timely debate as we quickly approach Veterans' Week here in Canada.

I am going to take a bit of a risk at first and share a quote with the House, not a Canadian quote but a quote from a past U.S. president. The reason I use it is more for the fact that it frames the debate we

are having today. It was George Washington who said that a nation will be measured by how in fact that nation shows honour and respect for its war veterans. I think that is what today's debate is about. It is about respect for those who have served the country, those who have answered the call. We enter into that debate today.

As well, I want to recognize my colleague from Sackville—Eastern Shore and the work that he has done with veterans over a number of years and certainly throughout his time here in the House. I listened with great interest to his presentation to the House earlier when he presented the motion and I fully recognize the emotion expressed during his remarks.

My colleague from Sydney—Victoria is another member of this House who stands on a very similar piece of real estate, whose parents also came from Holland in very similar circumstances, so I know that story very well. As Canadians, many of us understand the sacrifice and understand what a tremendous country we live in, but for those who were impacted, who started their lives here and were provided with opportunity in this great country as a result of Canadian Forces sacrificing so much on foreign soil, it even goes deeper into the understanding of those who have actually lived with it and whose parents have been the benefactors of those actions.

I think the House is united on one thing and that is respect for all veterans and all those who served our country. Last year here in this House, the former minister of defence, in his comments prior to Remembrance Day services, was very poignant in reflecting on the passing of Ernest “Smokey” Smith, Canada's last Victoria Cross recipient. It was very emotional and it was a very important and significant benchmark for veterans in this country. What was identified there certainly came home to me. In my hometown of Glace Bay, we had a Victoria Cross recipient as well, John Bernard Croak. Our Legion in Glace Bay carries the name of John Bernard Croak.

In his comments to the chamber, the former minister spoke about the common thread of “service and heroism” shared by each and every member who steps forward to represent their country and to serve in the Canadian Forces. They share that common thread, and I think each of us here in this chamber can identify those veterans in our communities who, as young people, probably went through the same emotions as Smokey Smith and John Bernard Croak and other heroes. As for what motivated them to answer that call, I think that thread runs through each and every community and every municipality in this country.

•(1110)

The great Canadian tradition of service and heroism continues to be emulated by many young soldiers, the young men and women who continue to serve in our armed forces. There is an inordinate number of people from eastern Canada and the Atlantic provinces who answer that call. We have a disproportionate number of Atlantic Canadians who enlist in the Canadian Forces. I think it goes well beyond economic need. I think it is a true sense of duty, a true sense of wanting to serve this great nation. Certainly Canadians from the Atlantic provinces respond very willingly.

Business of Supply

If any member were to read any management book or any coaching book, it would be recognized that what is a prime motivator is neither fame nor fortune. It is not money. It is respect. This is what Bill C-221 is about. That is what today's motion is about. It is about respect. It is about respect for our veterans who have served this great nation.

The NDP motion itself is so broad and far-reaching that we could have a day of debate on each aspect of the motion. A number of these aspects are very complex and impact on other issues. The pension issues are very involved and complex.

However, I was buoyed by my conversations with the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore in that the intent of the motion today is to make sure that these issues are brought forward and put in front of the government for further study, and to make sure that if recommendations are made, they are acted on. It is important that the issues do not die, do not slip onto the back burner. The issues raised in the motion are important to our veterans and to Canadians. Through this motion and the debate in the House today, these issues will be brought forward.

I want to look at each aspect of the motion. I will jump the queue and look at the second point first because it is an issue that is close and personal to me in light of the fact that a champion of the veterans independence program is a constituent of mine. Many members of the House know Joyce Carter's name. I have spoken of Joyce's work and her commitment to the extension of VIP benefits to many Canadians.

As the member said, what we want to see when our veterans retire and get on in years is that they are able to live their lives in comfort and dignity. That really is the essence of the veterans independence program. It allows for some aspects of home care and maintenance, some transportation needs, nutritional services and health support services. Those are the aspects of the VIP that are essential to our veterans.

During the last election campaign, the current Prime Minister, who was then leader of the opposition, went on record to say—and it was part of the Conservative campaign platform—that the veterans independence program would be extended to all veterans of all wars, to Korean veterans, and their spouses, and that there would be a full and immediate extension to cover all these veterans. I want to quote that letter to make sure that it is on the record.

Here is what the Prime Minister said in a piece of correspondence that went to Joyce Carter, this lady from St. Peters in my constituency:

—a Conservative government would immediately—

Let me repeat those words so that all members know:

—a Conservative government would immediately extend Veterans Independence Program services to widows of all Second World War and Korean War veterans regardless of when the veteran died...

That is in writing. That letter was received by Joyce Carter from the member's office. This is something that we had in testimony the other day from veterans from the Korean war. They are advocating this. The Canadian Legion is advocating this. Certainly this is something that we would hope the government will move on. We hope the government will honour its commitment to those veterans.

The government extended the promise and put forward the promise and we would hope that the government will do this and do it immediately.

• (1115)

The second aspect would be to amend section 31(1) of the Canadian Forces Superannuation Act so that the second spouses of Canadian Forces members and veterans have access to pension rights upon the death of Canadian Forces members or veterans.

This is typically referred to as the “gold diggers clause”. Certainly, it is one that has been discussed on a number of occasions. In past governments, concerns were raised about it. However, I think we are being somewhat hypocritical if we do not support this provision in the motion because MPs or other civil servants are not treated the same as the veterans in this particular situation. We have to weigh that into our decision and ensure that we discuss this important aspect.

An important other aspect to this particular issue, as well, is that it does not affect a whole lot of people. According to DND records, there are only about 141 retirees who have made the choice to remarry and reduce their own monthly pensions so that their spouses can get survivor allowances. So, it is not a great deal of money to the treasury, but it seems to be a great injustice.

I know some throw around the Anna Nicole Smith aspect and ask about what happens if a 92-year-old veteran marries an 18-year-old and we have to pay. All the more power to him if a 92-year-old veteran can marry an 18-year-old; he has something going for him. However, I do not think we can dismiss this aspect of the motion by citing those types of examples. This motion will allow it to come back to committee, so that this can be discussed and we can hang realistic numbers off it and then make the decision from there.

As things change in the military and as the demands on our military change, over the last number of years especially, we are seeing a greater responsibility and a different type of forces. However, in this particular case, when we are looking at the change warranted through this motion, I want to bring to the attention of members a court case that is being waged by Reg Warkentin and his lawyer David Baker. They are arguing that the provision contravenes the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Now, this was being pursued under the court challenges program. We know that the court challenges program was just cut and taken away in the last round of cuts made by this government, so probably this court challenge will die, which is truly unfortunate. Nonetheless, it is an important aspect of this motion. Hopefully, each member, when they come to vote on this motion, will entertain this somewhat of an injustice.

I want to go on record with regard to the fifth portion of the motion which deals with the elimination of the deduction from annuity for retired and disabled Canadian Forces members and the clawback. We would need a roomful of actuaries and pension specialists. We can try to boil it down into some simplistic terms, but I do not think it is that simplistic.

Business of Supply

• (1120)

We have been understanding for a number of years now that there is an integration between the two programs, the Canadian Forces Superannuation Act and the CPP, and in fact there is not a clawback.

Hopefully, this will come out over the course of the debate today to indicate to me why that is not so. I recognize that there is a difference. It appears in some cases that the benefit of the Canadian Forces Superannuation Act combined with the CPP benefit is slightly less than the Canadian Forces Superannuation Act benefit for the veteran after he became eligible for CPP. Hopefully, that will come out in the debate today.

There are aspects of this motion that make a great deal of sense. I know that we are united in the House in our support for veterans, and what we should be doing and what we can be doing. I know the parliamentary secretary has long been a hard-working and passionate advocate for veterans issues.

Hopefully, in supporting the motion this will further enable a committee and the government to take greater strides, and provide greater support for our veterans and certainly give them the respect and support that they so greatly warrant.

Mrs. Betty Hinton (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the debate. I would like to correct the record since the hon. member wants to put things on the record. The letter that he referred to was written and signed by a staff member in the official opposition office, not the current Prime Minister. That does not make it any less valid. We are moving forward on those promises that were made.

With regard to Mrs. Carter, I know the member opposite has been in this riding for quite a long while and she has been his constituent for quite a long while. I am wondering if the member would care to talk about the fact that when he was the parliamentary secretary to the then prime minister, he had the ear of the then prime minister but did not seem to be able to make any kind of change in this matter.

The member mentioned Smokey Smith. I have had the privilege of meeting Smokey Smith and a number of other wonderful veterans. As I have said so often before, there is really nothing that can compare to walking through history with those who created it. It is something I will take to my death. I will never forget that experience.

Another thing I would also like to share is the tombstone that I read. I have been to Dieppe, I have been to the Aboriginal Spiritual Journey, and I have been to the Italian campaign. This particular tombstone is another thing that will never leave my memory. The inscription was simple. It said: "To the world he was only one, to us he was the only one", and it was signed by the parents of this young soldier who died far too early in life. I think he was 17.

I would like to give the opportunity then to the member opposite to perhaps reflect on the fact that in the 1995 federal budget, the Liberals actually cut funding to veterans. Among the cuts was the elimination of thousands of allied veterans from federal benefits and they charged veterans \$5 to take a cab ride.

Under the Liberals, veterans found it harder to qualify for benefits after being forced to battle the government for years. I can speak from personal experience on that. I dealt with a veteran in my own riding who had tried for more than a dozen years to get what he had earned from his own government and he could not get it.

The Liberals also considered trimming 23,000 widows from the VIP. The only reason they did not do it was because the Conservative Party, which was then the official opposition, made life so uncomfortable they did not dare. I await the response from the member opposite.

• (1125)

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Speaker, as the parliamentary secretary said, cuts were made in 1995 in a number of different veterans programs and not just exclusively to veterans but on a broad range.

I will give a short history lesson. They were made for financial responsibility. We had to right this financial house. The country was off the rails with spending. There was \$48 billion more each year being spent than was brought into the federal coffers. Cuts were made in health care, defence and transportation. Every aspect of what we were doing as a federal government were cut and Canadians sacrificed. Yes, Canadian veterans also sacrificed.

However, what the member will understand was that the men who fought and died for this country would have been embarrassed with the way that the country was being run, on a credit card. They know that tough decisions had to be made and tough decisions were made in 1995, but once that financial house was righted, once the ship was righted, then investments were made back into health care. The money was put back into the VIP. We went back to the original 1981 date and money was put back into the budget. We continued to make those investments in those types of programs.

Tough decisions were made. I think our veterans would understand and would applaud a government for taking a tough and principled stand, and making those reinvestments when the time was proper.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by congratulating the member on his speech and his effort to stand up for veterans.

My riding is home to many veterans. We are planning to hold an event with them on Saturday, November 11, Remembrance Day. As my colleague said, what he is asking on behalf of veterans would not cost a fortune. He is not trying to make veterans rich with this bill. He wants some respect and dignity for them. I understand that, and I think that is what veterans want. My colleague also mentioned that during the last election campaign, the Conservative government made a commitment to help veterans and treat them fairly.

My question is short and simple. In his speech, the member mentioned that he was hoping for support from the Conservative government. What would keep the government from supporting this motion?

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[English]

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Speaker, I see nothing here pre-empting the government. I prefaced my comments to the parliamentary secretary with regard to the fiscal situation the federal Liberal government found itself in through the mid-1990s. It was a financial disaster and tough cuts had to be made.

Canadians were told that once we made the cuts we should be able to balance the books, pay down some debt, and reinvest in some social programs that were important to Canadians. That strategy taken in the mid-1990s is paying off. We saw it just recently with \$13 billion of surplus handed to the government, the best set of books that have been handed from an outgoing government to an incoming government. However, that money, instead of being reinvested in Canadians, in our veterans and social programs, was placed on the debt.

I am all for debt retirement, for attacking the debt and the burden that the debt places on our books, but that should not pre-empt us from investing in Canadians. The motion today talks about reinvesting in the veterans who have served the country. I do not think that pre-empting the government from stepping up and doing what it promised in the last election, immediately extending the VIP to all veterans and veterans' widows.

• (1130)

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member talked about the clawback and the need for further discussion on what is called the benefit reduction when members reach the age of 65.

He knows very well that members of the forces receive their superannuation pension and at age 60 they can elect to take their Canada pension plan, which is reduced by one-third if they elect to take it earlier. They already have had one-third taken off their Canada pension. They will get to collect, for example, \$3,000 and \$500 with no deductions. They just pay the taxes on these amounts. When they reach 65 the amount they would have received from Canada pension is deducted from their superannuation, and of course OAS kicks in. I have many documents in my office which show they would have less take home money at age 65 than they would have at age 64. There is definitely a clawback in this case. In some cases a veteran may receive \$17 more if all the taxes and everything else are included.

The men and women of our services live extraordinary lives. They move from place to place; we have heard the term army brats. Members' spouses do not get a chance to work on a full time basis. These men and women do not get the opportunity to purchase a home and earn equity. When they retire, they do not have the investments or other pensions that we in normal jobs have. They are asking for the restoration of their financial dignity. They want to keep more of their own money at age 65.

The member is correct that this is a complicated issue. That is why we are encouraging the government to look at this very seriously and make recommendations so that we can give more financial dignity to our veterans.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Speaker, the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore and I have been accused from time to time of being like-minded and I think on this particular issue this is one of those

times. I would certainly like to learn more about this issue from specialists in this area. I would hope that the government would refer this to committee for further study.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to mention that I am pleased to be sharing my time with my colleague from Montcalm.

Next, I would like to congratulate the hon. member for Sackville—Eastern Shore, whom I met when he was a vital member of the Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs, since the two committees were joined at the time.

I know that my colleague from Sackville—Eastern Shore has always been an ardent defender of veterans. He made a tremendous contribution to the Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs.

I would also like to say that the Bloc Québécois, as a whole, will certainly support the member's motion. We also agree with the division of the Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs into two committees, which occurred at the beginning of the Conservative government's term. Despite my colleague's past efforts, it seems to me that veterans, at the time, were the poor relation of that committee. There was also a certain degree of incongruity, since the committee fell under the responsibility or the will of two different ministers. I therefore find the situation much improved today.

I know that my colleagues on the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs can now devote themselves and their efforts solely to defending our veterans, who are very much in need. These people risked their lives trying to preserve important, democratic values.

We must be careful not to send regrettable messages to people who were wounded along the way, after their active service was complete. I use the term "wounded", but this concept goes beyond physical wounds and also includes psychological wounds. I believe that more people now return from these theatres of operation psychologically wounded than physically wounded. It is important nonetheless to have a committee to look after their interests. We will support the hon. member's motion because there is still a long way to go.

Some progress has been made. For one thing, at the time, we had passed Bill C-45, which was mainly for veterans, by providing them with a charter. We may have had good intentions in doing that, but the charter left a few things out. And my colleague is proposing important measures to improve it. Certainly there will be others, but four good measures is at least a step in the right direction. That is the reason why the Bloc Québécois will be supporting the motion by my colleague from Sackville—Eastern Shore.

I said that there was still work left to do. For example, just yesterday, we heard the ombudsman for the armed forces saying that the people who served in Kuwait or in Afghanistan not so long ago—four or five years ago—are having major problems.

Sometimes there are things that are hard to explain, agent orange being another example. That happened in the Gagetown area. When we are told in committee that the list of people who spent time there during the period when it was being sprayed in large volumes has been lost, we have some doubts. We conclude that the government often wants to scrimp and save on the backs of people who truly left part of their lives, whether psychologically or physically, in the theatre of operations.

The government has a tendency to move quickly. I have to say that I notice that as soon as a major problem arises and someone has left the forces, National Defence decides that it is no longer its problem, it is now a Veterans Affairs problem. I have said that to committees and I say it again here publicly.

As well, National Defence should be putting much more effort into prevention. Not to say that we are going to leave less up to Veterans Affairs, but because an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

Other armies—the American and British, for instance—pay special attention to individuals leaving the armed forces who are not allowed to remain for medical reasons. Here, this is unfortunately not how we think. In fact, National Defence tells veterans that their service is finished for medical reasons, and that now, because they were deployed in the theatre of operations, they are the responsibility of Veterans Affairs Canada, and they are sent there, and National Defence is no longer concerned with them. Something has to be done about this.

The first aspect of the motion deals with the fact that veterans might get married after age 60 and have a new wife, and the new wife was no longer entitled to compensation after her husband died.

• (1135)

We consider this to be truly discriminatory. In my opinion, the motion fixes this problem.

Another aspect of the motion that is important to us is the Veterans Independence Program, the VIP. This is not something new; we discussed it in 2002 and in 2003. The previous government had announced, with much fanfare, that it was now going to be looking after veterans' widows, because they were entitled to home help, whether it be for housework or for yard work, so that they could keep their homes as long as possible. This is important for them.

Let us not forget that the veterans' wives also fought, perhaps not as hard as the men since they were not on the front line, but they participated in the war effort. My mother married a soldier. She married my father during the Second World War. I assure you that to hear her stories she was very worried about her husband who was overseas. This too was valuable. It is all well and good to say that people went to battle, but let us not forget the work of the women who stayed behind and kept the war economy going. An army needs bullets for its guns in the theatre of operations and since all the men were deployed to the other side of the ocean, the women did their part to keep this industry operating. We must not forget them.

The former government said it would recognize 10,000 women who would be entitled to the allowance when their husbands died. Upon further investigation, it became apparent that 23,000 women

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had been forgotten. At the time, we fought with our colleagues in the Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs and we won the fight. We did not want to let specific dates be an impediment. If a woman lost her husband before June 17, 2002, she could have the pension. If she lost him after June 17, 2002, she could not. We thought that did not make sense. Why have a date? Why not recognize that the effort was shared by everyone and that all should be entitled? We absolutely agree with our colleague's proposal in the second item.

There are a number of other items, but I see that time is running out so I will make my closing statements. As I was saying, the Department of National Defence absolutely needs to be convinced to put an end to this division. It is all well and good to say there are two committees, but in fact and in practice, DND does not do enough to address the fallout of tragic events that people are currently experiencing.

I spoke about agent orange but I could also have spoken about post-traumatic stress syndrome. Several groups are currently pressuring the government because they are not receiving any services from National Defence or Veterans Affairs. Who is providing these services? The provincial health services. When a soldier is injured and goes to a public hospital in Quebec, the bill is sent to the Department of National Defence. When a soldier is injured but is no longer an employee of the department, he is covered by the provincial health authority. In my opinion, the Department of National Defence needs to take a long, hard look in the mirror. I believe that my colleague, the member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles knows it and is applying pressure in this regard.

The Department of Veterans Affairs will need an ombudsman. We do not need an ombudsman for National Defence as there already is one, he is doing both jobs. We need another one just for Veterans Affairs. Above all—and I believe my colleague will insist on this point this afternoon—the ombudsman must be independent of the minister.

It makes no sense for an ombudsman to report to the minister because the minister can exercise some control. If the ombudsman gave the minister a report and the minister did not agree, the minister could recommend to the governor in council—that is, the cabinet—that the ombudsman's contract not be renewed. That does not make sense.

The ombudsman for the armed forces and the future ombudsman for veterans must report to Parliament which, in its wisdom, will decide on how to follow up on the ombudsman's report.

I thank my colleagues for their attention and I am ready to answer questions.

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• (1140)

[English]

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my colleague's remarks. He and I sit on the defence committee. I have spent a lot of time talking to my hon. colleague from Nova Scotia as well.

This debate is a good one. It is one where we need to air a number of issues. They need to be aired honestly and with all of the facts on the table, and I think that will come out over the course of the day.

My question is with respect to post-traumatic stress syndrome. I believe my colleague is aware, and I wonder if he has some comment on the changes that the military is making today in terms of returning veterans from Afghanistan, the treatment that they get en route to coming back home that does in fact address specifically the issue of PTSD, and the follow-up they get to that potential situation after they have arrived back in Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Speaker, we must give credit where credit is due. I have seen an improvement in the last few years. Before leaving the operational theatre, soldiers returning from Afghanistan are given debriefings. And they receive additional debriefings upon their arrival here. They also have access to psychological support, as needed.

We must not forget or overlook those who took part in the Bosnia-Herzegovina war, those who were there during the early years of the war in Afghanistan, and those who fought in Cyprus.

Earlier I mentioned that some 20 groups are joining forces to try to defend their interests. The problem is that no one will help them. I believe that this is the problem that needs to be solved. Things are not perfect. There is still much work to be done.

At the Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue hospital, only five beds are available for people struggling with PTSD. Yet, hundreds of soldiers suffer from this. It is not enough.

These people are confined to their homes and their entire bodies tremble from the psychological shock. No one is there to help them and the suicide rate is rising. We must take care of these people. It is the government's responsibility to do so, including both the Department of National Defence and Veterans Affairs Canada.

• (1145)

[English]

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I come from a northern region and 50% of my riding is aboriginal. I am the son of a veteran of the second world war and I recognize the great sacrifice many people made in their effort to preserve and enhance our way of life and the way of life of other people in the world.

Our aboriginal population was also well represented in the military. When we look at the socio-economic statistics of the aboriginal population living in cities or in isolated locations, quite obviously, they tell the story of their difficult economic conditions.

Our effort to increase the ability of our veterans, including our aboriginal veterans, to live comfortably in their senior years is

extremely important. I would like to know what the member thinks about these issues as they relate to our aboriginal soldiers, their contribution and their life afterward?

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

Before being defence critic, I was aboriginal affairs critic for seven years. I was quite outraged by the veterans file. At the time, no aboriginal was recognized as a veteran, which was an incredible injustice. I do not know the status of the file today, but I hope that the government has corrected this injustice.

I agree with my colleague that aboriginals are probably in most need of help. This was illustrated during the recent forum held in Mashteuiatsh. Aboriginals are living in third world conditions. They do not have access to running water and three generations are crammed under one roof.

I hope the government has corrected the injustice toward aboriginals as far as recognizing their fine contribution during the world wars is concerned.

I hope these injustices will be resolved in the near future, both for veterans and in terms of the aboriginals' living conditions. Canada cannot tolerate people, still today, living in the third world conditions in which aboriginals are living.

Mr. Roger Gaudet (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to pick up where the member for Saint-Jean, a proponent of defence, left off, because he is a longstanding member of this House. I also want to thank the member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles for his good advice on veterans affairs, because I am new to this issue.

The Bloc Québécois and I support the motion by the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore. Veterans are too often neglected by the government, which seems to care about them only once a year, in November. In fact, Veterans Week is almost upon us. The steps proposed in this motion would improve the lives of veterans and their families.

We believe that other steps should be taken to further improve the lives of veterans. Although it was recently enhanced, the current system is still unfair in many respects. Hon. members will recall that in May 2005, Bill C-45 was adopted after being fast-tracked. It instituted the new Veterans Charter, which took effect that year. Despite this improvement, there is still much to be done.

The federal government is dragging its feet when it comes to veterans. We have only to think of Gagetown, for example, the inadequate treatment of post-traumatic stress and the ombudsman's repeated requests. This clearly illustrates the government's inaction on this issue. The federal government must act and close the gaps in the current system.

The first measure proposed by the NDP reads as follows:

1. amend Section 31 (1) of the Canadian Forces Superannuation Act so that second spouses of CF members and veterans have access to pension rights upon the death of the Canadian Forces member or veteran;

This section of the act is absurd. In other words, someone who marries a retired veteran over the age of 60 can never receive the benefits available to other military widows. This rule is nothing but discriminatory and is unwarranted. We believe that it should be eliminated, in order to place all spouses on an equal footing. It is important to remember that life expectancy in Canada is around 80 years. A marriage at 60 therefore should not last more than 20 years. In comparison, life expectancy in Caesar's Rome was only 20 years.

The second measure reads as follows:

2. extend the Veterans Independence Program (VIP) to all widows of all veterans, regardless of the time of death of the veteran and regardless of whether the veteran was in receipt of VIP services prior to his or her death;

This measure would broaden the eligibility criteria for the Veterans Independence Program. Basically, this program offers home care services to disabled veterans and, after death, to family members who need it and who provided a significant level of care to the veteran.

We think that expanding the program could be a good idea. This proposal goes much farther than the motion put forward by the Standing Committee on National Defence and the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, which included some details. It was very long, so I will not read it. I think everyone is familiar with it. However, before helping all widows of veterans, we think it makes sense to extend the measure to all veterans themselves. The current proposal raises a paradox: widows of veterans will benefit from more services than spouses of veterans. Furthermore, they will get more help after their spouses die. This inconsistency must be corrected because widows would receive more services than they did when their spouses were alive.

I will now read the third measure:

3. increase the Survivor's Pension Amount upon death of Canadian Forces retiree to 66% from the current amount of 50%;

We agree with this one. This measure seems fair. Upon the death of a veteran, his survivor should not be forced to move to maintain her quality of life. I think this is a very good idea. Currently, some expenses, such as housing, travel and furnishings, can be shared.

Here is the fourth measure:

4. eliminate the unfair reduction of Service Income Security Insurance Plan (SISIP) long term disability benefits from medically released members of the Canadian Forces;

On October 30, 2003, in a report entitled *Unfair Deductions from SISIP Payments to Former CF Members*, the ombudsman asked the government to correct this major systemic problem. Two years later, he reiterated this request in a letter to the minister on October 26, 2005. Here is what he wrote in the conclusion of his 2003 report:

● (1150)

The SISIP long term disability insurance plan is supposed to ensure that members who are medically released because of service-related illness or injury receive a reasonable amount of income while they are unable to work. These former members, who are forced to depend on their long term disability insurance benefits for income, should not lose the financial benefit of the disability pension they are awarded under the Pension Act as compensation for their illness or injury, especially when their injured colleagues who are able to continue serving can collect their disability pensions through VAC and still receive their pay cheques. I hope that the Minister will take the necessary actions to obtain Treasury Board approval so that the SISIP long term disability insurance policy can be amended to rectify this unfair situation

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and that those who have lost the financial benefit of their disability pension, while their serving colleagues continued to receive it, can be reimbursed.

I will now read the fifth measure:

5. eliminate the deduction from annuity for retired and disabled CF members.

It is unacceptable that the disabled person receiving a benefit to compensate for a disability has his pension reduced. This situation is similar to the preceding one. The government wants to save taxpayer money. However, there are limits. Benefits paid to the disabled do not represent, in our opinion, a source of income; they are used to pay for additional daily expenses arising from the disability. These benefits are used, for example, for special transportation or to modify a residence. Other veterans do not incur such costs.

There are other considerations as well. These measures are but a step in the right direction. Other problems are also important, perhaps even more so than those to be addressed by this motion.

The purpose of this motion is to improve the system for those already using it. But what about those excluded, those whose sacrifices we refuse to acknowledge? What about those soldiers exposed to defoliants in Gagetown, and soldiers who suffer from post-traumatic stress syndrome left to cope on their own? The government should be aware that early treatment of these illnesses can greatly diminish their symptoms.

What is even more disquieting is the fact that no just yesterday, November 1, the ombudsman for the Canadian armed forces, Mr. Côté, said that when the report was submitted on the dangers to soldiers from exposure to a polluted environment, the army was not even able to list the soldiers who had been posted to Kuwait during the Gulf war. He said too that the army would also be unable to follow-up on the soldiers who had gone to Afghanistan. This kind of list is essential, however, for managing certain risks related to the contamination of places where soldiers frequently go. The departments responsible for the welfare of our soldiers still have their work cut out for them.

In conclusion, it is important to remember that the Department of Veterans Affairs should not just work during Veterans' Week. It should not just work with a view to getting re-elected. It should work for the welfare of our veterans, who defended us in the past and are still defending us today.

We have been working for a few months on the creation of an ombudsman position reporting to the House of Commons. This person's mandate would come from the House of Commons, not the department. As a result, there would not be any conflicts of interest and he could comment on certain things without risking the ire of the department. He would report directly to the House of Commons.

Yesterday we met Mr. Marin, the Ontario ombudsman, who handles 25,000 complaints a year. Of all these complaints, about 25% are settled through discussions. Mr. Marin says that he does not have any problems, but he reports to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

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He concluded yesterday by saying that we were the last ray of hope for our veterans, many of whom had simply lost faith in the government. He also said that the Department of Veterans Affairs has long been vehemently opposed to an ombudsman keeping an eye on it. Now this department is being told that an ombudsman will be appointed despite its philosophical objections. It is therefore up to the parliamentary committee to help the government and support this initiative so that our veterans have an ally fighting on their behalf against administrative injustice. He also told us not to inadvertently allow ourselves to be persuaded to create what could just be a facade and not a real ombudsman's office.

I hope on behalf of our veterans that the government sets up a system that gives them an ombudsman to restore their hopes. This problem must be dealt with as quickly as possible before our veterans disappear.

• (1155)

Let us try to solve this problem as quickly as possible in fact and not just wait for these army veterans to disappear.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no one in this House, with one exception, can identify more personally than I do with these issues, and I am in agreement with many of the points of this motion.

On the subject of military pensions, I was there when the system was changed because of the introduction of the Canada Pension Plan.

[English]

I have a question for my hon. colleague.

We have talked a lot about a so-called clawback or perceived clawback of pensions. Is my hon. colleague aware that in 1966 when Canada pension was merged with the Canadian Forces Superannuation Act, and as I said, I was there when it happened, the pension deductions for CFSA went down by the amount of Canada pension deductions that were added?

If we were to allow the member to collect both pensions in full, how would we redress 40 years of pension contributions not made that now are expected to be paid?

[Translation]

Mr. Roger Gaudet: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question, but I am not well enough informed to answer it.

One thing is clear. Our veterans deserve special treatment. What exactly? I can not determine that. We have enough senior officials and public servants to give us examples.

In the final analysis, our veterans were the fathers of Confederation and of all we hold dear. Therefore, I believe that we must give them a great deal of help. How? I am not sure but there are certainly people working in the public service who can help us with this. Even the Department of Veterans Affairs could help us by providing proper information and not by trying to hide money and make savings for the government.

We are here to provide a quality of life. I believe that the quality of life of a veteran is very important. Indeed, whether a veteran served in Bosnia or any other place, even today in Afghanistan, our

veterans must have an income and they must be properly recognized as veterans so that we can help them as well as their families.

• (1200)

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague, the member for Montcalm, on his remarks concerning this motion.

He made what I would consider a magnificent speech in terms of the welfare of our veterans, and their quality of life.

One point in particular drew my attention, concerning the ombudsman.

My colleague told us that the ombudsman should report directly to the House of Commons, in order to deal with complaints and to find equitable solutions for those who call on his services.

My question is as follows: why should the ombudsman report to the House of Commons? We know that there is an ombudsman in the Department of National Defence and that he reports to the minister. The member suggested that the ombudsman should report to the House of Commons. I ask him why.

Mr. Roger Gaudet: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

That is straightforward. He should report to the House of Commons so that no one can interfere with his decisions and steps to be taken in carrying out his mandate.

If the mandate were given by the House of Commons, it would have to receive his report. Therefore, there would be fewer conflicts of interest in the attribution system. Sometimes the minister gets involved, and that is even the case at present.

In 1975, there was an independent ombudsman. Then his position was abolished. Now the department has an ombudsman who issues reports but is guarded in his remarks so as to not lose his job. If the House of Commons were to create or institute the position, and appoint the ombudsman for five, six or seven years—as it saw fit—things could change.

[English]

Ms. Catherine Bell (Vancouver Island North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Windsor West.

I am pleased to speak to the motion put forward by the hon. member for Sackville—Eastern Shore. I know my hon. colleague has been working many long years for fairness and justice for working families in his riding and across this country. By bringing forward this motion, which I urge all members of this House to support, we can make sure that Canadian Forces retirees, veterans and their families are treated fairly with respect to their pensions.

This is an important issue across this country and especially in my riding of Vancouver Island North where in the Comox Valley is one of the largest military bases in the country, CFB Comox. I have heard from many of my constituents about this issue, so it is with respect to them and for them that I speak to this motion today.

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CFB Comox has brought many military families to the area, and I have had the pleasure of getting to know many of them and getting to know their families. While they were in the service in this area many made a decision to come back when they retired and live in this spectacular area with its natural beauty and mild climate. The Comox Valley is the southernmost part of my riding. We boast that one can ski all morning on Mount Washington, golf in the afternoon at one of the many world class golf courses, and go for a sail in the evening to enjoy one of our beautiful west coast sunsets.

Because of this natural beauty and the availability of so many outdoor activities, as well as thriving urban areas, many military families have chosen to retire in this area. Just think: there is little or no snow to shovel in the winter and there is no need for air conditioners in the summer because of the cool ocean breezes. Some people might call it paradise. What a wonderful place to retire.

This very important motion seeks to improve the lives of veterans and retired military personnel in five ways:

First, it seeks to amend the Canadian Forces Superannuation Act so that second spouses of Canadian Forces members and veterans have access to pensions upon the death of the member or veteran. I believe the practice of disallowing the second spouse access to the pension is affectionately known, or maybe not so affectionately known, as the "gold digger clause". It has a long history dating back to the Boer War. My great-grandfather was in that war and many things have changed since then. This practice of disallowing the second spouse access to a pension is insulting and discriminatory. It supposes that anyone marrying a retired Canadian Forces member is only doing it for the money.

The practice of disallowing a survivor pension to women or men who marry retired Canadian Forces members after the age of 60 unfairly penalizes the surviving spouse. Not only does the survivor lose pension benefits, but also health and dental benefits are stripped at a time when they are most needed.

Second, this motion seeks to extend the veterans independence program to all widows of all veterans, regardless of the time of death of the veteran and regardless of whether the veteran was in receipt of VIP services prior to his or her death. This national home care program is so important to maintaining the health and independence of veterans and their spouses. It could be seen as independent living which is something that many people in their senior years require to stay out of hospitals and institutions.

Widows whose husbands have died before 1981 are not eligible, nor are those whose husbands did not receive VIP benefits prior to their death. Again, this is a discriminatory practice. Many of these women have cared for their partners in their homes for many years, assisting them with day to day living, with their daily personal care, saving the health care system thousands of precious dollars while sacrificing their very own lives. I do not think it is too much to ask that when they become eligible for VIP services that they receive them.

• (1205)

Third, this motion seeks to increase the survivor's pension amount upon death of a Canadian Forces retiree to 66% from the current 50%. Why is it, I ask, that survivors of Canadian Forces retirees

receive only 50% of superannuation when survivors of other public service workers receive 66%?

This is a sad way to say thank you to the many years of service our military commit to this country. I know that everyone in the House supports our military when they are serving this country so bravely, so why not after they retire? I know that they would want their surviving spouses to be taken care of with respect and dignity and with economic dignity.

This is another example of an outdated, unfair, discriminatory practice whose time has come to an end. It is time to stop treating retired military families as second class citizens. Spouses of Canadian Forces personnel deserve fair access to pension benefits and spousal benefits.

Fourth, this motion put forward by my hon. colleague from Sackville—Eastern Shore asks the government to eliminate the unfair reduction of the service income security insurance plan long term disability benefits for medically released members of the Canadian Forces. Under the SISIP LTD, Canadian Forces members are guaranteed 75% of their previous salaries for up to two years if they are disabled in service, but when a former Canadian Forces member receives disability payments from Veterans Affairs or any other money under the Pension Act, SISIP LTD is clawed back. This is another unfairness.

This unfairness places a financial hardship on the disabled member. The Veterans Affairs disability pension should not be considered as income. Disability benefits are to compensate for injuries suffered in the line of duty. I know that disabled members in my riding are finding it hard to make ends meet because of this punitive policy. In the new veterans charter this policy has been eliminated, but those who became disabled prior to the veterans charter still face an offset in their SISIP LTD.

Last, the motion seeks to eliminate the deduction from annuity for retired and disabled Canadian Forces members. This clawback of military and RCMP pension when they receive CPP or CPP disability creates a real financial hardship at a time when they need the most support. Everyone in this House knows that as we age, our health care needs increase.

My colleague has introduced other private members' bills in the past, specifically Bill C-221, An Act to amend the Canadian Forces Superannuation Act and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Superannuation Act (elimination of deduction from annuity). That is what we are talking about here today.

Veterans groups across the country have been calling on the government to eliminate this clawback of their pensions. I have received many letters from military retirees and members still serving telling me how they feel about this important issue. I would like to share some of those with the House now.

As one member told me:

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There is no better Canadian than the men and women who serve and they deserve to be treated with respect and dignity in their golden years, and not be penalized at a time when their country feels they can make a quick buck on their backs. At a time when they are living on a fixed income and at a time when they should feel the support of their country not to feel as though they have been wronged by a government who can easily forget their past deeds and services.

This is from another serviceman:

Why are we treated as second class citizens. After 40 years serving Canada in the Military I am denied what I invested in.

The frustration and hurt felt by those people is apparent. They have served this country bravely. They have contributed to our communities during their working lives. They have endured dangerous conditions and long separations from their families. The stresses of these jobs are enormous. These things take a toll on one's physical and mental health.

It is just one more way of showing support for the men and women who serve to make sure they are taken care of in their retirement.

• (1210)

I urge all members of Parliament to support this crucial motion that will do so much for retired military members and their families.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will say in English what I said in French to a previous question. Nobody in the House, save perhaps one, can identify more personally with these issues. I am one of the veterans about whom the hon. member talks. I know many of those people who live in paradise, in Comox. It is a wonderful place to be and I visit it as often as I can.

I agree with most of the things in the motion, but I will keep coming back to the issue of the pension. The member said it best when she referred to one of the letters from a retiree. He wants to collect what he invested in. I am talking about the pension, too. Would I love more money? Of course I would, but I invested in a pension that was made up partly of a contribution to the Canadian Forces superannuation and partly of contributions to the Canada pension. When the pension plan changed in 1966, my contribution to my pension, to the CFA, went down by the amount of my contribution to Canada pension.

I am now collecting everything that I paid in. When I turn 65, I will continue to collect, "what I invested in". As emotional as the arguments are and as wonderful as the military people are, and I take personal pride in that, the emotional arguments, unfortunately, do not cut it when it comes down to actual dollars.

Does my hon. friend have any idea of the cost of making up 40 years of paying out something that people like me did not pay into?

• (1215)

Ms. Catherine Bell: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his many long years of service to our country. It is because of people like him that we are able to stand in the House today and have our say and discuss issues in this democracy.

I know military families had to uproot and travel across the country. They did not have the same opportunities as some others or were denied those opportunities. They quite often were the sole breadwinner in their families because of having to move around the

country. In some cases they were unable to collect EI at the end of their term if they collected other benefits.

I want to remind the hon. member that the motion does not seek retroactivity in this instance. We are seeking to ensure that military families have fairness and justice with respect to their income and pensions on a go forward basis.

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I, too, congratulate the member for her sensitive and very informative presentation. My question relates to some of the inquiries that come in from my constituents. During the first and second world wars, there was a very high rate of volunteerism from the old York township. The old parts of Toronto was second to not many in the country, so I obviously have an empathy for the points that have been made by the member.

The responses given to inquiries that come in are very complicated. She outlined how these have become very complicated to veterans in calculating their pensions because of changes in the Canada pension. How does she feel with respect to the concept of an ombudsman who would report directly to the House and who could, hopefully, help veterans with respect to these kinds of very complicated actuarial issues that they encounter?

Ms. Catherine Bell: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his interest in this very important issue, which affects so many families across the country.

Absolutely, I believe an ombudsman is crucial in this debate and I look forward to the implementation of that position.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to be discussing this issue. I wear my poppy with both humility and pride, humility for being the recipient of the generous gift of freedom and democracy. Over generations, many people fought for this nation. I have pride for a country that is often found to do the right thing when it comes to world safety and security. In many respects, it has often been the leader of building a better world. Although we may sometimes disagree with some of the directions our country takes, there can be no doubt that Canada has played a significant role across the globe. It is my hope we will continue to do so in a progressive way.

I come from the riding of Windsor West, which has a long established military history. The member for Sackville—Eastern Shore has come to Windsor West to see that history. In fact, the first organization of military units in a formal context was in 1701, given our relationship with the United States and the proximity there. Following that, we have participated in the War of 1812, World War I, World War II, Korea, the Persian Gulf, Bosnia, Afghanistan and as peacekeepers across the globe.

Also, we have a very spirited revelry with regard to our veterans. We even have ceremonies commemorating the Canadian veterans of the Vietnam war. These Canadians went abroad and served in the American military. In all our ceremonies, whether it be for the Battle of the Atlantic, the Cenotaph service for November 11, or other types of initiatives such as Veterans Week, we commemorate and celebrate those who continue to contribute in our society.

I can speak from first-hand experiences. My grandfather, John Clifford Addison, died when the HMCS *Scorpion* sank in the fall of Burma. I did not know my grandfather. I do not know what music he liked or what food he liked. I do not know how he lived much of his life when my mother was an infant. All I have is some soccer medals, some war medals and a few photographs of John's life. His body was never recovered. I was fortunate, though, that my grandmother remarried. She married Fred Attwood, who then served in the merchant navy and the Royal Navy as well.

It was at the kitchen table that I learned the lessons of our veterans and their contributions to not only Canada, but to the United Kingdom and across the globe as well. I heard about my grandfather and how he served in East Asia where they shipped materiel to different areas, everything from combat missions and merchant expeditions from Halifax to the United Kingdom. I heard about the degree of commitment and the cost of one's life. It was fortunate that Fred and Irene came to Canada after the second world war and settled in Windsor where my family remains to this date.

Our area has provided significant contributions to the military operations of Canada, not only in the past, but the current and will in future as well. We have great reservations when we hear the daily news about what could potentially happen to some of our men and women in the service, who we all support wherever they are. We need to do everything possible to ensure their lives are protected abroad. More important, when they return, we need to provide support to them and their families, professionally and appropriately. The motion is all about that. It is about setting a series of rights in a system that has some wrongs.

The motion can be criticized in some respects for not being a complete picture. We know for a fact that we must improve things. We did that with the veterans charter. It has a series of issues that need to be corrected, but it was a profound step. I am very proud that my leader, the member for Toronto—Danforth, took this initiative and presented it to the other leaders, when they were travelling back from veterans ceremonies in Europe. We established something of which we can be proud. Passing this motion would be a bold step forward in improving some of the injustices of our system.

I want to ensure I do this in a non-partisan way. I want to congratulate the Minister of Veterans Affairs for supporting an initiative with the Essex and Kent Scottish Regiment. Last summer we returned to Dieppe. Many Windsor and Essex County veterans contributed to our country's attempt to invade Europe to liberate France, but it was a disaster. We have learned lessons from that. There was a lot of debate about the mission and its background, but what cannot be debated is the cost paid in human life.

● (1220)

Also, a Windsor regiment in my riding celebrated its 70th year, once again dating back to the founding of our country. It contributed

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to the safety of our country in a number of different war efforts. It was a tank battalion a number of times. The black insignia, which it had for a number of years, has been adopted by the entire department now. It is something of which we are very proud.

We also have the HMCS *Hunter*, which is naval operations. It has conducted training for sea cadets, servicemen and women for many years.

The motion in front of us are very important and it contains various recommendations.

The first is to:

amend Section 31(1) of the Canadian Forces Superannuation Act so that second spouses of CF members and veterans have access to pension rights upon the death of the Canadian Forces member or veteran;

That is a social justice issue, in my opinion. It is about righting a wrong and ensuring that their surviving spouses will be in a better situation.

The second is to:

extend the Veterans Independence Program (VIP) to all widows of all veterans, regardless of the time of death of the veteran and regardless of whether the veteran was in receipt of VIP services prior to his or her death;

As an aging population, these supports are important. People are healthier and are able to stay in their homes longer. We certainly can contribute to something like that.

We also want to increase the survivor's pension to 66% from the current 50%. A number of different people come to our office in Windsor West for support. Often the number one issue is pensions. We believe this modest improvement is one that is reasonable. It would ensure that people do not slip into poverty.

The fourth is to:

eliminate the unfair reduction of Service Income Security Insurance Plan...long term disability benefits from medically released members of the Canadian Forces...

This is very important because of stress and other types of issues. When people re-emerge into society, their convergence back has to be done in a way that can be productive for them. It is incumbent upon us to provide the proper supports and environment for people to be successful.

As someone who has worked on behalf of persons with disabilities and as someone who has been in this field in the past for a number of years, I cannot understand why we do not do more to assist individuals to become contributors and to ensure there is fairness and justice, especially after we have asked them to perform a service in the name of our country.

The fifth is to:

eliminate the deduction from annuity for retired and disabled CF members.

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It is important as well to put a human face on this. One of my heroes is Earl Scofield. He was a senator with the Métis nation of Ontario. He and his six brothers served in the Royal Canadian Air Force. He flew 17 missions, on behalf of our country, for our democracy. Earl, as well, is a founding member of the NDP and attended our convention recently. I was so proud to see Earl stand and talk about issues of democracy and also to provide the leadership that is necessary for younger people coming through the system. They need to understand the important contributions our veterans have made for our democracy and the lessons that should be learned from that.

We have seen this in a number of different situations. When our veterans have returned from overseas, they have not always been treated fairly, and that is a shame. However, this is something we can change. The motion before us offers a simple, practical solution to right some wrongs to ensure that our veterans are properly respected.

It is nice for all of us to stand here and say that we support our troops and veterans, but what are we going to do about it? It is my hope the government takes this to heart. If the motion passes in this chamber, I hope it will respect the will of Parliament and make these things happen, not note and file it like it often does on notices of motions.

• (1225)

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Windsor West for his comments today. Talking about his grandfather brings home the personal nature that each and every one of us has in this chamber.

We heard from colleagues opposite that they are concerned about number five, the deduction of annuity for retired and disabled CF veterans. I want to give my hon. colleague an example of why this is so important.

I have a gentleman in my riding who served in the RCMP, but this is very similar to those in the military because the same thing happens. At 58 years of age he had a stroke and doctors discovered he had cancer. They sent him from Nova Scotia to London, Ontario for treatment. While he was there, he realized that he was not going to be able to work again, so he applied for and received his pension from the RCMP.

At the same time, somebody told him that because he was not going to be able to work again anywhere, he should apply for Canada pension disability. He did and he received it. When he came back to his home in Nova Scotia, he received a letter saying that he had received his Canada pension disability, he was accepted to receive it, but because he was receiving an annuity from the forces, the disability amount would be deducted from the annuity.

It did not matter whether he walked out of the RCMP or got carried out. It was deducted immediately, not at 60 or 65, right away. The insanity of it was that he was told by the folks who handle CPP that because they did not deduct it from him soon enough, he now owed them money. It was insane to treat someone who has served this country in that callous manner. This is one of the reasons why we are doing it, and although the motion says it is strictly for veterans, we eventually would like to pass it on to the RCMP as well.

I would like my hon. colleague to comment on that. These are the types of changes we are seeking in order to look after the people who looked after us.

• (1230)

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague raises a good case example of some of the unfair practices that are currently happening.

I would like to note to my hon. colleague, and I am sure he has experienced the same thing. I have encountered or we have worked with different veterans and other service personnel on issues related to how they have been hurt or injured, or they are dealing with some of the programs that had been cut in the past. It is interesting that they never have any malice for their service and commitment to this country.

Continually, we refuse to fix these problems. It is important to note that we have the financial capability to do so. This country has gone through record tax cuts and giveaways. We have had a series of surplus budgets. The moneys that would be allocated to individuals to better their lives, raise them out of poverty and deal with some of the problems that they face as ordinary citizens right now almost exclusively go back into the economy. It is not money lost. They are not hiding money in Barbados because the finance department does not want to close down a loophole. That money stays in our communities, benefits the individuals and their families, and provides some dignity and integrity for a commitment back to our country.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we can always come up with examples, and I do not deny the example that my hon. friend from Sackville—Eastern Shore mentioned. Part of people getting benefits of course is getting good advice before they get them, and in a lot of cases people do not do that.

However, I want to go back to something the previous speaker had talked about regarding retroactivity. We are not talking about retroactivity here. I am sure that the most recent speaker can probably answer this because obviously we all talk among ourselves.

I am going to be 60 in a few months. My CPP will cut in at 65. If it is not retroactive, then what the heck is wrong with me? Darn it, I earned it like anybody else, according to the emotional arguments that have been put forth, which are great emotional arguments and I can identify with them, as I said. We are talking about retroactivity because if we are going to do that, we cannot ignore that.

I would like the hon. member to respond to that. If it is not retroactive, when does this start? What date and with whom, and who is left out?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Windsor West has 30 seconds to respond.

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, the minute this passes, it solves a particular problem right now. I know that the member has served our country ably and that needs to be noted, but quite frankly, if he has other suggestions or amendments or ways to improve the motion, why does he not pass this motion and get it into a process where we can make some of these changes?

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He can continue to ask these questions today, but why do we not have some solutions from the member, so that he can fix the problem he has identified because I think we would all be open to those suggestions.

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is indeed a pleasure to have the opportunity today to speak to this motion. I will be splitting my time with the member for Beauport—Limoilou.

I would like to respond to the motion by stating that the federal government and all Canadians recognize the dangerous demands imposed on the members of the Canadian Forces. We want to recognize the commitment and certainly the responsibility and the contribution that these veterans have made and continue to make to our great country and around the world.

That is why, in recognition of their unique needs, a comprehensive program of pensions and benefits is provided to ensure a generous level of protection to the members of the Canadian Forces and their families. These benefits include life insurance, disability, pension plan benefits in their retirement or in the event of disability or death.

The President of the Treasury Board is the minister responsible for the financing and the funding of the Canadian Forces pension plan as well as other federal public sector pensions, including those of the public service and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. In light of that, he wishes to reassure the Canadian Forces, RCMP and all federal public service employees and pensioners that they benefit from a complete package of pensions and benefits for themselves and their survivors.

Even though the federal public service offers comprehensive pensions and benefits to all employees and pensioners, there are always demands for improvement to these benefits, as is the case of today's motion proposed by the hon. member for Sackville—Eastern Shore.

SISIP, the service income security insurance plan, provides an income replacement benefit regardless of whether a member is injured in the line of duty or not. In the past, SISIP benefits were reduced to offset the benefit paid under the Pension Act. This changed on April 1, 2006 when the new veterans charter came into effect. The Pension Act benefit is now paid as a lump sum amount which is no longer deducted from the SISIP benefit.

I would like to comment briefly on the pension plan that is available to members of the Canadian Forces as well as other federal public service employees, including members of the public service and the RCMP. The federal public service pension plan contains many features which are comparable with or superior to other employer sponsored pension plans within this great country of Canada.

Members of the Canadian Forces and the RCMP further enjoy early retirement provisions in order to recognize the fact that they often have shorter careers due to the more dangerous and physically demanding nature of their jobs.

It is important to remember also that the pension benefits for federal public service employees and pensioners are not at risk since the federal public service pension plans are defined benefit plans. This means that in exchange for their contributions, federal public

service members acquire the right to a defined amount of pension at retirement.

This differs from defined contribution pension schemes where the final entitlement is directly dependent on employee contributions, employer contributions and investment returns. In other words, federal employees and retirees can continue to rely on receiving what their public service pension plans have promised: a defined, guaranteed, fully indexed retirement income.

In addressing today's motion to change the Canadian Forces pensions and benefits, it is important to fully understand the existing provisions of these programs. One particular provision of the public service pension plans which may not be well understood is the coordination feature with the Canada pension plan. In other words, the reduction to the Canadian Forces or RCMP pensions at age 65.

In 1966, when the Canada pension plan was introduced, the federal government of the day decided to coordinate the new CPP with the federal public service pension plans. Like most other Canadian public sector pension plans which were coordinated with the CPP, the federal government was concerned that some of their employees would be forced to contribute too much to their retirement savings if they had to contribute to the Canada pension plan in addition to the contributions already made to their employer sponsored pension plan.

This means that while federal public service employees of the public service, Canadian Forces and the RCMP pension plans are working, they are making contributions to their public service pension plans and to the CPP.

• (1235)

Typically, at age 65, public service pension plan members will be entitled to an unreduced Canada pension and, as a result, their public pension will be reduced to take into account the payment of the Canada pension. The amount of the reduction to the public service pension is approximately equal or equivalent to the amount the plan member receives from the CPP.

In other words, the total pension amount available to plan members after age 65 is essentially unchanged. It is simply received from two sources, from the Canada pension plan and the public service pension plan. This is a very common design feature in most Canada employer sponsored plans.

The federal public service pension also provides survivor benefits which are generous by industry standards. Although survivor benefits under the federal public service pension plans are generally described as being 50%, this does not provide the full picture. The benefit formula in the federal public service plans provides for a surviving spouse's allowance equal to 50% of the unreduced pension available to the member, as opposed to the 60% of a pension that may have been reduced to take into account a survivor's benefit.

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As well, there are many instances where a member has chosen to retire early and has opted to receive a reduced pension. In such cases, the survivor's allowance will be more than what the plan member was entitled to receive. The 50% of an unreduced pension is often more generous than 60% of a reduced pension.

When considering the benefits payable to survivors under the federal public service plans, it should also be noted that these allowances are indexed to fully reflect increases in the cost of living since the member's retirement.

Therefore, all factors considered, survivor benefits currently provided under the federal public service plans are already, in a number of ways, more generous than benefits provided under many other Canadian employer sponsored pension plans, both in the public and the private sector.

Improvements to the survivor benefit provisions in the federal public service pension plans have been made in response to complaints involving spouses who marry after age 60. This has been referred to earlier. In 1992, both Canadian Forces and RCMP plans were amended to give pension plan members flexibility in their ability to provide protection for their spouses who they marry after age 60.

Pensioners under both plans now have an opportunity to elect to reduce the amount of their benefit in order to provide a pension for a surviving spouse who would not otherwise be entitled to a survivor's allowance.

We must remember that when determining pension arrangements for its employees, it is reasonable and responsible for an employer to consider the costs involved. This is especially true for the federal government as the employer, given that it is the taxpayers of Canada who must fund the plan.

Today's proposed changes to the Canadian Forces plans would not only increase the costs, but further place the burden of those additional costs on taxpayers. Other public service plans, namely the public service and the RCMP plans, contain similar provisions to the Canadian Forces plan so there would be significant pressure also to amend these plans.

In considering any changes to the public service pension plans, the federal government as an employer must always be mindful of the long term sustainability of the plans as well to remain fair to both the federal public service employees, including the RCMP and veterans, and to all Canadians as taxpayers.

• (1240)

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do a lot of work with my good friend and colleague, the member for Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, in another industry and I know how deeply committed and passionate he is about this particular file, as I was many years ago when I encouraged my government to increase its contributions, among other things, to the veterans independence program, as well as to ensure that veterans would be looked after in a way that is consistent with national standards in a number of hospitals in which our veterans are cared for.

Mr. Speaker, on that note, you will know, since I have invited you, of the fundraising for the veterans centre within my riding, the Tony Stacey Centre, which will take place on November 9. I look forward to many colleagues participating in that event, which is to commemorate and assist in a facility that is really designed for spouses, as well as veterans. It is a unique facility in that regard.

I know the hon. member understands full well my interests and I know that his government is again committing vast amounts of money to military resources. However, it seems to me that one of the most consistent things we can do is to ensure that our veterans are given a modicum of support.

I do want to thank the hon. member for Sackville—Eastern Shore for proposing this worthwhile motion and, on behalf of my party, I can say that we will be supporting it four square.

On the subject of the veterans independence program, does the hon. member understand how the program works? It has been around for some 25 years. I am not sure he can speak for all the members of his party, but will the Conservative Party be working toward the extension of the VIP program so that it also covers those from previous wars, regardless of the time of death of the veteran or whether the veteran was in receipt of VIP services prior to his death?

• (1245)

Mr. Bev Shipley: Mr. Speaker, the deep commitment of all members in the House is not only to this country but to our veterans who have given us the opportunity to debate in this House, on a day to day basis, issues that are important to this country. We have the opportunity to debate today because our veterans from wars past gave us the freedom to do what we are doing today.

As we go forward, especially in committee, I think the member will find that all of us in the committee, who have been very cooperative, will be looking to do what we can, in a reasonable and responsible manner, for all veterans.

One thing that has come about that will be so significant to our veterans is the discussion, the interviews and the investigation into the ombudsman. As we move forward in that respect, many of the things that will be talked about today will have that extra voice. Hopefully, as we bring this position forward, veterans will then have the opportunity to use that body of influence to bring issues forward, not unlike the one the member raised today.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I feel my hon. colleague has a strong sense of the importance of pension plans for everybody across the country.

I have experience in the north with people in the RCMP, their lifestyles, their commitment to travel and to living in a variety of places during their working careers. They also fit in with the Canadian Forces in many instances. These are lifestyles that at the end of the day leaves one a little short. As politicians, we perhaps experience the same thing. While we are in Parliament we neglect a lot of the things at home.

When it comes to pensions for our service men and women, would the member not agree that we should do our very best as employers for the people whose burdens may be greater than the average?

Mr. Bev Shipley: Mr. Speaker, I support my hon. colleague's comments in terms of those who are in emergency personnel positions. They do step out beyond what we do on a normal day just because of the nature of their business and the nature of their job.

I just want to re-emphasize the fact that many of the pension plans that are in place right now for our Canadian Forces and for our veterans exceeds that of the normal standards within Canada.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank all the members taking part in this debate.

Each of us here should feel a sense of honour when we realize how privileged we are to be able to assume public office, to live in a country where freedom and democracy are fundamental values, and the supremacy of law is valued and respected. It is a way of life which I enjoy—which all Canadians and Quebecers enjoy—thanks to veterans.

I have the privilege of being able to talk about a great country free of tyranny and oppression. A country devoted to values dear to all Canadians: freedom, democracy and the rule of law.

Freedom is not free of cost, however. It never has been. We acquired freedom at the expense of huge sacrifice on the part of our veterans, their families and their companions.

Surveys conducted in recent years have revealed that Canadians of all ages, especially young ones, are not very familiar with our military history and heritage. Many of them do not know that over 116,000 Canadians made the ultimate sacrifice in the past century to protect our values and way of life.

What can we do to raise the young Canadians' awareness of the importance of the times that have marked the history of our country? How can we help them better grasp the great courage of these volunteers, who risked their all for their compatriots? How do we explain to them the acts of extraordinary courage performed in terrible circumstances? The challenge is a big one.

All commemorative activities of Veterans Affairs Canada are designed chiefly to encourage young people to discover the military history of their country. The young representatives who have taken part in overseas activities have told their stories in some particularly touching accounts and reports they have written.

After her experience attending the ceremonies that marked the 60th anniversary of D Day, Catherine MacNeil, from Cape Breton, wrote: "I always try to make the best of the travel times by sitting with the veterans and I am amazed how quickly I have made friends with them. During these short rides, some of them have told their stories to me, piece by piece." She concluded as follows: "I understand the importance of these stories, and I realize that the veterans themselves will not always be around to tell their stories themselves. That is why it is important for the youth, like myself, to pay careful attention to these stories, to learn as much as we can and then to pass it on to others we know to keep their memories alive".

Canadians have also gathered veterans' stories, stories of young Canadians from previous generations who left their loved ones,

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stories of their courage under enemy fire, of their determination in the face of insurmountable obstacles, and of their fallen friends. These stories bear witness to their extraordinary valour and perseverance.

On the front lines of two great wars, in Korea and in troublespots around the world, our soldiers have prevailed—shoulder to shoulder—against such threats.

The Canadian way of life has prevailed because these men and women refused to be defeated by such evil. They remained committed to our ideals, and a better vision of the world.

Still today, liberty does not come without its price. I am referring to the loss of our young soldiers, those heroic Canadians, who are making a tremendous sacrifice and risking their lives to protect our way of life.

The Prime Minister talked about that vision recently when he spoke to the nation about the need to confront the menace of terror. As he said, "the horrors of the world will not go away if we turn a blind eye to them, no matter how far off they may be".

Of course, we can also take comfort from knowing we are prepared to meet these challenges. We have the best-trained soldiers in the world, the most professional and disciplined soldiers in the world, and they commit themselves to their missions 100%.

What is new is simply this: we now have a government that is equally committed to supporting them in return.

● (1250)

We make sure that our soldiers, men and women, also have the equipment and resources they need. As well, our government is prepared to support them and their families when tragedy strikes. That is the least we can do for them. We owe our veterans our profound gratitude for their sacrifices and their deeds. We owe them our unflinching support.

That is why I am proud to be part of a government that not only acknowledges this debt, but also is committed to honouring its obligations to veterans. For example, I know that health care is a matter of particular importance to veterans. The government is committed to ensuring that they will never have to worry about access to the health care that they need and they deserve. We want to be sure that the new veterans' charter continues to measure up to its commitment to providing the essential support and services for the courageous young Canadian men and women who are serving their country today.

As well, there will be a fair resolution of the issue of agent orange at Canadian Forces Base Gagetown in New Brunswick. We will also be preparing a bill of veterans rights and we will appoint a veterans ombudsman, two measures that will ensure that no veteran will be denied the respectful and dignified treatment he or she deserves.

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I want to be sure that no Canadian ever forgets the actions taken by our veterans to deserve that respect and dignity. I want to thank them for the legacy of freedom that they have bequeathed to us.

•(1255)

[English]

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is absolutely correct. The veterans charter does go a long way in improving many of the deficiencies that were there before. As well, the implementation of a veterans ombudsman will be very worthwhile. However, the office of the veterans ombudsman has not yet been established so it will take some time to set up and do anything. Meanwhile, many veterans and their families have concerns and issues that need to be dealt with in this particular regard.

We believe the five points we mention in our motion are fiscally responsible and that they would go a long way in ensuring the needs of veterans and their spouses are met.

As our veterans become more elderly and more frail in their elderly years, does the member not believe that we should be doing absolutely everything in our power immediately to assist them and not get tied up in technical, bureaucratic, legislative mumbo-jumbo, which most of them think that it is? We know it is important to deal with these issues very properly.

We are talking about some of our more elderly and frail citizens who have served our country and we believe these five points in our motion, although we could have added many more, would go a long way in assisting them. Does the member not believe that we should move on these issues fairly quickly?

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Mr. Speaker, we have always been committed to working with veterans. The parliamentary secretary works very hard on this issue. We support veterans and we will continue to support them.

The system we now have is a very good one, because it has a number of characteristics and includes generous provisions. Obviously, we are working very hard on this issue. We will have answers in due course, but we are working to ensure that our veterans retain their dignity at all times.

[English]

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we do want to be generous with our veterans' pensions, as the hon. member said in her answer to the question, but how do we deal with these pensions with the disparity in the cost of living that exists for many pensioners across the country? I think of the aboriginal people in northern Canada with the high cost of living, the remoteness and the fact that a lot of them have served in the armed forces and have been away from their communities for a very long time. When they return, how do they deal with re-establishing a lifestyle as a veteran and a pensioner in the situation where the cost of living is out of sight?

•(1300)

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Mr. Speaker, the pension we have at this time is fully indexed to the cost of living. When the cost of living goes up, it is immediately indexed.

We are therefore working very hard to ensure that veterans do not have this problem.

[English]

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will just pick one aspect of the motion, the veterans independence program. With respect to the widows and widowers who cared for our veterans in the last stages of their lives, does the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister not believe that all of them, every last one of them, should receive the VIP package regardless of the time of death of the veteran?

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Mr. Speaker, I must point out that we have the greatest respect for the widows and widowers of veterans and that we are working very hard to find a way of meeting their expectations.

[English]

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to participate in this debate today. I will be sharing my time with the member for New Westminster—Coquitlam.

I would like to thank the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore for his work not just on this motion but generally on behalf of veterans. He gave some very moving comments this morning about his family's experience in Holland and their gratitude for the work that our armed forces did at that time.

On a personal note, I can certainly say that my years of experience of working with our armed forces personnel have allowed me to observe their dedication and their willingness to serve wherever and whenever they are asked by the government to do so.

A month ago, on October 5, I spoke in support of a bill to honour our soldiers by designating a peacekeepers day. It was a symbol of our gratitude, of our recognition of the service of soldiers who have risked their lives, and continue to do so, in the service of our country, of peace and of democracy.

Today, through this motion, we can do more than offer a token of gratitude. We can actually rectify a number of unjust situations that veterans and their families continue to face.

I will focus in particular on two aspects of this motion that several of my constituents have either spoken or written to me about. I will begin with clause 2 of the motion that proposes to extend the veterans independence program to all widows of all veterans, regardless of the time of death of the veteran and regardless of whether the veteran was in receipt of VIP services prior to his or her death.

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The veterans independence program is a national home care program provided by Veterans Affairs Canada. It depends on the person's circumstances, health and needs, but it includes house-keeping, ground maintenance, personal care services, health support services and access to nutrition. The program was established to help clients remain healthy and independent in their own homes or communities. Widows whose husbands died prior to 1981 are not eligible for the program, nor are those widows whose husbands did not receive VIP benefits prior to their death.

The interesting thing about this part of the motion is that it would actually save money for the government by allowing seniors to stay in their homes longer. Many of the women cared for their husbands in their homes for years, assisting them with daily living and other caregiving duties. Some of these women are now facing declining health and need these services. Access to these services would give special recognition of their supportive work and allow many of them, as I said, to remain healthy and independent in their homes.

This is no simple program gap. It is a serious omission with real life consequences for Canadians every day.

Just this spring a local Royal Canadian Legion brought to my attention a case of a veteran from my riding who passed away in November 2005. Before he died, the Department of Veterans Affairs had installed a chairlift in his home. His wife, who is also not well, has difficulty with her mobility and is not able to get around in the house without the aid of the chairlift, yet they came to this veteran's home in late March of this year, a few months after his death, to remove the chairlift. They did not phone the veteran's wife or family to inquire about an opportune time to remove the lift, nor whether the lift was still required by the veteran's spouse.

The legion pointed out that this veteran's widow deserves to be able to use the chairlift. After all, she was the one who raised their children on her own while her husband was away serving our country in a theatre of war.

• (1305)

Her family is trying to give their aged mother the dignity of remaining in her own home for as long as possible, and it is not possible without the chairlift. I agree that it is the very least we can do to honour this woman for her sacrifice and the sacrifice of her husband to allow this device to stay for as long as she needs it. This chairlift I am happy to report is still in the home, but only because this couple's son stood strong and refused to let MEDiChair remove it.

It should not fall to the families of Canadian veterans to defend their parents' right to live with dignity. That should be a given from the government that waxes poetic about its commitment to our troops, yet somehow has continued to let the troops and their families fall through the cracks in their later years.

Now is the time to do more than talk about honouring our soldiers. The Conservatives can keep the promise the Prime Minister made while in opposition and help the spouses and the families of our veterans.

A second way to do that is to eliminate the deduction from annuity for retired and disabled Canadian Forces members. The service pensions of retired Canadian Forces and RCMP personnel are

reduced significantly when the pensioner receives CPP or CPP disability benefits. This reduction formula is especially punishing for the military personnel and the RCMP now disabled and in receipt of CPP disability benefits.

Eliminating this clawback would assist in recognizing their special contributions to our country. During their working years they face dangerous conditions, extended family separations, hazards to health and safety, long stretches of overtime, and have to re-establish family life with new postings many times over their career.

One of my constituents recently wrote me to tell his story. When he became a pensioner on February 22, a portion of his Canadian Forces annuity, equal to about 70¢ per dollar of CPP disability pension, was clawed back. He wrote:

I have contributed to both the Canadian Forces Superannuation Plan and the Canada Pension Plan for all of my working life. I know that CF and RCMP members were SUPPOSED to have contributed to CPP at a lower rate than others; however, my records show that I have contributed the maximum allowable amount every year from 1974 to 2005. Both the CFSA and the CPP are pension plans, to which one contributes with the understanding that when one retires, one collects the benefits of that pension plan at the rate to which one has become entitled.

These two issues are in addition to three others that the Royal Canadian Legion has brought to our attention. This motion seeks to allow a veteran's spouse to receive pension benefits upon the veteran's death, removing this desperately antiquated clause that unfairly penalizes older women.

This motion would push to increase the inadequate survivors pension amount from 50% to 60% to give our veterans and their families comparable treatment from superannuation and survivor benefits to those received by individuals in public or private pension plans.

These five points are no-brainers in my opinion in recognizing the exceptional contribution and sacrifice of our Canadian Forces veterans and their families. Our inaction is a disservice to those who have served us very well. There are surely more issues than these to address, but let these five points be a beginning.

I would briefly like to mention the next immediate step to take after this and that is to reconsider the discontinuance of danger pay to our injured soldiers in Afghanistan. This is another issue that cuts to the heart of how we recognize the contribution of military families. Their family member comes home from a theatre of war with an injury and we dock his or her pay for getting injured. I agree with a constituent of mine who wrote, "I am in awe that Ottawa can't see the harm that is being caused to the morale of our troops over a relatively small amount of money".

When a government makes that most solemn decision to send the men and women of our Canadian Forces to war, those men and women respond with wholehearted courage and commitment. Once our veterans have served Canada, it is time for Canada to serve our veterans.

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●(1310)

Mrs. Betty Hinton (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is very obvious that everyone in the House has deep and emotional feelings toward our veterans. I am going to presume that the NDP member who put this motion forward has also done the due diligence and has looked into the costs of putting forward some of what is contained within the bill.

In terms of item 5 alone, a rough guesstimate, and it truly just a rough guesstimate, is \$22 billion. I wonder if the member opposite could please tell us where she thinks we would be able to find \$22 billion.

Ms. Denise Savoie: Mr. Speaker, I think the issue of due diligence is an important one in all areas of the military. It is not just important to do our due diligence when we send them abroad and send them to war or to the theatre of war such as we are doing now in Afghanistan, it also is important to do our due diligence in all cases of looking after them and their families when they return.

I believe that government has a role to play, if it is committed to our forces, in looking at the finances to allow this to happen. It is not just a question of buying equipment. It is also important to look after the people who are involved in serving us.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I find it ironic to hear the numbers being floated. On the record I would have to say that I think they are absurd in terms of what it is costing us.

I would like to give members an example. A senior in my community who grew up in the Depression asked me if I knew what it was like in the Depression when the kids were hungry and the government said there was not a cent for them. The government had no money for them.

When they went through the Depression, he said, there was no unemployment money and there was nothing for them, but when the war came, boy oh boy, cost was not an option. We got the boots on them and we sent them off. We sent them over by the thousands. Cost was no option. The government did not consider it. Most of them never came home and the ones who did have had to deal with a parsimonious response from government year after year.

In my own riding, there is a widow who was given a pension of \$3.25 a month. There is no problem with feeding us at lunch every day in the House. What everyone in this House gets fed at lunch is worth more than the \$3.25 a month we were giving that widow, and this is in 2006.

I would like to ask the member why she thinks it is that the Conservative government stands here and comes up with such outrageously inflated figures when we are dealing with the simple fact of coming up with an honourable conclusion for what our veterans and their widows have lived through.

●(1315)

Ms. Denise Savoie: In the past month, Mr. Speaker, we have seen the government attribute \$13 billion to our surplus without considering many other very important needs in our society. Basic literacy is important for people to participate in the economy, and now some figures are being brought out about this.

I would like to repeat and emphasize that I myself have been a witness to the incredible work that our military has done, whether it lies in being at sea for months or in jumping in the ocean out of a helicopter to save someone. That we now become stingy after the fact, after they either have to take medical leave or retire and leave their families in distress, is just not an acceptable response by the government.

Mrs. Betty Hinton (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will assure both members of the NDP that I am not pulling numbers out of thin air. I suggested that this is a rough guesstimate, and that is only on one of the five points that has been brought forward. I am not challenging the member. I am asking the member to back up this particular motion that has been put forward. Has the due diligence been done? Would the member give an estimate as to what it will cost?

Ms. Denise Savoie: Yes, Mr. Speaker, there are estimates that have been provided for each of the programs. As I said when I referred to the veterans independence program, that program would in itself save money for the government for a long time. We have always known that a proper national home care program for all Canadians would keep seniors in their homes longer and out of hospitals and would at least be cost neutral, if not a saving.

For each one of these programs estimates have been done, and of course the government has more resources and analysts and researchers to look into the costs than does the opposition. I trust that if the government is interested in moving forward with this program—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Resuming debate, the hon. member for New Westminster—Coquitlam.

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to rise today to speak in support of this New Democrat opposition day motion as the defence critic for my party and also in support of the veterans in my riding in New Westminster, in Coquitlam and in Port Moody.

I also want to take a moment to pay tribute to my colleague from Sackville—Eastern Shore who has worked so hard on veterans issues over so many years, understands them thoroughly and has actually done the research that brings this motion forward today for debate.

My grandfather volunteered to serve in the first world war as a young boy of 15. He was accepted and went overseas as a 15 year old. My father served in the second world war.

A few years ago, I had an opportunity to travel to Vimy Ridge, tour the monuments to the Canadian war dead from the first world war and go through the tunnels that the young Canadian soldiers were in during the night before they were told to go out over the top and attack the enemy lines.

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When I was in Vimy Ridge and in that tunnel and was being given what I must say was a magnificent tour by a young Canadian university student, I saw carved into the wall of the tunnel a maple leaf. That maple leaf had been carved there by a young person who had been sent over to fight in the first world war. It brought tears to my eyes. I thought about that young person who spent that night in those tunnels before being sent out to fight in that terrible, terrible war, and I wondered about him and his family and whether he survived.

I also took the opportunity with my family to travel to Beaumont-Hamel, where there is a wonderful park that has been given to Canadians by the French government, as Vimy has, and is maintained. There is also a museum there that speaks to the Newfoundland Regiment, which had a higher percentage of soldiers killed than any other Commonwealth country. So many from Newfoundland were killed on that July 1 day.

This summer, my family and I travelled to Juno Beach, to Normandy, and saw the new museum there. While we were there on the beach, I came across a family from Victoria. These people were there with their father, a veteran of the landings at Juno Beach. I was struck in talking to this veteran by his modesty, his sense that he was only doing what he had to do, that he was not doing any more than the country expected of him when he put his life in danger that day, and when he lost friends and comrades in the landings at Juno Beach. His sense of modesty really touched my heart when he talked about his contributions of valour and bravery. He thought it was just the right thing to do.

These are the people we are talking about today. They are the very kind of people we are talking about. They are the sons and daughters of working class people who put their lives on hold, who put their youth on hold, and went to fight in Canada's wars. These are the people who deserve dignity and respect and the support they should be getting in their older years.

There are five components to the motion we have before us.

One of them would eliminate what is called the gold digger clause and would allow veterans' spouses to have the pension benefits upon their death. The root of this goes back to 1901 and the Militia Pension Act, which had the intent of preventing young women from marrying Boer war veterans for the purpose of collecting their pensions.

The clock has moved forward. The calendar has moved forward. This is a ridiculous kind of provision to have now. It also disqualifies spouses from receiving dental or health benefits. It is insulting to assume that spouses, women or men, would marry for some small amount of pension benefits. It is time for the government to eliminate this clause and to get with it and get into this century, particularly in terms of how women are treated by pension legislation.

We are also asking that the veterans independence program be extended to all widows regardless of the time of death of the veteran and regardless of whether he was in receipt of the VIP services prior to his death.

● (1320)

All widows, based on need, should be eligible for VIP services. These services depend upon one's circumstances and health needs, but they include the very kinds of services that allow widows to stay in their homes, be independent and not be a burden on the health care system in Canada and, as my colleague from Victoria said, would actually save us money in many respects.

Many widows came to Canada as war brides after the second world war. One of those women is a person in my riding named Yetty Foulds. She lives in Maillardville in Coquitlam. She is the president of the Greater Vancouver War Brides Association and the secretary of our local legion in the city of Coquitlam. She is the poppy chairperson. She organizes special candlelight services every October which gives veterans the opportunity to pass a candle on to the young people in our community. It is a way of passing the torch to remember and to instil in the young people in our community a sense of our history and the sacrifice that our veterans have made over the years.

The third point in this opposition day motion would increase the survivor's pension amount upon the death of a Canadian Forces retiree. It asks that the pension amount be increased from the current 50% to 66%, which is much more in line with other private and public pensions in Canada.

If this change were made it would recognize the contribution of the Canadian Forces personnel and their families. We feel they should receive the same fair and equitable treatment from their superannuation benefits that others do from public or private pension plans. I want to reiterate that all spouses should have fair access to the pensions of their partners.

The fourth point in our motion calls for the elimination of the unfair reduction in the SISIP, the long term disability benefits for medically released members of the Canadian Forces. This plan does not necessarily pay the whole 75% that it can pay. It takes into account other sources of income that a former member may receive and that is offset from the SISIP paid directly. This offset includes the Veterans Affairs Canada disability pension. It offsets the amount from a veterans affairs disability pension from the SISIP long term disability plan.

The veterans disability pension should not be considered income but disability benefits to compensate for injuries sustained in the line of duty. This is an unfair policy and it places an incredible financial hardship on disabled Canadian Forces personnel. We are asking the government to eliminate this unfair policy. It is something the Conservatives talked about doing while they were in opposition and therefore I urge them now to act while they are in government and have the power to do this.

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The last part of the motion calls for the elimination of the deduction from annuity for retired and disabled Canadian Forces members. I know my colleague from Sackville—Eastern Shore has a private member's bill on this. Members of the Canadian Forces and the RCMP have roles and a lifestyle distinct from those of us in the House of Commons and from the community at large. They face dangerous conditions, family separations and conditions that are hazardous to their health and safety. They need to re-establish family life many times with new postings.

In conclusion, I want to emphasize that veterans and their families should be accorded the utmost respect in Canada. This respect must include ensuring they and their families have the support they need to remain healthy and independent. I call upon the government and all members of the House to support this opposition day motion in advance of Remembrance Day.

●(1325)

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be rising a few times today because I can speak to this issue with some authority.

I know my NDP colleague and her party care about people as individuals but, at the risk of sounding unkind, I would point out that if they had cared in the past about people in the military like they care about them now they would not have obstructed military spending as much as they have historically.

However, I do strongly support a couple of items in this motion, one being the VIP spousal benefits, because, frankly, anybody who gold digs for a military pension does not understand mathematics.

Somebody mentioned that more research resources were available to the government than to the opposition to come up with figures to cost out some of the programs that we are talking about, and there was some disbelief at the figures that my hon. Conservative colleague mentioned. However, I would point out that those resources are the same for the opposition as they are for us, and it is called the Library of Parliament. Why would they not go get accurate numbers? Is it because the answer is inconvenient?

Ms. Dawn Black: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member and I sit together on the defence committee and I know his concerns about the Canadian military are sincere, as are mine.

In terms of the cutbacks that were made, it seems to me that they go back to a previous Conservative government. Under the Mulroney government, the cuts were made to bases right across Canada. I do not recall the New Democratic Party supporting that action. I think it was a Conservative government.

In terms of the Library of Parliament, it is a wonderful resource and we use it a lot. I know my colleague, the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore, has costed out these proposals that we have put forward today and the figures we have been given certainly differ from the ones the parliamentary secretary put on the table today.

My colleague, the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore, communicates well with all members of this House and I know he would be happy to share the research he has done with the doubting Thomases on the government side.

●(1330)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, while I was visiting my local legion in Timmins, Legion Branch 88, the other day and talking with some of the people there, it occurred to me that the legion was not an old folks' home, a golden age club, but the repository in every community across the country that protects our future veterans. The young ones who are there now will be the legion 20 and 30 years from now protecting them.

While I was at the legion, a Korean war vet came up to me and said, "You know, Charlie, we went over there to a war and we fought in a war. We were still young when we came back and we didn't understand everything we were being told. But when we got home, we found out we weren't in a war, we were in a police action, and because we were technically in a police action, we weren't eligible for the same benefits that war veterans got". He then said, "So, Charlie, when you see the Prime Minister on television saying this isn't a war in Afghanistan, this is a police action, or, yes, we're in a war but it's not a war". He said, "You know why they're doing that? Because these young men who come back to our riding, 30 and 40 years from now, when they need help, they will not be getting the same level of benefits that they deserve as veterans".

Because the member has done such strong work on raising issues about Afghanistan, what obligations do we have as a nation to ensure that our Afghanistan veterans are given the full protection as veterans of war?

Ms. Dawn Black: Mr. Speaker, I have three active legions in my community. The legion in Coquitlam has, over the last five years, donated a quarter of a million dollars to community organizations, most of them youth based. The legion in Port Moody and the legion in New Westminster work hard to provide housing for seniors and older British Columbians and they each maintain a housing unit called Legion Manor.

I am shocked to hear that members in my colleague's riding think that the Canadian Forces who are fighting in Afghanistan may not be entitled to full veterans' benefits when they come home. We know their danger pay has been cut if they are hurt in battle right now. We have had a commitment from the minister who says that it will be fixed. I certainly hope it is and I hope it happens quickly. I think we need to push that issue in our defence committee and I call upon members in the House of Commons who are on the defence committee to work with me to ensure our forces get full benefits.

Mr. Brent St. Denis (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform the House that I will be splitting my time with my colleague, the member for Charlottetown.

I would like to commend my colleague from the other corner of this chamber, the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore, for bringing forward a very important to-do list for Parliament in relation to the needs of our veterans.

As we enter upon the remembrance period, with Veterans Week about to begin, the timing of this is very appropriate. My colleague has asked the House to consider five very important measures, each of which will have importance to our veterans.

Before I get into the particulars, I would like to not only commend our legions from coast to coast, but commend the 15 legions in my own riding of Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking that have carried the torch of remembrance on behalf of those who did not come home from wars and peacekeeping missions, past and present, and on behalf of those who came home injured and those who, thankfully, came home in better health. Regardless of how they returned from the wars, peacekeeping or peace time service, they all deserve our absolute and utmost respect now. They have provided and do provide a special service to our country and, without question, as we support our troops now we must support our retired troops, whether they were air, land or sea.

One of the things that I have learned in my years as a member of Parliament is that most of our veterans, when they first entered the service, were very young. Many of them were in their teens, even some in the early teens, but certainly late teens. If any of us remember back to our teen years, the last thing we thought about was what we would do when we retired from whatever our life's work would be. It was the last thing on our minds.

I am thinking of Tom Morrisette in Massey, Ontario, who turned 80 this past August. He injured a knee within a few weeks of basic training, which, for his whole life, has caused him difficulty. However, because he was only a teenager, he was afraid to go to the higher ups to report his injury. He was concerned that he would be picked out as being weaker than the rest, which he certainly was not. His injury was genuine and it happened during basic training. He was one of tens of thousands of young people who entered the service with a certain degree of naiveté. They were happy and honoured to serve their country and not really concerned about the long term. They left it up to the powers that be to ensure things would be there for them.

It is not just like taking a job at the local factory. Entering the military service for our country is a special undertaking. We owe it to our veterans to bring our minds back as much as possible to 50 and 60 years ago, and more if necessary for some of our older veterans, back to the days before Korea. Just a few years ago, before the conflicts in which our troops are now engaged, we could imagine what young people were concerned about. Most of them were concerned about what would happen to them if they got injured. That is our job.

I really appreciate the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore bringing forward this list of important measures that we are debating today. I will be supporting the motion when it comes to a vote because I think the veterans affairs committee, on behalf of the House, needs to and should do a very thorough study of every one of these measures. Some of the measures, as proposed in the motion, are easier to grapple than others but every one of them, regardless of that, needs to be grappled.

• (1335)

I have no dispute with the notion that the second wife of a veteran should qualify for a pension. Current measures are simply an

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anachronism. Who would not wish anything but a happy life for a veteran who decides to remarry? We simply need to do the analysis and get that right.

When it comes to the veterans independence program, we simply need go no further than to refer to the current Prime Minister's promise made during a campaign, and I think the word "immediately" was used, that a new Conservative government—which is what the Conservatives claim they are; I am not sure they are new, but they are a Conservative government—would immediately implement the VIP for all widows regardless of the date of death of a veteran.

We are ready to go. I urge my colleagues across the way to encourage the Prime Minister in caucus to get on this. The finance minister will be reporting his economic statement to the House I believe in the third week of November, after the recess week following Remembrance Day. I hope during that economic update he will introduce measures to immediately implement the VIP for all widows of veterans.

Indeed, there are a number of measures that he needs to institute to make up for the disaster of the income trust announcement a couple of days ago. It would be a good start, along with other measures he could announce and confirm toward making things better for senior veterans.

Who are our veterans? They are people who live among us and who deliberately put their lives at risk for us. Most of us here will never have to suffer the ravages of war. We really depend on them to carry that torch to make sure we never forget and we thank them. We thank our legions and veterans.

My good friend, the member for Cape Breton—Canso, who is a great advocate for veterans, always talks about one of his constituents, Mrs. Joyce Carter. She has been a constant reminder to all of us of the importance of getting on with the veterans independence program.

Our legions are not only local institutions which provide services to the community at large but individual veterans are among the greatest volunteers communities can have. The activities in my riding throughout the year, and I am sure all members in the House can relate to similar stories, whether they are remembrance activities or events in the community sponsored by the legion, are far too numerous to count. Their continued efforts on behalf of all of us are efforts for which we must be very grateful.

They not only gave their lives and put their lives in danger but they continue to do that in service to the country today. Many of them are very frail. Those of us who thought a few years ago that the legion and remembrance movement would diminish over time as our veterans passed away have thankfully been proven wrong. It has been my experience that the remembrance movement in northern Ontario, particularly in my riding and elsewhere, is extremely strong and is getting stronger. There are more events.

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I was at a Korea vets dinner a couple of weeks ago in Elliot Lake. I will be at the legion branch dinner Saturday night. I will be at the remembrance ceremony in Kapuskasing on November 11 and then on to Hearst. I will get to many events across my riding. In fact, there are so many events I cannot get to them all, but thankfully our veterans are doing that for us.

But they are frail and they do need our attention, whether it is by increasing the survivors pension from 50% to 66% or dealing with the service income security insurance plan. We need to look at why there is a compromise to the benefits. We certainly need to look at the integration of the superannuation with the CPP, which occurred back in the 1960s. Let us review that. Let us make sure we have it right. Any clawback is not appropriate considering the special honour and special thanks we owe to our veterans.

• (1340)

We see the torch being passed on. I thank my colleagues and we thank our veterans.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I share in my colleague's remarks about the value of veterans and what they have given the country.

People who know me know that I am an emotional person and I respond to emotion. All the emotional things that go with being in the military and all of the sacrifices that we have talked about today are very real, but there is also a practical side to me and I think there has to be a practical side to what we do as well.

I ask the hon. member, whether the number is \$20 billion, \$40 billion or whatever the number is that we can argue about, is there a practical limit to the amount of dollars the hon. member would suggest that the Government of Canada spend to compensate somebody, strictly financially speaking, for what they have not paid for for 40 years, multiplied by tens of thousands?

• (1345)

Mr. Brent St. Denis: Mr. Speaker, the member for Edmonton Centre has asked a similar question of other colleagues.

In anything there are practical limits, but the question is what the numbers are that we are talking about in this particular case. That is why my plan is to support this motion so that the veterans affairs committee can have a close look at all of the measures here.

With respect to the extension of the VIP, there should be really no question in the member's mind about proceeding on that one, because as I mentioned in my remarks, it was his leader who made a commitment during the campaign to immediately implement that. Let us at the very least take that one off the table. It need not even go to committee. I am sure my colleague from Sackville—Eastern Shore would be glad that that element not go to committee, that the government simply proceed, and then we would do the study and review of the other four measures.

I do not have the exact figure. I do not know even if the member has gone to the Library of Parliament, whether anybody really has a real sense of it. I gather that his concern is about the so-called clawback and that is worth a very close look.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to ask a question of my colleague. First I would

like to thank my own colleague, the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore, for his great work on this whole area of veterans issues and for the motion we have before us today, so close to November 11.

It is an emotional day for everyone, especially for those of us who have parents who are still alive and who were part of World War II. My father is 87. He was part of the Governor General's Horse Guards who liberated Holland. That is where he met my mother and that is why I am here today. I am so glad to be part of this debate and I am grateful to all those veterans.

In addition to the veterans independence program, which it is self-evident that it must be addressed, the same must be said about the survivor benefits. It seems just as obvious that we should be increasing the survivor benefit from 50% to 66%. In that context, I want to ask the member to respond to the following statement by Jack Frost, the head of the Royal Canadian Legion for this country, who at our finance committee in the middle of September said the following:

I think it's only fair that we look at our CF personnel, the ones who today are putting their lives on the line. For example, since 2002, 36 Canadian soldiers have lost their lives, including the four that just lost their lives yesterday. Since August, 13 have died and 150 have been seriously injured and have returned to Canada. They deserve not only great benefits from Veterans Affairs Canada, which they do receive, but they require the same eligibility and same fair and equitable treatment from the superannuation benefits, which, as we have suggested, would include a 60% survival benefit as well as the abatement of the CPP.

Does the member agree with that well-meaning request by the Royal Canadian Legion?

Mr. Brent St. Denis: Mr. Speaker, the president, Mr. Frost, recently spoke quite eloquently at the veterans affairs committee. We are studying the proposal for an ombudsman for veterans which I think has all party support. It is a matter of moving the yardsticks forward on that one.

As for increasing the survivors pension from 50% to 66%, I believe that veterans should have the opportunity to opt into that. I do not think there would be much disagreement with using industry standards for the actuarial application of that principle. I would be very happy to say yes to that particular proposal.

• (1350)

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. There have been discussions between all the parties and I believe you would find unanimous consent for the following motion: That at the conclusion of today's debate on the opposition motion in the name of the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore, all questions necessary to dispose of the motion be deemed put, and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Tuesday, November 7, 2006, at the expiry of the time provided for government orders.

I ask that this motion be put forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Does the hon. House leader for the NDP have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Business of Supply

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I am hearing some nos. I do not think there is unanimous consent.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I do not want to say no, but I have not been consulted by my House leader. If the hon. member would give me two minutes, I will get right back to her.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): There are 10 minutes left for questions and comments, so maybe we could do that just before oral questions. I will recognize the next speaker on debate.

The hon. member for Charlottetown.

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am thankful for the opportunity to rise in the House today to participate in this extremely important and timely topic. It is timely because we are in process of starting Veterans Week next week and it ends on Remembrance Day, November 11. Every member of Parliament participates fully in the thousands and thousands of Remembrance Day ceremonies that take place across our great country.

In my riding of Charlottetown we have the main ceremony at the Cenotaph on Grafton Street. It is followed by a reception at the Daniel J. MacDonald Building, which is the headquarters of the Department of Veterans Affairs. Then there are other ceremonies at the legion and other places, for a full day and a good day.

There is one very unfortunate trend I have noticed in my last six years as the member of Parliament. The fortunate trend is that the crowds are getting larger and larger every year. We are getting two or three hundred more people at this ceremony, which is tremendous. It shows the importance that the Canadian public attributes to this day and to this event.

However, there is an unfortunate trend, and I guess it is a fact of life. The number of World War II veterans on parade have become less and less each and every year. Six or seven years ago we would see hundreds of them on parade and that is down substantially, which is unfortunate.

I mentioned my riding of Charlottetown. It is very proud to be the location of the headquarters of the Department of Veterans Affairs. About 1,200 workers in that department. There is also another office in Ottawa. These people do a tremendous job and I am proud of each and every one of them. I deal with them, represent them and talk to them. I get a lot of the veterans issues not only in November during Veterans Week, but each and every day of the year.

One tremendous event has happened in the past year. That is the passage of the Veterans Charter, which came into effect on April 1 last year. I believe every member of this House can take some credit for that. It was an opportunity where all parties put aside their partisan differences. It did not take days, it took hours to pass that tremendous legislation. The honour bestowed to veterans is a great credit to the House. The charter sets out a new way to deal with the injured veteran and it will pay dividends in the years to come.

I will be supporting the motion before the House. It is an omnibus motion. It contains five separate issues all relating to veterans but not relating to each other. Some of them are simple. It is a matter of just doing it. I do not understand why we do not just do it this afternoon, and I will speak to that. Some are not simple. The adjustment of the

pensions for veterans when they turn 65 years of age is not a simple matter. I am not going to say this is a simple matter and that the Minister of Finance can do this with the stroke of a pen.

I will support the motion to send it to committee so the matter can be studied, analyzed and reviewed. We have heard some costs of \$200 million. I heard one recently of \$20 billion, so let us get the figures and see what we can do to improve the pensions for veterans. That is my objective.

One thing I will not call it is a clawback because it is not. Anyone who calls it a clawback, really does not understand how that pension was calculated. It is a blending of the Canada Pension Plan and that is the way it has been calculated. It has been done like that for years. It is the same as other federal, provincial and municipal civil service pensions, but, again, it is a matter to refer to committee.

However, let us talk about some simple issues. The first one is the veterans independence program. At one time until about three years ago, it was available for the surviving spouse of deceased veterans for a period only of 12 years after the death of the veteran.

• (1355)

Through lobbying of a lot members on both sides of the House, that was changed to allow the surviving spouse to get it for his or her remaining years, and in most cases it was a her. That was a tremendous development, and it is one for which I believe every member in the House deserves some credit. However, in doing that, we did not go all the way. Right now there are surviving spouses whose husbands perhaps were entitled to the benefits of the program, but died before the program initially came into existence, and I believe that was 1991.

I lobbied hard, as did other members, to get it extended to all surviving spouses. When I campaigned during the 2004 election campaign, I ran across three or four surviving spouses. They told me what they thought. They asked me why they could not get the benefit of the veterans independence program. I did not have an answer for them. It was very unfortunate.

We as parliamentarians have to correct this and we have to correct it immediately. The husbands of two of those surviving spouses were amputees. I would surmise and speculate that the reason they died prior to the earlier date was because they suffered a premature death due to respiratory and circulatory issues. As a result, these surviving spouses are not eligible for this very small benefit.

The party in government made a simple promise. It promised to immediately rectify this issue. Immediate in my background means doing it right away, and already nine months have passed. Is there anyone in the House who can explain to me why we cannot do it right away, and by right away, I mean today?

Statements by Members

We had a very unfortunate incident yesterday where the party in power broke a promise. I think for generations to come, November 1 will be known as “black Wednesday”. Maybe we can follow “black Wednesday” with “white Thursday”, do the right thing and pass this provision, which I do not think is a big budgetary item. Members know where I stand on this issue.

The first step deals with section 31(1) of the act, dealing with the provision that the new spouse of a veteran who gets married later in life is not eligible as a survivor under his pension. I do not think it is appropriate, but it has been referred to as the “gold digger clause”. That goes back to an earlier era of situations like the dowry where the wife was a chattel of the husband. We have moved on from that. That is a very sexist issue.

We should just move on and pass this and not wait another day. We should get it done right now.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member will have two minutes left after question period and five minutes for questions and comments.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. There have been discussions among all parties and I believe you would find unanimous 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 Sackville—Eastern Shore, all questions necessary to dispose of the motion be deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Tuesday, November 7 at the expiry of the time provided for government orders.

• (1400)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.
(Motion agreed to)

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

FEDERAL ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday marked the first anniversary of the release of the Gomery report. The report was an unequivocal condemnation of the Liberal Party and its practices. The Gomery report turned out to be a lifting of the cloak of secrecy off the Liberal Party, revealing a culture of entitlement, corruption and gross mismanagement of taxpayers' money.

Thankfully Canada's new government introduced the federal accountability act as its first order of business. Regretfully, a full year after the release of the Gomery report, Bill C-2 has still not been enacted into law.

Despite the unanimous consent of the House, the Liberal controlled Senate has stalled, delayed, refused, undermined and attempted to dismantle legislation that is designed to restore the faith of Canadians in their political system.

Bill C-2 has been carefully considered, debated sufficiently and is supported by the people of Canada, including the constituents in the

riding of Peterborough. Let us get on with passing Bill C-2 and stop the shenanigans in the unelected Senate.

* * *

GURU NANAK DEV JI

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): On November 5, Mr. Speaker, Sikhs around the world will be celebrating the anniversary of the birth of Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the founder of the Sikh religion who was born in 1469.

Guru Nanak and his teachings uplifted the poor, the oppressed and the mistreated. Throughout his life Guru Nanak spread the message of love, peace, hope, justice, harmony, equality and the oneness of God and universal brotherhood.

It is through Guru Nanak's teachings that Sikhs receive the five basic principles of their religion: remember the all mighty God; earn an honest living; share what one has with the less fortunate; pray for the well-being of humanity; and accept the will of God.

To adherents of the Sikh faith in Canada, please accept the best wishes of the House and the other place on the auspicious occasion of the anniversary of the birth of Guru Nanak Dev Ji.

Wahe Guru Jika Khalsa. Wahe Guru Jiki Fatai.

* * *

[Translation]

DIABETES MONTH

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the month of November is devoted to diabetes, a disease that is affecting increasing numbers in the 21st century. This chronic, incurable disease is caused by a lack of insulin in the body or the body's inability to properly use normal amounts of insulin. It affects almost half a million Quebecers. Even more worrying is the fact that half of these people do not know about their condition and the WHO believes the number of diabetics will double by 2025.

The social cost of diabetes is enormous. It amounts to two billion dollars per year in direct and indirect costs in Quebec. However, we can work to overcome this disease by investing in research and prevention. The Government of Canada must do its share and transfer the necessary funds to Quebec so that it can increase funding for research, carry out more screening and continue to promote a healthy lifestyle among the population.

I take this opportunity to thank all those who are involved in the fight against this scourge called diabetes.

* * *

[English]

CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, 70 years ago today CBC went on the air. For seven decades it has been a public commons for the social and political discourse of our country from coast to coast to coast.

Statements by Members

Yes, CBC is about hockey, sure it is about comedy and it is definitely about top-notch journalism, but fundamentally it is about creating a dialogue and that dialogue is what we need to create a nation.

We have only to look south of the border where the privatized airwaves have turned political discourse into the beating of political jungle drums and attack ads.

[*Translation*]

I would like to congratulate employees of Radio-Canada and of the CBC for their exemplary work in all regions of Canada. For example, in northeastern Ontario, they play a vital role in the life and culture of the north.

[*English*]

Now it is time for Parliament to do its part. We need a long term stable commitment to funding. We need a clear mandate. We need an end to the political patronage appointments out of the PMO. If we do that, it will be another 70 great years—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for Nanaimo—Alberni.

* * *

CHIROPRACTICS

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Over the past 30 years, Mr. Speaker, there has been increasing international recognition of the contribution doctors of chiropractic make in promoting good health and reducing both cost and lost time due to workplace injury.

A 1993 landmark study by Dr. Pran Manga at the University of Ottawa recommended that the Ontario government might save hundreds of millions of dollars by ensuring access to chiropractors in the realm of low back pain treatment alone.

Numerous studies in Canada, the U.S., Denmark and the U.K. attest to the valuable contribution chiropractors are making around the world.

Last month UBC announced the appointment of Dr. Jean-Sebastian Blouin as research chair in spinal biomechanics and neurophysiology. Dr. Blouin joins two other chiropractors as research chairs in respected Canadian universities.

Today, doctors of chiropractic from across Canada have come to the House to speak with members and government officials about the contribution chiropractors are and could be making to enhance the health of Canadians and reduce the cost of health care delivery in Canada.

I hope all members will extend a warm welcome to the visiting delegation and best wishes to all doctors of chiropractic working to improve the health of Canadians.

* * *

• (1405)

DR. CARMEL CASEY

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-
sor, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am indeed proud of one of my constituents,

Dr. Carmel Casey of Gander, who recently was presented with the prestigious Reg L. Perkin award: 2006 Physician of the Year for Newfoundland and Labrador.

The presentation took place at the College of Family Physicians of Canada annual meeting in Quebec City during Family Doctor Week in Canada.

Dr. Casey has a family practice in Gander and is the Newfoundland and Labrador champion for the College of Physicians doctors promoting active living programs. She founded the Victorian Order of Nurses broadening horizons program in Gander that offers employment opportunities to adults with intellectual disabilities and received the VON's gold team of excellence award.

She is a member of the special Olympics Newfoundland and Labrador and was an assistant coach for the 2006 national special Olympics summer games.

I congratulate and commend Dr. Casey on winning this prestigious award. Her commitment to family practice and volunteer community initiatives is indeed commendable.

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ROTARY CLUB

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Rotary Club of Palgrave, Ontario, will celebrate its 25th anniversary on November 4, 2006. The club is marking this significant anniversary by donating to the village of Palgrave a town clock, which will be unveiled and dedicated on Saturday, November 4, at 2 p.m., for all to enjoy and which is part of the celebrations recognizing this milestone.

For 25 years the men and women of the Palgrave Rotary Club have been making a difference in the lives of others. Rotarians volunteer their time and energy to serve our community, to sponsor children and young people, and to give a helping hand to those most in need around the world.

I sincerely congratulate the Palgrave Rotary Club on this remarkable achievement and for the many outstanding contributions the club has made to our strong and proud community. I also wish the club many more years of excellent community service and good will. Congratulations.

* * *

[*Translation*]

SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, grants awarded by SCPI this year amounted to \$135 million, of which \$20 million went to Quebec. These amounts were absolutely necessary to provide assistance to the homeless, and, to our knowledge, these funds were well used.

The four little pilot projects announced last week by the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development will not make SCPI obsolete. We support that announcement to the extent that those pilot projects can contribute to enhancing SCPI, but they must not be used as a pretext for reducing SCPI in any way.

Statements by Members

There are more than 12,000 homeless people in Montreal and more than 150,000 across Canada. Only an enhanced and permanent SCPI program can help these people, as the Bloc Québécois has been demanding for a long time.

Is the minister's refusal to act for nine months a matter of ideology or simply a lack of expertise?

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. Christian Paradis (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the co-chair of the Council of the Federation Advisory Panel on the Fiscal Imbalance wrote today that the leader of the Bloc Québécois is deceiving the public when he puts a figure on the fiscal imbalance.

According to Mr. Gagné, “—the statements made by Mr. Boisclair and the leader of the Bloc Québécois do not result from a different interpretation of our conclusions but rather from a more than dubious manipulation of certain data in our report”.

To arrive erroneously at his figure, the leader of the Bloc Québécois uses a fictitious amount—“fictitious”, Mr. Speaker—which the committee does not even recommend.

Mr. Gagné also says, “By manipulating the data in our report in this way, Mr. Boisclair and the leader of the Bloc Québécois are misleading the public and trying to foster unrealistic expectations that have no basis in fact”.

The Bloc Québécois has become its founder's nightmare, just “a piece of furniture in the House of Commons”, unable to do anything because it is eternally in the opposition.

Our new government promised to take care of the fiscal imbalance, and that is exactly what it will do.

* * *

[English]

NORTHERN CANADA

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last month my colleague, the member for Nunavut, invited me to join her in Iqaluit to hear first-hand the challenges of her region.

• (1410)

[Translation]

I was happy to learn from the Premier of Nunavut himself and the health minister, Leona Aglukkaq, about their views on the progress that this young territory has made as well as the challenges facing it insofar as housing, sovereignty, health and territorial funding are concerned. I was struck by the enormous potential of the Canadian north.

[English]

In a report released by the U.S. National Research Council, commissioned by the United States Congress, the sovereignty of this remarkable part of our nation is under attack. Tuesday this week, American Ambassador David Wilkins again asserted that the Canadian government is not sovereign over the waterway.

I am calling upon the government to tell us how it will respond and what it will do to protect the sovereignty of our north.

* * *

FEDERAL ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is day 134 of the Liberal Senate's foot dragging on the toughest anti-corruption law in Canadian history, the federal accountability act.

Let us not forget that many of the laws broken by the Liberals in the sponsorship scandal were not discovered until years later. That is why Canada's new government immediately moved to increase the number of years to five for investigations into violations of the Elections Act. Unfortunately, Liberal senators have undone this good work by reducing the five year limit to two years.

Are there other Liberal scandals they are trying to hide? Is the Liberal Senate getting in the way of future investigations into illegal Liberal behaviour? Canadians are owed these and many more answers, not to mention millions of sponsorship dollars still owed to taxpayers by the Liberal Party.

It is time for the Senate to pass the federal accountability act.

* * *

CORNERSTONE BUILDING

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this week I attended the opening of the Cornerstone Building, a non-profit project that could be used as a model of community development and urban sustainability.

In August 2005, the Fernwood NRG Society bought this historic building that stood vacant in the centre of the neighbourhood. Now, after 15 months of hard work, including by scores of volunteers, it is a café, a resources centre with other retail space, and four units of affordable rental housing for families. Revenues from the project will support Fernwood NRG's many community programs.

The Cornerstone is also good for the environment, with new geothermal heating. The Cornerstone project shows what a community working together can achieve. I am proud to have it in my riding. This type of project could be a reality across Canada with a national green housing strategy.

* * *

CHINA

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the future is China. The Liberals know this. The Minister of International Trade knows this, recently being quoted as saying, “China is the workshop of the world”. He continues, “How can you turn your back on the workshop of the world?”

The Prime Minister has, however, turned his back on this very important trading partner.

The former Liberal government saw China as a crucial area for Canadian investment and opportunity. China is the fourth largest economy in the world, boasting tremendous trade and investment opportunities for Canada. It is vital that we intensify our efforts to encourage economic partnership with China.

The Prime Minister refuses to engage one of the most powerful economic countries in Asia. These actions have been duly noted by the Chinese government, which recently shut down negotiations to grant Canada approved destination status, effectively killing a multi-million dollar opportunity to promote Canada as a destination for Chinese tourists.

If we do not step up and demonstrate to the Chinese the importance Canada places on this relationship, we will not succeed.

* * *

[Translation]

LA MAISON DESJARDINS

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the people of the Eastern Townships are generous and help one another. No other conclusion could be reached after the record collection of \$330,000 from the Maison Desjardins.

This idea got off to a modest start, but purchasing tickets for a chance to win the famous Maison Desjardins has now become a ritual.

Almost all the profits from the ticket sales go to various regional health foundations and health centres. The more people participate in the draw, the more our centres are assured of substantial revenues and of being able to provide better health services.

On behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I would like to congratulate the organizers of this event. Most of all, I would like to thank the people of the Eastern Townships for their record-breaking participation.

* * *

•(1415)

[English]

CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on November 2, 1936, Parliament created the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and Radio-Canada.

[Translation]

CBC/Radio-Canada, which is celebrating its 70th anniversary today, has become an integral part of Canada's social fabric.

[English]

CBC/Radio-Canada is composed of two national television networks; four national radio services; two cable news services; a northern service broadcasting in English, French and eight aboriginal languages; Radio-Canada International broadcasting in nine languages; CBC.ca and Radio-Canada.ca, visited by two million users monthly; and a number of other initiatives.

As all Canadians know, CBC/Radio-Canada is much more than the sum of its parts.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

CBC/Radio-Canada reflects who we are; it is our source for information and entertainment and it is our social conscience.

I would like to thank the creators, artists, technicians, journalists, administrators and visionaries who continue to—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Louis-Hébert.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Luc Harvey (Louis-Hébert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this morning, during a meeting of the Standing Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development, our government scored a victory for the environment. Despite opposition from the Liberals and the Bloc, we passed a government motion to schedule additional committee meetings so we can deliver the review of the Canadian Environmental Protection Act on time.

For those who are not familiar with the CEPA, this act regulates all industrial and domestic chemical products in Canada.

This morning's victory enables our committee to stay on course and give Canadians the legislation they have been waiting for so long.

This is ironic, because every day Liberal and Bloc Québécois members put on a big show. They are the environmental caped crusaders. But for all their chest pounding and battle cries, when the time comes to act, they are nowhere to be found.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

INCOME TRUSTS

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are shocked. They were duped by this Prime Minister. The Prime Minister knows full well that average Canadians are paying today for his irresponsible promise.

Will the Prime Minister apologize to Canadians for the false promises he made during the election campaign? Will the Prime Minister apologize to all the people who have seen their savings go up in smoke simply because they took him at his word?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada has responded to market changes that would have resulted in big corporations in this country paying no tax, while individuals paid more. This is not acceptable to this government. Our decision is supported by the finance minister of the Government of Quebec, a Liberal minister. I should add that I fail to understand why the Liberal Party of Canada supports a zero taxation rate for big corporations and is opposed to tax cuts for seniors.

Oral Questions

[English]

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister can do all he likes to try to turn this into something about corporations. This is not about corporations. It is about Canadians from all walks of life who have lost their savings. He can tell that story to Canadians sitting around the dinner table tonight, with their heads in their hands, asking, "What do we do now?" It is about Canadians on main street who feel cheated.

The Prime Minister is the author of their misfortune, yet he refuses to admit it. It is he who lured Canadians into investing into his promise. It was not the big corporations. It was the average person who was lured in. Will the Prime Minister at least admit that he misled Canadians and offer them an apology?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Once again, Mr. Speaker, everyone in this country knows that in the last few months what we have seen is the beginning of the conversion of major corporations to income trusts, which would have resulted in them paying no taxes whatsoever and which would have shifted the tax burden to ordinary Canadians. That is not fair. That is not what this government promised.

This government is determined to have a fair system of taxation. I think the Liberal Party can explain in the next election why it believes corporations should not pay any tax in this country.

• (1420)

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said, he can tell that to the average person who has seen his or her savings wiped out in a single night.

We hear a lot from that party about accountability, but who over there is accountable to average Canadians who lost their money because of this Conservative double-cross? Since the last election, many Canadians put their money into income trusts precisely because the Prime Minister told them to do it and he told them he would protect them.

How does the Prime Minister explain his duplicity to those Canadians who believed in him and have seen their money go up in smoke because he is now not willing to be accountable to them?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the Liberal Party had its way and corporate Canada paid no tax whatsoever, all of the tax burden would shift to ordinary people and senior citizens. That is why this government has acted.

This government has given a four year window before these changes take effect so that people can make adjustments. This government has given immediate tax reduction to senior citizens through income splitting of pensions and through a raised age credit.

Canadians will be wondering why the party opposite opposes tax cuts for senior citizens.

[Translation]

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the current circumstances are not any different from those of a year ago. The only thing that has changed is the minority Conservative government's promises.

The Prime Minister promised free rein to income trusts, and now he acts surprised to see that so many companies availed themselves of it.

Why does the Prime Minister not have the courage to say to Canadians that he made a promise, he broke it and he is sorry? It would be so easy to say.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, this government will not apologize for trying to protect the interests of individuals and a tax system that makes big business pay its fair share. It is essential. That is why Quebec's Liberal minister and government support us. It is unbelievable that the Liberal Party of Canada thinks this country's businesses should not have to pay taxes.

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is very disappointing to see that our Prime Minister cannot even say to Canadians that he is sorry he made a promise and had to break it when circumstances changed.

Why is it so difficult for him to admit something so simple to all of the citizens of this country?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the party opposite seems incapable of handling this file. The Liberals had no plan for the file. Their critics said they had no position on the file. Then, when they addressed it last year, they bungled it.

I can say that the government has support from Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Quebec, Ontario and Alberta. Most Canadians and most governments in this country understand the long term interests of the Canadian economy, as does the *Globe and Mail*, as does the *Toronto Star*. Those who look at—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in a few days, the Minister of the Environment will attend the International Conference on Climate Change in Nairobi.

While a number of participating countries will propose adjustments consistent with the Kyoto protocol objectives, Canada has decided instead that it will sabotage the protocol.

While the purpose of the Nairobi conference is to swiftly pursue the work already started by the Kyoto protocol, can the Prime Minister explain what his Minister of the Environment will do there?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I absolutely do not agree with the Bloc Québécois leader's assessment. The minister is attending this conference in order to participate in the development of an effective international protocol, which will include the major emitters of greenhouse gases. The Kyoto protocol does not do that. There needs to be a more effective protocol. Canada is working together with other participants in order to achieve this objective.

*Oral Questions***NATIONAL DEFENCE**

● (1425)

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, if the Prime Minister thinks his proposal and his so called plan are so great, if he thinks his minister should attend the conference with a mandate from the House, then I have a proposal for him.

Why not hold a debate here in this House, next week, followed by a vote, in order for the minister to go to Nairobi with a mandate given to her by this House?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government will go to Nairobi to represent the Government of Canada's position.

The leader of the Bloc Québécois asked that a Bloc Québécois representative attend. I am sure this representative will express the Bloc's position. If I understand the Bloc's position correctly, we should support the current protocol, but it is not necessary to have a plan to implement it.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's stubborn refusal to implement the Kyoto protocol is a bad decision not only in terms of the environment, but also a bad decision economically speaking. It will cause job losses here, as Canadian businesses will be forced to invest in countries that adhere to Kyoto in order to take advantage of the carbon exchange, a market worth \$150 billion.

How can the Prime Minister sacrifice jobs in this way, maintaining a bad decision, against the will of so many, this bad decision that benefits only our biggest polluter, the oil and gas industry?

[English]

Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we see the hon. member puff out his chest and act like he supports the environment, but in reality the hon. member owes the House an apology. Today he voted against the environment. He voted against cleaning up the air. He owes the House an apology.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in the case of income trusts, the Prime Minister missed the mark, but corrected himself yesterday. He also missed the mark regarding the Kyoto protocol. His obstinacy is leading him astray and, sooner or later, he will have to change his direction.

Does the Prime Minister not see that his stubborn rejection of the Kyoto protocol is preventing the Montreal Exchange from opening the carbon trading market, thus forcing leading edge businesses to invest elsewhere, creating jobs outside Canada?

[English]

Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is another example of the hon. member not doing his homework. Nothing prevents the Montreal Exchange from establishing a carbon credit along the lines that currently exist in Chicago. The notice of intent that we released last week explicitly mentions carbon trading as one of the issues we will be consulting on. I encourage the member to do his homework and read the notice of intent.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in 1991 in Doha, Kuwait, Canada sent the soldiers of the 1 Combat Engineer Regiment to fight a fire at a U.S. munitions depot. One soldier on that mission has already died of cancer and about 60 others developed cancer or respiratory symptoms after the incident.

Yesterday's report of the military ombudsman said that these soldiers were "systematically ignored during, and after, their service to Canada". That is a shameful indictment.

Will the Prime Minister commit to move immediately forward on the recommendations of this damning report and right the wrongs that these brave men and women have endured?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I met with the ombudsman and reviewed his report and I have ordered our department to implement the changes immediately.

We will not treat soldiers like they were treated in the past. We will make sure that from now on and into the future they will be treated properly when they return from missions.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the first way the minister and his government can show they are serious about that is to vote for our motion putting veterans first, which we are debating here today.

[Translation]

The NDP introduced a motion to help our veterans, but the Prime Minister prefers to ignore them, just as he is ignoring the ombudsman's report.

We have heard terrible stories today about some of our soldiers who are struggling with depression, attempting suicide, and having to take legal action to obtain their medical files.

When Canada sends a soldier to the front, why does it not care for that soldier when he or she returns?

● (1430)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Once again, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence indicated that the government will accept the report. The treatment of veterans, in this case, was unacceptable to this government and we are going to correct the situation.

* * *

[English]

INCOME TRUSTS

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the income trust betrayal by the government has cost millions of investors billions of dollars.

Oral Questions

I would like to know what the Prime Minister says to Mr. Gerry Collard, who wrote to the member for Calgary West: “In appreciation of my vote, you and the Conservatives caused” thousands of dollars “of my life savings to evaporate overnight. In exchange for my” thousands, “you gave me seniors income splitting, I am still looking for the humour in this. I invested my entire life’s savings...after you promised me they would not be” taxed. He says “after”.

Will the Prime Minister admit to Mr. Collard that he misled him during the election?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that intellectually bankrupt party opposite had no idea of how to deal with this issue. As the *Globe and Mail* said, Canada in becoming an income trust economy “would be less competitive, less productive, and less innovative than it needs to be in the global arena”.

The *Globe and Mail* gets it. The members opposite do not get it. Not only did they not get it, they do not get it now. They bungled it last year.

We have done what is fair for Canadians. The Liberals think the phone companies should not pay taxes. We do.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the only bankruptcy we are talking about here is that of millions of Canadian investors. It takes some gall to destroy a man’s life’s savings and then ask for his vote.

Is this what the Prime Minister would also say to Mr. Sykora from Kingston, who lost thousands of dollars yesterday? He is hopping mad and says, “You have stolen” thousands of dollars “from my aged parents in their retirement home, from my wife, and from me... You have lied to us about leaving income trusts alone”.

Is he going to give the same answer or is he going to apologize to Mr. Sykora and his family?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is what one would expect from a party that is against reducing the GST, that voted against reducing the GST, that is against allowing pensioners to income split in this country, saving, for example, \$2,500 on a single pension household of \$40,000, and that is in favour of letting corporations not pay their fair share of taxes. On every tax issue, on every fairness issue for Canadians, that party opposite is wrong.

* * *

[Translation]

MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Outremont, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, as millions of retirees were watching their life savings go up in smoke because of the Prime Minister’s broken promise, the unelected minister, Senator Fortier, added insult to injury by telling small investors who were worried and betrayed to “take a Valium”.

Will the Prime Minister apologize to Canadians on behalf of his haughty, arrogant and insensitive minister?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister was simply referring to the markets and the fact that there was some volatility in the markets yesterday. That was to be expected.

The realistic view which many people on Bay Street and on St. James Street in Montreal expressed is that one should take the time to look at the fact that there is a four year grandparenting of the changes with respect to income trusts, and that people should have perspective with respect to all of the changes that were announced on Tuesday.

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Outremont, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, how can the Prime Minister accept the fact that his unelected, arrogant millionaire Minister of Public Works and Government Services tells worried Canadians to take a Valium? How can the Prime Minister continue to protect his millionaire buddy?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I dare say, if we are talking about arrogance, how arrogant is it to expect ordinary Canadians to bear a tax burden greater than large corporations bear in this country? How arrogant is it to say to average Canadians and pensioners that they should not be entitled to split incomes for pensions? That is arrogance. That is the position of the Liberal Party opposite.

* * *

● (1435)

[Translation]

CRIME PREVENTION

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in the Dawson College tragedy, the gunman had announced his intention of committing this carnage on a public blog on the Internet. Section 111 of the Criminal Code would have allowed a judge to order that his weapons be taken away from him, if a police officer had brought the case before the judge.

Can the Minister of Public Safety tell us whether the RCMP’s cyberpolice are monitoring this kind of Internet site and checking to see whether the authors of the sites also have permits to possess firearms and have any registered firearms?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, that happened within the jurisdiction of the Sûreté du Québec. However, I might also add that the RCMP has the capacity to listen to, look at and review situations that represent a threat, here in Canada. As well, it is important for members of the public across Canada, who have information about a person who represents a threat, to inform the local police.

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I do believe that we may find something on which we can agree. I understand that the work done by the police who monitor the Internet amounts to looking for a needle in a haystack. That is why they need the public’s help. On the question of child pornography, a site that was set up for surfers who stumble on such sites has proved to be extremely useful in flushing them out.

Can the minister commit himself to creating and funding this kind of site and publicizing it as widely as possible, so that Internet surfers can report these blogs and thus save other human lives?

Oral Questions

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is a good idea. I might also add that there is a link on our RCMP centre's Internet site about child exploitation.

There is something else that can also help us protect children. That would be for the Liberal members to decide to support the bill to raise the age of consent, as a child protection measure, from 14 to 16.

* * *

HEALTH

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on July 25, the Prime Minister announced with a great deal of fanfare a settlement for all those infected with hepatitis C from the blood system. Three months later, the victims are still waiting for their first cheque.

Does the Minister of Health realize that three months is a long time to wait when one is sick? Will he immediately undertake to pay interim compensation to the victims while waiting for the finishing touches to be put on the agreement, as called for by the hepatitis C victims coalition.

[English]

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister announced a historic compensation package for victims of hepatitis C. There was at the time of that announcement a whole schedule that had to be enjoined. There has to be a final settlement which I understand is in train. Then there has to be a series of court proceedings where that final settlement is approved.

We are on track with the Prime Minister's promise to have the money in the hands of these victims in 2007.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security has decided to no longer seize drugs from Canada ordered over the Internet by Americans. According to the Quebec Order of Pharmacists, this could very likely result in higher drug prices in Canada.

Does the Minister of Health intend to explain to his American counterpart that Canada does not wish to serve as a pharmacy for the United States?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in Canada the Patented Medicine Prices Review Board regulates the price of drugs.

I would like the hon. member to know that there is a process for reviewing these prices. There is no relationship between these matters and the price of drugs in our country.

• (1440)

[English]

INCOME TRUSTS

Ms. Bonnie Brown (Oakville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative election platform made a specific promise to seniors to preserve income trusts by not imposing any new taxes on them, and the Prime Minister went further. When he came to Oakville, he promised my constituents face to face that a Conservative government would not "monkey around with their income trusts". Now, he is denying those promises. He has cost many Canadians tens of thousands of dollars and put their futures in jeopardy.

Will the Prime Minister now admit he broke his promise?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the commitment of course was to support financial security for seniors in Canada and what we saw this year was an acceleration of the creation of income trusts.

There were more than \$70 billion worth of income trusts announced this year alone. Not only did we have this acceleration of income trusts, we also had the reality that income trusts were entering into active areas of business requiring investments in technology, machinery and equipment, particularly in the telecommunications sector. This presented a clear and present danger to the health of the Canadian economy.

Ms. Bonnie Brown (Oakville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister promised he would not do this. He cannot seem to apologize for breaking his word. Canadians have learned that this is a government that cannot apologize even when it is wrong. This was a bait and switch scheme on Canadians who invested their hard-earned money based on the Prime Minister's own words.

This is no time for monkey business. Does the Prime Minister still deny that he made a pledge to Canadians that he would not impose a new tax on income trusts?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): The platform, Mr. Speaker, certainly pledged income security for seniors and there is a major tax change that was announced on Tuesday. I know the Liberal Party is opposed to pension splitting for seniors in Canada. I know that is the position of that particular political party.

We recognize that this is a major change in tax policy that is vitally important for seniors and pensioners in Canada who have sought this tax change for many years. This is a tax change that was recommended more than 40 years ago. The government listened to pensioners in Canada and has responded with a major change in tax policy.

* * *

[Translation]

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Minister of Public Safety claimed that he agreed in principle with the comments made by Hayder Kadhim, a student wounded in the Dawson College shooting.

Oral Questions

Today this same minister declared his intention to dismantle the gun registry. For the second time, I am asking the Prime Minister to respond to Hayder's question. Why does he want to abolish a gun registry proven to have saved lives and which now costs next to nothing to maintain?

[*English*]

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have done a couple of things. First of all, we have attempted to contact the gentleman mentioned and I am looking forward to sitting down with him. I believe, having gone through this tragedy, that he has some particular insights which may be helpful to us. His press secretary informed me that he will be busy on Monday when I proposed to go to Montreal, but I can certainly find another time.

I do agree in principle, as all Canadians do, that we want a firearms system that is effective at reducing criminal activity with firearms and we aim to get that.

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are also in contact with Hayder and his press secretary. I will keep asking the same question until Hayder Kadhim gets an answer. He is the college shooting victim who challenged the Conservative government to answer a simple question, and here it is for the third time to the Prime Minister.

Why does the government insist on dismantling a gun registry proven to have saved lives and which now costs next to nothing to maintain?

• (1445)

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not think for a minute that my colleague opposite is intentionally trying to mislead Canadians, but she should be clear. The gun registry is not being dismantled. If individuals want to own or purchase a firearm in this country, they will need a licence for that. If they want to own or acquire a firearm that is restricted in any way, they also need to have an added licence for that. That registry is being maintained.

There is one portion of the registry that has proven to be a waste of money and the Auditor General has said that the data was not good. She was referring to long arms that in 2003 were only responsible for .5% of homicides. We want to go—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Lévis—Bellechasse.

* * *

[*Translation*]

TAXATION

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

Robert Gagné, the director of HEC Montreal's Institute of Applied Economics and co-chair of the Council of the Federation Advisory Panel on the Fiscal Imbalance, wrote today that the Leader of the Bloc Québécois and his buddy, André Boisclair, are misleading the Quebec public when it comes to the fiscal imbalance.

How can they claim to defend the interests of Quebec? I would like to know my hon. colleague's position on that.

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent question.

For the Bloc and the Parti Québécois, the problem is verbal imbalance. This is what was reported this morning in a number of Quebec's newspapers under the pen of the co-chair of the Council of the Federation Advisory Panel on the Fiscal Imbalance, and I quote:

By manipulating the data in our report, Mr. Boisclair and [the Leader of the Bloc Québécois] are misleading the public and trying to foster unrealistic expectations that have no basis in fact.

The Bloc Québécois contribution to this discussion is totally—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas.

* * *

[*English*]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on Tuesday the citizenship and immigration committee visited the Kingston immigration holding centre. Mahmoud Jaballah, Mohammad Mahjoub and Hassan Almrei are being held there on security certificates. These men, detained for five or six years without charges or convictions, have never been allowed private spousal visits, are strip-searched, and are required to wear a prison uniform when meeting with family, friends and lawyers, and have no programming among other issues.

Will the Minister of Public Safety immediately act to reverse these practices?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind Canadians that these particular individuals are subject to a process called a security certificate. This process has been upheld in federal courts of appeal a number of times. These are people who are deemed to be a security risk if they are allowed to be in Canada. One could say it is a three-sided prison cell. They can leave any time if they want to go back to their country of provenance. They are working through the appeals process right now. If the courts uphold their appeal, then they will be free to go. Other than that, they are deemed a risk at this particular point in time.

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, who would return to torture?

Recently the Correctional Investigator asked the government to expand his mandate to include the Kingston immigration holding centre and the security certificate detainees. He noted that the establishment of the holding centre removed the detainees to a situation where they “no longer have the benefits and legal protections afforded by ombudsman legislation”.

Will the Minister of Public Safety act immediately to extend the mandate of the Correctional Investigator to include the holding centre and security certificate detainees?

Oral Questions

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one of the reasons that those five individuals are in a facility of their own, a \$3.2 million facility constructed by the former Liberals, is so that they are not in the rest of the population. They are unique individuals and they are there for a unique purpose that has been upheld by the Federal Court of Appeal.

Others who are concerned about rights and are concerned about treatment of inmates have viewed that facility and have said that it is a good and more than adequate facility and it will continue to remain so.

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CHALLENGER JET USE

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister for anything but Caledonia and Kashechewan likes to travel more than he likes filing expense reports.

On June 26 he flew from Washington to Toronto. He then hailed an empty Challenger from Ottawa, which the Prime Minister's parliamentary secretary tells us costs \$11,000 an hour, to fetch him in Toronto when there are commercial flights between the two cities every hour.

Can the minister explain why he ordered an empty Challenger to fly him one way from Toronto to Ottawa instead of taking one of the many commercial flights that were available to him?

• (1450)

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has his facts completely wrong. The minister in fact was stranded at Toronto's Pearson International Airport on June 27 at 1 a.m., with no commercial flights available because of cancellations. He took a Challenger to Ottawa and arrived at 2 a.m. He was in time for the cabinet meetings that began at 7:30 a.m. on the same day, and later that day he needed a Challenger to get to Washington to make a speech by 5 p.m. the same day.

I know it will make the hon. member happy that this government has used the Challenger half the frequency of the previous government.

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have used it only half the time but they have not been there for a quarter of the time that we were in office.

It gets worse. After his meeting the next day the minister took another flying limousine back to Washington even though there are at least four direct non-stop flights from Ottawa to Washington every day. On top of this, his expense report does not list his use of the government jet. Staffers take unaccompanied joy-rides to Washington. Conservatives get freebie flights to cocktail parties and subsidized trips to hockey games.

When will the government and the minister start following the rules and list the full cost of these joy-rides and which department pays?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would have thought the hon. member after getting his

facts wrong in the first question would not have asked the second question.

In any case I will point out again that it was necessary for the minister to take the Challenger to get to Washington. There were no commercial flights available that were going to get him there on time. Again, let us all celebrate the fact that the Challenger is being used half the time it was under the member's government.

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CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister's discredited task force has failed by every measure, except that it will give the corporate U.S. grain sector what it wants: more economic power at our farmers' expense. Look at the report. There is not a single reference to gains for farmers, absolutely none.

How can the minister defend an action that has its strongest support in the U.S.? Popping champagne in U.S. boardrooms, heartbreak for Canadian farm families. Does the Prime Minister just not care about Canadian farmers?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we campaigned during the last election campaign on behalf of farmers who wanted marketing choice. They wanted a strong, independent, voluntary Canadian Wheat Board in a marketing choice world.

After we had this task force report, it delivered a very good report on how that transition might take place. Its first recommendation was to move on barley. We are going to have a plebiscite on barley in the new year.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the only farmers the minister is listening to live in North Dakota, Kansas and Nebraska. In giving the United States its way, the minister's undemocratic acts are getting worse. Now he is initiating a Stalinist purge, firing a pro-board director and inserting an anti-Wheat Board activist.

How can he expect such a director to act in good faith with a view to the best interests of the corporation and farmers, or is he just attempting to destroy the board from the inside?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I guess the real issue is, after days and days the member would not wait for the task force report, but it came and it delivered the goods. For days the member opposite said, "Please, please, give us a plebiscite for the farmers of western Canada".

We are not only going to represent the farmers from coast to coast, we are going to have a plebiscite which that member asked for. Why does he not get on board and listen to the farmers for a change?

Oral Questions

[Translation]

AGRICULTURE

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, farmers are faced with a serious income crisis, mainly because of low grain prices. This week, in committee, the minister told us that things would improve for grain producers. Is the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food aware that the price of grain does not even cover 85% of the production costs and that he must therefore act quickly? That means now.

• (1455)

[English]

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course we are concerned about grain farmers across the country. We are not only moving on marketing choice for western Canadian grain farmers, but the first action of this government was to follow through on the \$755 million grains and oilseeds payment to all grain farmers across the country.

We followed that up with \$950 million to help repair the broken CAIS program brought in by the previous Liberal government. That will help somewhat more.

Thankfully, prices are starting to come up. We are going to work closely with farmers in Quebec and across the country to make sure they get the returns they need.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): That is all well and good, but these people, who are losing a great deal of money every year, are not eligible for existing income support programs. That is why, yesterday, they left eight tonnes of grain for the Minister of Labour in his riding.

Will the minister agree to review his assistance mechanisms so that grain producers can benefit from them, and will he announce emergency assistance as soon as possible?

[English]

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listed some of the things we did. I could go on about how we are helping grains and oilseeds farmers.

We also initiated, as promised in the campaign, a cover crop program for any farmers who are affected by flooding. Farmers in Saskatchewan, Manitoba and in Quebec have benefited from that program.

We have also doubled the amount of money that farmers can borrow interest free through cash advances and through the AMPA program. We have expanded that to include horticulture and livestock. We have the grains and oilseeds program.

We continue to add programming to help Canadian farmers.

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INFRASTRUCTURE

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the success of Canada's cities depends upon an effective transportation network.

The Spadina subway extension will improve access to York University and to Vaughan city centre.

The city of Toronto, York region and the province all have their funding in place and the environmental assessment completed.

Since the government's clean air act will do nothing to improve air quality in our cities, will it commit today to a project which at least will improve the quality of air and as well the overall quality of life in Canada's largest city?

What is the government waiting for to deliver the cheque?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have during the last several months consulted the provinces. We have consulted the Federation of Canadian Municipalities.

We were able to put aside \$16.5 billion for infrastructure. We also put aside \$1.3 billion for public transit. That money is already available. It is now flowing. The agreements are there.

Hopefully, the communities and cities will take that money to be able to go forward.

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WORLD EXPO 2015

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the city of Toronto has worked extremely hard in preparing its bid for World Expo in 2015.

Unfortunately, the city's wishes to host the world exposition were completely lost on the provincial Liberals.

Would the Minister of Canadian Heritage update the House on the news of Toronto's best wish to host Expo 2015?

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very disappointed that the Toronto Expo 2015 bid will not go forward.

This government supported Toronto in its bid for Expo 2015. We were prepared to commit up to \$600 million in support for Expo 2015 and to support Toronto.

Toronto's bid for Expo 2015 is dead because the Ontario government would not do its part. The Ontario government would not support an expo in Toronto. Why would the Ontario government not do its part? It has to answer to the lost opportunity for Toronto.

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GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, every report on income security released in the last six months indicates poverty is growing deeper and more pervasive.

I have been consulting across the country and people tell me the recent cuts by the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development are hurting the poor disproportionately.

Why will the minister not stand up for her ministry and fight these cuts?

Oral Questions

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Frankly, Mr. Speaker, I am absolutely and thoroughly confused by the member for Sault Ste. Marie because—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The Minister of Human Resources and Social Development has the floor for an answer.

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is complaining about cuts to programs and yet he himself just tabled a motion to take \$2 million of spending out of social development. Why is that?

• (1500)

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, not only is she confused, but she is wrong.

It does not matter how the minister spins this. Her ministry took the largest hit and it is driving poverty through the permafrost. Homelessness in Canada's most prosperous cities, Victoria, Calgary and Toronto, is growing at an alarming rate.

I am going to Calgary and Saskatoon next week to meet with the homeless, people who work with the homeless, people working to eradicate poverty. Will the minister join me and see for herself?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would still like to know why that member tabled a motion asking for \$2 million to be cut from social development spending.

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LITERACY

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is trying to trick Canadians into believing they are spending \$80 million on adult literacy. I have asked repeatedly for details of that spending. I have gotten zilch.

If the cuts to literacy are as trivial as a cup of coffee, as the minister claims, then she should have the details of what is left at her fingertips.

Will she table those details in the House today, or will she admit she is not being truthful with Canadians?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I explained at some length and very often to the member last night, the existing programs and existing commitments are all going to be honoured.

Going forward we are going to realize savings for Canadians by focusing on programs that deliver measurable results in helping people learn literacy and numeracy skills.

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HEALTH

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is bad enough that the Ontario Liberals are charging soldiers and RCMP members health premiums when their coverage is already paid for by the federal government. Now they want to have retired federal public servants, who have served their country so well, excluded from the provincial drug plan for seniors.

Can the President of the Treasury Board tell us how he is fighting on behalf of retired federal public servants in Ontario to ensure they are treated fairly?

Hon. John Baird (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the member from Renfrew County that is the best question I have heard all day.

Like the member from Renfrew County, I am tremendously concerned about the two tier, two class of citizens that is being introduced by the provincial government in the province of Ontario.

Those seniors who served our country in the public service, in the RCMP and in the armed forces are being cut off their medical drug program that they have spent their entire life paying for.

Why do the Ontario Liberals believe in a two tier health care plan for seniors? I am going to work with the Ontario government—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Halton.

* * *

TAXATION

Hon. Garth Turner (Halton, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, the finance minister did the right thing this week by realizing that retired couples should be able to split their income for tax purposes.

Can he tell us if he agrees that working families should also benefit from income splitting, especially when one spouse stays at home and looks after the kids who could then make RRSP contributions and look after their future? Does he agree with that?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question. I certainly acknowledge the extensive work the hon. member did with respect to advocacy on the issue of income splitting for pensioners in Canada.

That policy is now going forward. It is a major change in tax policy in Canada. There is special reason to make the change with respect to pensioners, to encourage investment and savings for retirement through pension vehicles.

I understand the principle that the member speaks about and certainly it is worthy of further study, as are other tax measures.

* * *

[*Translation*]

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of the recipients of the Governor General's Performing Arts Awards.

[*English*]

For lifetime achievement in the performing arts, we have: Mark Starowicz, Lorne Michaels, Albert Millaire, Robbie Robertson, Joysanne Sidimus and Jacques Languirand.

The Ramon John Hnatyshyn Award for Voluntarism in the Performing Arts: George and Sherif Laoun.

Routine Proceedings

Finally, the National Arts Centre Award: Richard Bradshaw.

I invite all hon. members to meet the recipients at a reception a little later this afternoon in room 216.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: On the upcoming occasion of Veterans Week, I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of Canadian war veterans, peacekeepers and a current serving member of the military: John Newell and Elsa Lessard, World War II veterans; Moe Leblanc, a Korean War veteran; Barry Helman, retired peacekeeper with the Royal Canadian Artillery; and, Master Warrant Officer Timothy Power who served in Afghanistan and is a current serving member of the military.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1505)

[*English*]

VETERANS WEEK

Hon. Greg Thompson (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a number of weeks ago the Prime Minister said that military service was the highest form of public service. We are reminded of that in the House every day. It is because our veterans have served that we can serve here in this chamber. Our veterans are why we have a free and democratic country. It is that simple.

We are the direct beneficiaries of their great sacrifices and achievements, and it is why I feel honoured and humbled to rise in the House on the eve of Veterans Week.

Our men and women in uniform forged this nation's identity on the distant battlefields of the past century. In the two Great Wars, in the Korean War, in military operations and on peacekeeping missions around the world, our soldiers have made Canada proud. They have made us proud.

No one in the House needs to be convinced about the honour and accomplishments of our veterans and their modern-day colleagues. When we look around the House, we see the poppies proudly on display. Our veterans unite us as few things can.

Regardless of our political stripes or where we come from, I believe we all agree that our men and women in uniform are the best in the world. They are the best trained, the most professional and the most disciplined, and they have always committed themselves 100% to the mission.

However, we know that our freedom is not free. It has never been free. The freedoms that we often take for granted have come with a heavy price for our country, for our families and for all of us here.

We have lost too many of our best young men and women.

As our most famous war poet, John McCrae, wrote, with every fallen soldier we have lost a Canadian who "loved and was loved". We know this and we feel it deeply in our hearts and in our souls.

We realize that this great country we have inherited was built by ordinary men and women doing extraordinary things. They did it for their country, they did it for each other and they did it for you and me, Mr. Speaker, and, of course, more than anything, they did it at great sacrifice to themselves.

We understand this. We understand that our veterans willingly stood in the face of oppression and tyranny to protect the values that all Canadians still cherish: freedom, democracy and the rule of law. That is what we must never forget and we must remain committed to sharing this legacy with future generations.

It is this torch of remembrance that we raise so proudly each Veterans Week. This year the theme could not be more fitting, "Share the Story". Not only are we encouraging our veterans to share their stories, we are urging Canadians in every region of this country to take the time to listen.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, there are many stories to be told and there are many more that have gone untold, one for each of our honoured veterans.

I would like to share with the House one of those untold stories. This past summer, while standing on the shores of Normandy with my eldest son, he began telling me about his grandfather's experience, my father-in-law's experience, on D-Day during that landing 50 years ago. I stood there fascinated as I listened to my son. I was curious about the details, about the painful, brutal facts that my father-in-law had rarely shared with anyone.

• (1510)

I asked my son why he thought granddad had not told me any of this story and he simply replied that it was because I had not asked. I know that it is now time to ask, to listen and to learn about soldiers like Harold Roderick.

Those of us who have never served, who have never worn the Canadian uniform, need to take the time to understand before "time slips away". We only need to look outside at the last few autumn leaves clinging to their branches. With the slightest rustle of a breeze, they could be gone by dusk. We realize this. We realize that there are only three known surviving Canadian veterans left from the first world war. We need to learn more about their stories, the stories of these remarkable men, all of them now well past 100 years of age. I have had the privilege to meet them and they are as dedicated to Canada today as they were when they wore the uniform. They are also our last living links to our greatest generation. We cannot allow their stories to be lost in history or to go untold. Otherwise, we can only guess at what our veterans have endured for us and what they have achieved for all of us.

Routine Proceedings

We can only wonder at the emotions captured in those grainy old films and black and white pictures, in those scenes of Canadian soldiers marching down our main streets or waving goodbye from ships pulling out to sea. We have seen the photographs of soldiers in the departing troop trains. Their faces, through the train windows, are a mixture of sadness and excitement. Their arms are reaching out for one last touch of a loved one. Sadly, for many, it would be the final touch. Those images, their lives, still touch us today.

We cannot bear witness to any of these individual stories without asking ourselves if we would have responded the way our veterans did. If we had walked in their shoes, would we have had their courage? Where did they find the strength to leave behind their loved ones and their own dreams and walk straight into harm's way?

As we seek the answers to these difficult questions, we must also pause to think about our men and women in uniform today; brave Canadians still serving around the world in such troubled spots as Afghanistan. They, as those who came before them, know the threats we face today. They know they are real and they know the cause is just.

As in those decades gone by, our men and women in uniform should know that they have earned the thanks and the praise of a grateful nation, today and forever.

In a few days we will leave this place and return to our ridings, to the people we represent. There we will gather in our largest cities and smallest villages, side by side, to lay wreaths and to remember. In those moments of deep silence, we will renew our pledge to honour, always, the men and women who have given us so much and who have given us their very best.

Lest we forget.

• (1515)

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of Liberal members in the House and our constituents to pay tribute to all Canadian veterans, the men and women who have answered the call and who have served this great country so bravely.

November 11, from coast to coast to coast, is a day that gives Canadians time for pause. It is a day that gives us all an opportunity to reflect on Canada's history, as well as what Canada is and what we, as a nation, stand for in the world today. Above all, it is an occasion to think about the valiant men and women who sacrificed their lives in the interest of their country, of our country.

[*Translation*]

We salute our brave veterans for their outstanding service.

[*English*]

During remembrance week, Canadians will take part in ceremonies in honour of our veterans. We will gather and pay tribute to the more than one and a half million Canadians who fought for Canada in the first world war, the second world war and the Korean war. We will recognize the more than 100,000 soldiers who died and the enormous sacrifices made by their families, families split apart by war and tragedy.

We will also think about the men and women who have sacrificed their lives in the service of peace in such faraway places as Bosnia and those who continue to defend our country and our interests in Afghanistan today.

At the same time, Canadians recognize the significance of what it is they have fought for and continue to fight for, namely, the values, freedoms and a way of life that we cherish and are privileged to enjoy today.

It is particularly poignant, as I look around this chamber at my colleagues from all political stripes and pause and marvel at the fact that we can congregate here to debate issues from child care to health care, from trade issues to fiscal policy. We were given that privilege of democracy, of respectful, informed debate from the sacrifices of those who came before us who fought for our values, and way too often paid with the ultimate sacrifice.

Most Canadians are fortunate in that we have not suffered through the hardships of war. Today, however, in light of the events that have shaped our world recently, we are experiencing the suffering that war and conflict invariably bring.

To this end, we can be thankful that Canada has a long and revered history as a peaceful nation, a history that includes a long-standing commitment to peacekeeping and peace building, epitomized in Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson's 1957 Nobel Prize for peace.

As the Minister of Veterans Affairs referenced, this year the theme of Veterans Week is "Share the Story".

When preparing my comments for today, I started to think about the many heroic stories that our veterans have told. I thought back to last year as I watched on T.V. when the streets of Vancouver were lined with people who came to pay their final respects to Canada's last surviving Victoria Cross recipient, Ernest "Smokey" Smith. It made me reflect on a Victoria Cross recipient in my own riding of Cape Breton—Canso, Private John Bernard Croak.

Croak grew up in my own home town, Glace Bay. He was a coal miner and, during the first world war, a member of the 13th Canadian Infantry Battalion. Under a blanket of heavy enemy fire, he heroically took a machine gun nest out single-handedly and then led a charge of his platoon against several others, being wounded on both occasions and ultimately succumbing to his wounds.

Heroic stories like this, stories of sacrifice, of honour, need to be told. They need to be remembered and shared with younger generations so we never forget the sacrifices of our veterans.

Routine Proceedings

As Canadians, we remember those who gave their lives by wearing a poppy, the flower of remembrance. We recall the poem *In Flanders Fields*. We take part in Remembrance Day services and activities in our local communities. This includes two minutes of silence, which offers each and every one of us the chance to reflect privately on peace and the forces that have shaped our country's great history.

In this regard, at a time when we are all much more acutely aware of how important peace truly is, today we can appreciate even more our Canadian heroes, their bravery and the great sacrifices they have made.

Earlier today, during debate on a motion before the House on veterans, we heard stories from members of Parliament about their personal experiences with veterans. I ask all members to take away from this debate these stories and share them back in their ridings and honour their heroic legacy.

As the days and weeks pass by, our nation readies itself for the 90th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge, this country's first major military victory. This victory marks one of the most poignant events in our history and is often referred to as the time Canada truly became a nation. Yet, however significant this date might be, remembrance is not about celebrating victory or basking in triumph. Rather it is recognizing those who answered a selfless call to service.

● (1520)

In his poem *In Flanders Field*, the poet, John McCrae, states:

To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.

I call on all members of Parliament and all Canadians to take up this challenge, to not forget the sacrifices of the past, to remember the bravery of our veterans and to share these stories.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would hope that no one wishes armed conflict. Battlefields are places of horror where no one would want to walk. Nevertheless, women and men of Quebec and of this country, year after year, arm themselves with courage and go to defend the values and principles in which we believe.

In the face of such courage, we owe a debt of gratitude and admiration. We all have a duty to remember these men and these women.

As November 11 and Veterans Week approach, I remember all these men and women who have served in uniform, with bravery and tenacity, in times of war as in times of peace.

I remember those destroyed cities, where only dust and rubble remained, that they have rebuilt. I remember the sacrifices made by them and their families. I remember the tears wept on piers and platforms, a mother's wait without news of her son or her daughter, a young woman already widowed and a child orphaned.

I remember, however, that it is in the shadow of these sacrifices and these dramas that our society has been able to thrive and become what it is today.

I remember the democracy, equality, freedom, justice and peace which have not just been given to us. No, these ideals have had to be earned with labour and suffering.

I remember the price paid by these soldiers and their families, by those who have fallen in combat, but also those, fortunately more numerous, who have come home.

I remember these men and women who have risked their lives and too often lost them, so that we can live our lives in better conditions.

I remember that I have a duty never to forget their feats and their courage. I remember that, because of their sacrifices, I have a duty to convey this memory to my friends, my children and my grandchildren.

I also remember that I have an obligation to protect and build on, with my modest means, the heritage they have left us so that I in turn can pass on this legacy of justice, equality, freedom and democracy.

I remember that we owe an enormous debt to our veterans and our only way of repaying it is to never forget and to perpetuate the memory of their stories, from generation to generation.

I remember.

● (1525)

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is indeed an honour, on behalf of our leader and the New Democratic Party, to join with parliamentarians of all parties to pay homage and respect to our most valued of Canadians, our war veterans and those who currently serve in our armed forces.

It is an honour to be in the chamber where we have representatives of those brave men and women with us today. I pay homage, honour and respect and stand in humility for their bravery.

As members also know, 60 years ago thousands of war brides arrived in Halifax from various countries to settle in Canada. These war brides looked after our honoured brave Canadians. Not many of them are left, but those who are will soon go back to Halifax to rejoice in the memory of 60 years ago today. Our veterans were able to bring cultures and people together. They sacrificed everything they had so all of us could live in peace, freedom and democracy.

I was born in Holland. My parents were liberated by the sacrifices made by the people we see before us. I see the shiny medals that the men and women wear. They do not wear them for decoration. They do not wear them for gratitude. They wear them for service, for duty, for honour to their country. Most important, they wear them because they know that over 117,000 Canadians, buried in over 70 countries around the world, never had the chance to wear theirs. It is an honour to see them wearing their medals.

Points of Order

I recommend to everyone, if they get the opportunity, as the Minister of Veterans Affairs said, to share their stories, open up to them, shake their hand, give them a hug, sit down and buy them any kind of beverage they want and they will enjoy it. If we do that, we will be enriching our lives. We will be telling them once again that we remember. We remember the sacrifices and the horrors they went through. We remember their families who kept the home fires burning, who cared for them when they returned.

If we continue this remembrance, we will then be able to pass it on to our children and to their children's children the message that never again will war inflict our society. If and when it does, we know the brave men and women in the Canadian armed forces will stand up to any tyranny out there. My father met a Canadian soldier in Holland and asked him why he had come over to help them. The young Canadian soldier said he had a job to do.

We know that our current service personnel in Afghanistan are doing their job. We know that our service personnel around the world and their families are doing their job for Canada. November 11 is Remembrance Day. Remembrance Day is every day for the families of Nichola Goddard, Chris Saunders, Nathan Smith and the many others who passed on recently in Afghanistan. This is something that we should never forget. Canadians even today are honouring the ultimate sacrifice they made so all of us can live in peace, freedom and democracy. We should do all we can to ensure they have everything they need to carry out their duties as they do with such honour, courage and valour.

In the words of the Royal Canadian Legion, we say very humbly, "As the going down of the sun and in the morning, we will remember them".

● (1530)

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: On behalf of all hon. members, I would like to thank the Minister of Veterans Affairs and the hon. members for Cape Breton—Canso, Rivière-des-Mille-Îles and Sackville—Eastern Shore for their moving remarks.

[*English*]

I now invite the House to rise and observe a moment of silence to commemorate our war veterans.

[*A moment of silence observed*]

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, would the government House leader tell the House what business he is planning for the upcoming week?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today we will continue with the NDP opposition motion.

Tomorrow we should conclude debate on third reading of Bill C-9, an act to amend the Criminal Code (conditional sentence of imprisonment).

Next week we will begin the report stage of Bill C-16, fixed dates for elections, followed by Bill C-26, payday loans, Bill C-6, an act to

amend the Aeronautics Act and to make consequential amendments to other acts, Bill C-17, an act to amend the Judges Act and certain other acts in relation to courts and then Bill C-27, dangerous offenders.

I will continue to consult with the House leaders of other political parties with respect to Bill C-31, the voter integrity bill, and we may be able to proceed with that next week as well.

* * *

● (1535)

POINTS OF ORDER

LANGUAGE USED IN ORAL QUESTION

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. During question period emotions sometimes run high and sometimes things are said that I think are inappropriate. The member for Malpeque, in questioning the Minister of Agriculture, compared the actions of the minister to a Stalinist purge. I think that term is highly inappropriate and very unfortunate.

Stalin is the greatest mass murderer perhaps of all time. A Stalinist purge, among other things, induced a famine genocide in the Ukraine in the early 1930s, killing over seven million people. Stalin systematically killed kulak farmers in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine. Over one million of them were killed. There was the near complete ethnic cleansing of the population of the Crimean Tartars by murder and exile to Siberia. There were the multiple pogroms targeting Jews.

To use that term I think is unfortunate and I would ask the hon. member to withdraw that term and apologize, both to the Minister of Agriculture and to all the victims of that terrible time.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was merely referring to how democracy worked in Russia. In Stalin's day in communist Russia, people who did not agree simply disappeared. It became known as a purge in the historic context.

A little over a week ago, one of the appointed directors to the Canadian Wheat Board by the name of Ross Keith wrote a letter to the Minister of Agriculture disagreeing with his position on the Canadian Wheat Board. What happened last weekend? He basically disappeared. He was fired from the job and replaced by an anti-Wheat Board activist just yesterday, so in effect it is a purge.

If the governing party is upset with the word Stalinist, then I will withdraw that word, but the fact of the matter is that it is a purge and that is what it was.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I appreciate the hon. member for Malpeque withdrawing his references to that situation.

I wish to inform the House that government orders will be extended by 24 minutes because of the ministerial statement today.

*Business of Supply***GOVERNMENT ORDERS***[English]***BUSINESS OF SUPPLY**

OPPOSITION MOTION—CANADIAN FORCES

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to advise you that I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst.

I rise today to express my strong support for the motion introduced by the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore. I stand here proudly in support of our veterans and of course our active Canadian Forces. As members of the House will know, the member has a longstanding record of speaking out for veterans. I commend him for his hard work and his dedication to finding solutions for their problems.

Earlier in the House we heard very eloquent speeches in support of our veterans. When I was considering the topic today and how I would begin my remarks, I was reminded of my family. I had an uncle who at 16 years of age served in World War I. I had three uncles who served in the second world war. One was killed two days after D-Day. The other two went on to careers outside of the military but both died young and it was pretty clear that it was as a result of their service to their country.

The motion states in part: “That, in the opinion of the House, the government should immediately take the following steps to assist members and veterans of the Canadian Forces and their families...”. As I stated at the beginning of my remarks, I strongly support this motion, but having said that, I want to say for the record that the word “assist” really does not express how I believe our national government should be responding to the needs of veterans. First and foremost they need our support, but rather than critiquing wording I will go directly to what I believe is needed.

As the motion states, what is needed is:

—an amendment to Section 31(1) of the Canadian Forces Superannuation Act so that second spouses of CF members and veterans have access to pension rights upon the death of the Canadian Forces member or veteran;...

In one part we hear it as a right. In another place I have heard it expressed as this clause being called the gold diggers clause. How offensive. I must say such a clause harkens back to a far and distant time, a time when teachers were required to get permission from their school boards in order to marry. It is beyond being discriminatory. It is simply offensive. It should have been removed from the act many years ago.

I can almost hear the question: how much will this cost? I agree it is not an unreasonable question on most occasions, but with the government sitting on a surplus of \$13 billion surely it can spare the estimated \$183 million this program would cost.

Next in the motion is this clause:

—extend the veterans independence program (VIP) to all widows of all veterans, regardless of the time of death of the veteran and regardless of whether the veteran was in receipt of VIP services prior to his or her death;.....

I believe most members present would find it reasonable to provide proper home care for veterans as they age. I cannot imagine someone not supporting that.

Canadian veterans have always been a proud lot. As an example, in our gallery today we saw the pride as those veterans rose before us. As a result, however, many veterans did not know about the veterans independence program or simply chose not to apply.

An example I would use is a person I know well, a Hamilton resident, Art Hebert. Art is a veteran of the second world war. He served proudly in the Canadian navy. He served in the engine room of ships during that war. He was injured when his ship was torpedoed and sunk. Let us imagine for a moment what it must have been like getting out of that engine room and into the ocean after being torpedoed. Art's leg injury was with him for the remainder of his non-military career.

It was not until the mid-1990s that Art decided to seek assistance from the Government of Canada. No one had ever contacted Art regarding his injury or his eligibility for pension. His persistence in getting on with life after the war is but one of many examples of the courage of veterans and their determination not to be a burden to Canada. If anyone ever deserved real VIP treatment, our veterans did and do.

● (1540)

We know what the issues are that many veterans face during their latter years, and without access to the VIP, for whatever reason, it is more often than not their spouses who provide that home care. Today we have a chance to offer care to those spouses who cared for our nation's heroes. Veterans' spouses deserve nothing less.

The next point in the motion is the following:

—increase the Survivor's Pension Amount upon death of Canadian Forces retirees to 66% from the current amount of 50%;....

In times of great national need, veterans and their families gave Canada their all. They offered their very lives for our freedoms. I believe it is incumbent upon the government to reciprocate by giving veterans and their families fair and equitable treatment, the same treatment that public and private plans offer. Moreover, spouses of Canadian Forces personnel deserve fair access to spousal benefits.

Next, the motion states that we should:

—eliminate the unfair reduction of Service Income Security Insurance Plan (SISIP) long term disability benefits from medically released members of the Canadian Forces; and

—eliminate the deduction from annuity for retired and disabled CF members.

In these very difficult times, with Canadian Forces every day facing the real threat of life-changing wounds and injuries in Afghanistan, it is very important to weigh carefully what is being asked for in items 4 and 5 of the motion.

Recommendations were made in 2003 to address the issue immediately, but the previous Liberal government failed to take action. Mr. Côté, the ombudsman for the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces, called for the previous government to address the issue in his 2003 report entitled, “Unfair Deductions from SISIP Payments to Former CF Members”.

Business of Supply

I ask the government, and in particular the Minister of National Defence, why has this government not acted? Why has it not moved to take better care of injured and disabled Canadian Forces members?

As members of the House heard in question period today, the ombudsman released a second report just yesterday. In that report regarding the treatment of 1 Combat Engineer Regiment Kuwait veterans, Mr. Côté spoke of the courage and dedication to duty of these veterans. That is what we expect of our forces and what we get from our veterans of all the wars and conflicts. The ombudsman pointed to the fact that they, like most veterans, served in area where, at the time of engagement, service personnel were not told and were not aware of the harmful substances to which they were being exposed during their deployment.

Prior to being elected to the House, I was a labour activist. In that capacity, I fought alongside injured workers from the private sector and other activists to achieve what we called the right to know legislation, which was about the right to know what hazards one faces in the workplace. In addition to the right to know, there was also the right to refuse unsafe work in the private sector.

Obviously in military deployments service personnel often are compelled by circumstance to continue their work in spite of the obvious and often not so obvious environmental risks. Their government owes them more, because it put them in harm's way in many more ways than just fighting the visible enemy. We place many service personnel at risk from unknown and undocumented environmental risks. On Mr. Côté's report, I was pleased to hear today that the Minister of National Defence said he will be acting on the nine recommendations. As we are learning about the environmental hazards throughout regular workplaces, we see the damage of these particular ones.

In conclusion, there are a number of times in this House when we can do the right thing. In this particular case, the right thing could never be more obvious. The right thing is to support the motion. I call on all members of the House to do the one thing that we all claim to do, which is to stand up for our veterans, and pass the motion.

• (1545)

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member from the Hamilton area for his speech and how he, like all of us in the House, can actually relate this motion to individual concerns within our own families.

One thing I would like the hon. member to touch on, and he probably knows this quite well, is that when soldiers come back injured or they do not come back at all, the family is left behind. Because of that, these families face a lot of economic hardships. Their children grow up in that environment missing a lot of opportunities that other kids in their neighbourhood would have had because their father or mother served proudly and courageously for their country, and either became mentally or physically disabled or they did not come back at all and paid the ultimate sacrifice.

The reason the NDP put forward this motion is to assist those people now in the later years of their life and with other concerns pertaining to their disabilities, so that we can add respect and dignity to their lives. I would like him to comment on that, please.

Mr. Wayne Marston: Mr. Speaker, I was born two years after the end of the second world war and I can remember in 1954-55 when the veterans of Korea returned home. They would sit in our local barbershop with veterans from the first world war and the second world war. As a very, very young person, I was there listening intently. I did not hear stories of glory or of how much one had done. I heard repeatedly what Canada had done for the good of the world. In all of those cases, it was people who had clearly put the interests of their country ahead of the interests of themselves and their families.

Occasionally, in those barbershop days, there would be the son of someone who did not come home. I could see the caring from the veterans who would address those people and ask what they needed or what they could do to support them. The need was clearly there. Over a period of time, the Government of Canada has done better than what it was doing at that time. It touches one deeply to see the faces and remember those faces of people who gave so much and of those who lost so much.

• (1550)

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, how does my colleague answer the spouse who says that she was married to a veteran who came back from war but because the law was passed in 1981, they are not covered by or qualify for, for example, the VIP?

How do we answer that spouse on the discrimination made by the Government of Canada? How do we explain that? How does the member explain that to his constituents who say they are Canadian but are treated differently? How does he explain that on November 11 when all members of Parliament are running around the country telling veterans that we support them? How could the member explain that to the spouse?

Mr. Wayne Marston: Mr. Speaker, the question has a terrible connotation about how that person must feel inside who has been neglected by the government. In the operation of my community office, whenever constituents come to our office, we try to find the best way to work with them.

I would turn to that person and reference the motion that is before us today as an example of how we are moving forward on the issue. I believe a majority of members in the House will be supporting this motion. As I have said before, it is time to stand up because it is the right thing to do. I would explain to my constituent that I have faith in this House. I have faith in the fact that people have a genuine respect for veterans and that they will do the right thing.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to rise in this House to discuss the New Democratic Party motion, moved by my colleague for Sackville—Eastern Shore.

It is with some emotion that we discuss the important subject of our veterans, especially as we approach Remembrance Day, November 11. We must remember what those soldiers did for us in order to defend our freedom; a freedom that many countries would like to have today.

At this moment, many countries are at war. I am certain that those people would like to be living in peace. Whether it was the first world war, the second world war, the Korean war or the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina—the list is long—Canadian men and women have risked their lives to give us our freedom of speech and the right to travel freely.

Personally, I have visited countries where the simple fact of walking down the street called for an escort carrying a machine-gun to provide protection. Visitors from other parliaments come here and do not need to be protected by the army. Our veterans have given us a land of freedom.

The motion seeks to remove the “gold digger clause” to allow veterans and their second spouses to have access to pension rights upon the veteran's death. What is the “gold digger clause”? It concerns pension benefits that are not granted to men or women who marry a retired member of the Canadian forces after the latter has reached age 60. The clause is outdated and discriminatory. In particular, this provision unfairly penalizes older women who constitute the majority of surviving spouses.

Under any insurance plan, it is possible to bequeath the proceeds of an insurance policy to one's partner or spouse. In the event of death, our pension can be granted to them.

The Government of Canada, and especially a Conservative government, truly believes in wars, and believes that we should send our soldiers to war. According to the government, our military should be present, as it is now in Afghanistan. The NDP does not agree with our soldiers' mission. The government claims that it can not give this money because of the cost that it represents. There we have the government's answer. Its position is represented by a dollar sign.

For a soldier, man or woman, who has gone to war, what does it mean to put their life in danger for their country? The government says that it costs too much, it is too expensive. We cannot help them. They will not be given permission to lead a decent life. A person who marries a veteran after the age of 60 will not receive a pension on the veteran's death.

This is totally discriminatory. The Veterans Independence Program should be offered to all widows and widowers of veterans, regardless of the time of the veteran's death and regardless of whether the veteran received VIP services before they died. All widows, if they have an identified need, should be eligible for the program. The act was passed in 1981 and should be retroactive for everyone.

● (1555)

In the past I used to negotiate collective agreements for workers. So it is as though, for a collective agreement, I had negotiated a pension fund retroactive to 1985. It is as though I said to the people who began in the Brunswick mine in 1966 that it was too bad for them, because they were not with us when we negotiated all the retroactive clauses.

This is discrimination. It is not a way to solve problems.

That is why I asked my colleague earlier what he would say to a spouse who told him that her neighbour was entitled to this program because she was in the system in 1982 and the act was passed in 1981, whereas she herself was not entitled to it because it was in 1979. Still, her husband had been in World War II and the Korean War. Why is she not entitled to compensation, when her husband took part in the same war as her neighbour's husband?

This is discrimination toward a citizen. This government, if we recall, was the House champion in the battle over hepatitis C. It accused the Liberal government of not compensating everyone, since it excluded a number of years. This same government that, when in opposition, had good arguments about hepatitis C, argued that everyone should be entitled to compensation. How can we explain today that the VIP will not be available to all spouses, not even to those from before 1981? How can we explain to people that their husband or their wife will be excluded, when they participated in the same war and they were in the same trenches?

I was moved, in 2004, when I had the chance to go to France and stop at Vimy, where I saw millions of crosses on the ground, in memory of the soldiers who were killed in World War I to give us freedom. I was moved to see that, because I could see what these people had done.

After going there, a person cannot come back to Canada without remembering. This is what we are talking about when we say, on November 11, we will remember.

When people see these cemeteries, they think of the soldiers who never had a chance to come home. Even those who returned from the war bear the scars. They have been psychologically affected. They live with their spouse and live with that. They have certainly explained what happened in the war, all the emotions they felt and the psychological upsets. When these people return, they are told that their spouses cannot have the money because the government passed legislation in 1981 that treats them differently from the others. This is contrary to the hepatitis C policies that the Conservatives advocated when they were in the opposition.

If I am not mistaken, the Conservative Party said that all those who had received contaminated blood should be treated equally. That is not what happened then, and the same situation is repeating itself now. We want the pension that survivors receive upon the death of a person who retired from the armed forces increased from 50% to 66%.

Business of Supply

Who wants to live on 50% or even 66%? It should be more, but virtually any insurance that is bought normally provides one-third of the salary. People get one-third of the benefit money. When the Conservative government rises in the House to say that we are sending out our soldiers and the NDP should support them and accuses us of not supporting them, we reply that it is not our soldiers we do not support but the mission the Conservative government has sent them on. That is what we do not support.

If the Conservatives really do support our soldiers, they should support our veterans and their spouses. Those are the people we should support.

•(1600)

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you for the time you have given me. It was an honour and a privilege to speak today on the eve of Veterans' Week, which will be held from November 5 to 11, and we certainly hope that the government will support it.

[*English*]

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my colleague's remarks and I want to take him to task for something he said early on. He said, "the Conservatives believe in war". What a ridiculous statement. We do not believe in war. I do not believe in war. I spent 30 years prepared to fight a war because I hate war.

What we believe in is protecting people who cannot protect themselves. What we believe in is standing up against tyranny. What we believe in is protecting women and children. What we believe in is putting down dictators.

We do not hate war. We hate the people who make war on those who cannot defend themselves.

This member and this party, and I think every member in the House, will agree, as every freedom loving person in the world who has the courage to stand up to it will agree, we do not hate war.

I will quote Mark Twain in 1912 when he was considering running for the presidency of the United States. He said, "It's a fine thing to defend one's own freedom. It's a damn sight finer thing to defend somebody else's".

I would simply ask my hon. friend to reconsider that ridiculous comment.

•(1605)

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, if the member is saying that his government does not hate war, then it should bring back our soldiers.

The Conservatives talk about people's freedom and says that we are in Afghanistan to give rights and freedoms to women. If that is true why have they cut the funding to Status of Women Canada? Where is that freedom?

Where was the government at the big AIDS convention in Toronto? Forty million people around the world are dying of AIDS and the Conservative government refused to be in Toronto. On Friday the government said that it would not give money because it could be political. Where is the freedom of people? What chance do people have of living and being proud of themselves?

The Conservatives should be ashamed of themselves for making those ridiculous statements that were just made.

Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP member becomes quite animated and that makes us all pay attention, which is good. He certainly expresses his point of view without ambiguity. I think that would generally be true.

The problem I have, as my colleague mentioned, is that he sometimes distances himself from the facts. I find it repulsive when he implies that we somehow love war. We do not. I do not know how to express it without becoming really animated myself, but war is very distasteful. We are defenders of peace.

However, every once in a while, whether it is in our own country or on the international scene, some very bad people stand up and do things that are very unjust to innocent people. I am one who would not hurt a flea but if someone was being attacked by someone else, I would be ready to put my body between them.

I do not know why that member wants to characterize us in that way.

The member made another statement saying that somehow we do not care about people who are dying of AIDS. How false. We care deeply and compassionately, which is why we are participants, as the Canadian government, in funding research and in distributing drugs to other countries where people are dying of AIDS.

For the member to say that because we were not represented at the conference we are not fighting AIDS is also false. Two of our ministers were at that conference but the media chose to ignore them. Our Minister of Health was there. I do not know who the other minister was but two ministers were there.

I wish the member would be totally truthful before he so blatantly and falsely attacks us.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, I understand the hon. member's statement but the statement I made, which is not false, is that the Prime Minister of our country was not in Toronto for the AIDS convention. That is what I said and I stand by that.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform the House that I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Edmonton Centre.

I would like to thank the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore for introducing the motion. The debate could not come at a more appropriate time.

In the next week, Canadians will remember and pay tribute to those who risked their lives and too often paid the ultimate sacrifice for freedom and democracy. The very least we can do in the House is have an open, honest debate about the most important issues facing our veterans.

Like all things, context is important to understand to grasp the issue at hand. For me and thousands of veterans in Canada, that context began in 1995. In that year, the then minister of finance and former prime minister introduced the most heavy-handed budget in Canadian history. No one was spared. Cuts were made to health care, to post-secondary education, to infrastructure support and the list goes on. However, the most important and most tragic cuts were the ones he made to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Business of Supply

Because of the cuts he made, thousands of allied war veterans were shut out from the benefits they should have rightly received. They settled in Canada after the war, paid taxes in Canada and helped build our great country, and this was the thanks they got from the Liberal government.

Because of the cuts he made, veterans had to pay to take a taxi to the doctor because of a \$5 co-pay. Not only was that unfair, it directly targeted some of the most vulnerable in our society. While the Liberal Party was entrusted by Canadians to protect and respect the legacy of our veterans, all it could do was cut benefits and charge them for taxi rides.

Eleven more years of Liberal rule and nothing changed. Veterans found it harder to qualify for benefits. It took some veterans years of battling with the government to get even the smallest pension. These veterans again found themselves playing the role of brave soldier, only this time they were fighting battles with the Liberal government.

Then, the Liberal government, with the member for LaSalle—Émard in tow, asked itself how it could help more of its Liberal friends while ignoring what was best for Canadian veterans. The answer to that was the Veterans Review and Appeals Board.

After opening this new patronage machine, the former prime minister could not get his Liberal pals in place fast enough. I will give some examples of the appointments the former prime minister made. His former executive assistant, Denise Tremblay, received a five year term; former Liberal MP, Charlie Power, won the lottery with a seven year term; while fellow Liberal MP, Ian Murray, got himself a five year appointment. The other thing members should note is that no fewer than nine of the members on the board when we took government had either sat as a Liberal in Parliament, in a provincial legislature, had been an assistant to a Liberal minister or had worked for a Liberal member of Parliament. To put that in context, that was almost 50% of the members of the board in February 2006.

A few years down the road, in 2003, former Prime Minister Chrétien threatened 23,000 veterans' widows by saying that he would take away their veterans independence program benefits. This shameful act was met with outrage from the widows and their families. The former prime minister was taken to task by his caucus, not out of concern for the widows, but because they were afraid of losing their jobs.

The minister of the day defended the exclusion of the widows by saying that he could not include them because the prime minister would not give him any more money. How cold and shallow is that? These people sacrificed to give us the freedom we have today and the Liberals could only say "Sorry, we have no money", despite the fact there were record surpluses at the time.

In any event, the member for LaSalle—Émard took over a sinking Liberal ship after forcing out the previous prime minister. What did that mean for veterans? Absolutely nothing. Not only did the right hon. member for LaSalle—Émard do nothing for our veterans, but he did not even mention them in either the 2004 or 2006 Liberal Party election platforms. That is incredible. How could the Liberal

Party drop the ball so badly that it refused to include veterans in its campaign propaganda?

Did the veterans not register on the government's polls? Were they not good focus groups? Perhaps the Liberal brain trust was too busy finding things to insult current members of the Canadian Forces with their ridiculous attack ads. We will probably never know.

One final point on the do nothing reign of the right hon. member for LaSalle—Émard, and this is more to the credit of the current Prime Minister than anyone else, is the new veterans charter which was passed in May 2005, literally by the express consent of the opposition parties.

● (1610)

The former Liberal prime minister from LaSalle—Émard had to be forced by the other three opposition leaders to agree to the legislation. Even then, it took this Prime Minister and this Minister of Veterans Affairs to sign it into law.

However, that was then and this is now. I can say, on behalf of the Prime Minister and the Minister of Veterans Affairs, that our government has more respect for veterans than was shown by the official opposition in its 13 years of government.

I am confident that Canada's new government will raise the bar when it comes to treating our veterans with respect and dignity. There were 13 years of neglect, cuts and disrespect shown to our veterans by the previous Liberal administration. Canada's new government endeavours to undo those past 13 years and treat Canadian veterans with the respect they deserve.

Our new government will not use the Veterans Review and Appeal Board as a golden handshake for former parliamentarians or their staff. Our new government will change the Liberal culture of "deny until they die", to one of compassion and fairness. Our new government will continue to support the Department of Veterans Affairs with new resources and initiatives to better the lives of our veterans. Our new government will also ensure that each and every veteran is receiving everything he or she is entitled to under the law.

We have achieved much for veterans during our short time in government. We have begun to fill vacancies on the Veterans Review and Appeal Board to serve veterans more quickly and we have added a national advertising campaign for board positions. We have put an additional \$350 million into Veterans Affairs Canada to help new and traditional veterans and we have signed into law the new veterans charter, the biggest change in veterans' benefits in 60 years.

We ordered a review of all health services, including the veterans independence program.

Business of Supply

We have done all that in a short period of time, and we still have a lot of time left to accomplish good things for veterans.

As for the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore, I am supportive of his efforts with this motion but, as I noted earlier, there is a health care review currently underway and I am sure the minister will inform us of the results of that review in due course.

● (1615)

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been witness to some pretty simplistic and rash statements in this House in the last half hour or so. We had a member from the NDP say that the Conservatives love war and we have had a member of the Conservatives say that the Liberals do not like veterans. I think we should inject a bit of moderation into our speeches.

My question for the hon. member relates to a facility that happens to be located in my riding of Lac-Saint-Louis, a facility of which I am very proud. I have visited this facility many times over the years and I will be visiting it again on Monday. The facility is the Ste. Anne's Hospital for veterans which is the last standing federally owned and operated veteran's hospital in the country.

One of the issues that is very important to people in my community, especially to the families of veterans, is whether the widows of veterans, the widows who did not serve in the armed forces, will be allowed to receive care in that hospital, either while their spouses are there or even though their spouses have passed on.

If, as the member says, his party has the interests of veterans so much at heart, will he, on his own behalf, push his government to allow the widows of veterans admittance to the Ste. Anne's Hospital for veterans?

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for his question and for maybe toning down the rhetoric a little.

He obviously has a very serious issue in his constituency and any opportunity that the government has to take care of veterans and their widows should be examined and given every bit of due process. It is the veterans and their widows, the widows who stayed at home and supported the families while their spouses were off fighting on behalf of freedom and democracy for everybody in Canada and around the world, who should be afforded every reasonable opportunity to have the advantages of any of the pensionable benefits. I cannot speak on behalf of the government totally, but I can assure the hon. member that that is my personal feeling.

I wish he had spent as much time, when he had the opportunity as a member of the previous government, pushing for exactly what it is he is talking about today. He had that opportunity and if it did not get done he should seriously examine why his party could not get that done on his behalf.

I would like to talk about the numerous veterans in my riding who will be out in full force on November 11 at the various legions. I have about 15 legions across my riding and I will be glad to hear from them about the positive things that are coming from this government, with the new veterans charter and with the other health care initiatives that we are taking action on to ensure all veterans and their widows have an opportunity to get access to the services they need.

● (1620)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): On questions and comments, the hon. member for Winnipeg North. She should know that there is about a minute and a half for both the question and the answer.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to comment on the member's speech by saying that in this time when we are all talking about supporting our troops, wherever they are, and obviously Afghanistan comes to mind, we are here today to say that we honour them long after they take off their uniforms.

We are here today to call for measures to show our true respect for our veterans and address some of the egregious inequalities and outstanding program deficiencies here and now. One of those of course is the right to stay in one's own home as long as one can, especially spouses of deceased veterans. I want the member to know that one constituent of mine, Marion Robertson, wrote to me and said:

On January 7, 1989 my husband of 30 years...passed away at the age of 70. Although at the time of my husband's death he did have reoccurring heart problems and a pacemaker, he was not in receipt of VIP services.

It has been 16 years since my husband's death and I require housekeeping and grounds maintenance services. I am the wife of a veteran who served in the Merchant Navy from 1943-1945. I believe that my husband served and I feel I am entitled to this benefit.

Does the member agree with that sentiment and will he support the motion?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I would like to advise the hon. member that the clock has run out, but there will be a moment for him to reply.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Speaker, there are aspects of the motion that have merit and I know that the government is making progress in addressing those areas, such as the VIP. However, a number of points related to the Canadian Forces pension are inaccurate and what we need is a good, long study, and some clarity on these issues because not all parts of this motion are actually up to par.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be here today to address the motion put forward by my hon. friend, the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore. My perspective is a bit different having served for 30 years, and I was honoured and proud to have done that. I have been treated extremely well during and since my service. I am honoured and proud to serve here.

The men and women of the Canadian Forces deserve our gratitude and respect both while serving and in retirement. I would like to address, though, the last section of the motion, most elements of which I can support except the last portion which urges the government to eliminate the deduction from annuity for retired and disabled CF members. It is an inaccurate statement. We need to be very clear about what government benefits are for our men and women in uniform.

Business of Supply

If one reads the motion the way it is worded, one would think that the government is wilfully taking money away from our soldiers, taking money right out of their pockets. We all know that this government would never consider such an idea, nor would any reasonable government.

In fact, if we were to ask Canadians to look at the track record of the government in just the nine months since it has taken office, I am sure all Canadians would agree that this government is doing a lot for our military. I will cite some examples, starting with budget 2006.

[Translation]

Our government provided our forces with an additional \$5.3 billion over five years, so that they can carry out their important role in Canada and abroad.

[English]

This government has also announced plans to purchase four major procurement items for our military: joint support ships, medium to heavy lift helicopters, strategic and tactical airlift, medium size logistic trucks, and there is more to come.

[Translation]

We have also taken additional measures—including sending armoured recovery vehicles, engineering vehicles and counter-mortar equipment, which includes a radar system to locate enemy weapons, in order for our troops to have what they need in Afghanistan to carry out their mission.

[English]

I think it is obvious that the government stands squarely behind our forces. Our soldiers, sailors, airmen and airwomen contribute so much for our country and we cannot thank them enough for the daily sacrifices they make for their courage and dedication.

We owe it to them to ensure that they are well accommodated when it comes to retirement and beyond. We need to look after them. We are not, as the motion would suggest, deducting anything from them. This is simply false.

I would like to clarify for members of the House and for Canadians how we look after our dedicated men and women in the military through their pensions. Upon retirement from the military Canadian Forces members receive a full pension under the Canadian Forces Superannuation Act and then, once they reach 65, they receive a pension from two sources: the CFSA and Canada pension plan.

The pension benefits of the CFSA and CPP have been integrated and that happened in 1966, and I was there. This has been the case since the introduction of CPP of course 40 years ago. Payments to CFSA at that time were reduced by the amounts of the new CPP. I was an 18-year-old going through pilot training at the time.

How are these two plans joined together? They are linked by something called a bridge benefit. Once retired the former Canadian Forces members will receive a bridge benefit from the government until they reach age 65. This additional bridge benefit and CPP retirement pension that they will get when they are 65 are similar in

amounts. There are exceptions to this if someone takes CPP early but those are the exceptions.

In my own case, retiring at 47, it meant that from age 47 to age 65 I was collecting a full Canadian Forces superannuation even though I have only paid for part of it. In effect, the pension amount the retirees receive is the same both before and after they reach 65.

We do this so that the income for our retired military is stable throughout the entire retirement period. We do this because we recognize that a military member can retire much earlier than 65. In my own case, 47. We do this because we care.

Let me give an example. Some of our military personnel joined the military as early as age 16, in my case 17. That means that by the age of 36 after 20 years of service to this country they are eligible to retire on a pension of 40%.

• (1625)

[Translation]

Our plan for them is to ensure they receive the same pension for the rest of their life or until they are 102 years old, if they live that long.

[English]

Our plan ensures that if they have a child to put through school or university, or an unforeseen expense, they can have a predictable level of income throughout their lives. In the great majority of cases, the total monthly pension income for a CF annuitant is similar in amount whether it be before turning 65 or after.

In some cases, if a retired soldier continues to make CPP contributions after leaving the military, the amount of his or her retirement pension would be even more than the amount of his or her bridge benefit. In other words, total pension income after age 65 will be higher than before reaching age 65. From time to time there is a situation when a member will see a reduction after age 65, and this is where there has been some confusion in the past.

We need to be clear to our veterans and Canadian Forces retirees why this can happen. As I mentioned, there will be a reduction in pension earnings after 65 when retirees have elected to receive early CPP benefits, which they are eligible to receive at age 60. This reduction in total pension income happens only because Canadian Forces members have chosen to take this route.

Our military pension plan does not, by any means, deduct anything from our Canadian Forces members that is rightfully theirs. They have paid into their pension plans and they will get their benefits from it. This is very different from what the motion before us would suggest. Canadians can be proud of the pension plan that we have for our military.

The CFSA is an excellent pension plan for our forces. In addition to the pension, or the bridge benefit, the CFSA also has generous early retirement provisions, benefits that are payable to survivors, and a full cost of living indexing feature. It is a program that is designed to provide generous benefits to which members have paid significant contributions and it compares favourably with some of the best pension plans this country has to offer.

Business of Supply

I went through a lot of the things that we have heard about today, in the military. I even endured a year in Victoria, learning French from the hon. member for Victoria. It was not much of a hardship, and I hope it worked a little bit.

I do support several measures that are in this motion. I will personally fight to get the VIP benefit extended. I will fight to get the spousal benefits extended. I support and will fight for the concept of a veterans ombudsman.

However, and this is my own pension I am talking about, I cannot honestly support getting something for myself, or anybody else, that I have not paid for, and that is simply what we are talking about.

The emotional arguments are valid. I have been there. I have hundreds, at least, of friends who have been there. I understand it better than most. But it simply does not cut it. I cannot expect to get something that I have not paid for.

Many people I talk to, former chiefs of defence staff, former senior officers, down to junior officers, who sit down, put aside the emotion, and look at the cold hard facts have to agree. As much sacrifice the members of the military and the RCMP make, we cannot expect to get something that we just flat have not paid for. As I said, I was proud to serve and honoured to serve, and I was well compensated for that before and since.

It pains me to have to say that because I know I have friends watching who are saying, "Hawnski, what are you doing? You're deserting us". I would love to get more money. I am sorry. I referred to myself as Hawnski, I should have said "Youski, you're deserting us".

I would love to get more money, but I cannot, with a sense of honesty and integrity, stand here and say, "Please give me something that I haven't earned", no matter what I have gone through. I just cannot do that. To many of my friends who are watching, I am sorry, but my sense of honesty and integrity will not allow that. It does pain me because I would love to have more money, as we all would.

I will say again, there are many things that I support in this motion, and I have the utmost respect for my hon. colleague, who is very active in veterans affairs and military affairs, as am I. There are many things that I will support, but the one aspect, the aspect of getting something that we have not paid for, that, I am sorry, I just cannot. I am taking money out of my own pocket to say that, but that is the right answer.

• (1630)

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his speech and for his over 30 years of service defending the interests of all Canadians throughout this country. I also thank him for his efforts in preserving and protecting the entire integrity of the Shearwater air base. For that I am extremely grateful.

My question is with regard to the annuity deductions which he says is not correct. If he firmly believes that, then is he saying that the Royal Canadian Legion representing 440,000 people, the Army, Navy & Air Force Veterans in Canada Association representing over 20,000 people, the Air Force Association of Canada representing

thousands more, plus Lewis MacKenzie and many other people are simply blatantly wrong?

If the hon. member firmly believes this, then I ask him to support the motion and send it to a full standing committee. If he wants the clear facts, let us hear from those individuals and pension experts from across the country. The member should support the motion and get it to a committee where we can have a clear, open and honest debate once and for all on the deduction of the annuity.

I have received letter after letter that contradicts my hon. colleague. I would like to have further debate. That is why we included it in the motion, along with the other four aspects of our motion. We believe that they are valid, cost effective and they should be moved on and passed quickly.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, I am a member of two of the three organizations the member mentioned. One of the problems here is that for a lot of people, including the vets, the legion and the Air Force Association, the situation becomes so muddy. There is so much misinformation and the mixing of emotional arguments. It is everyone's desire to do the right thing for veterans, but some of the simple facts have not been laid out in a pure unemotional way.

The simple fact is that in 1966 my contributions to my Canadian Forces superannuation went down by the amount that my Canada pension plan contributions kicked in. It has been that way ever since.

Would I like to get more? Sure. Is the country prepared to spend \$20 billion, \$40 billion? I do not know what the number is for sure. We have received numbers back from the Library of Parliament that are extraordinarily high.

It is not up to General MacKenzie or the other organizations that the member mentioned, all of whom I have tremendous respect for. I have friends in those organizations. It is up to the Government of Canada to do the right thing by the Canadian Forces and RCMP veterans and so on. It is also up to us to make sure that we are doing it with the facts and honestly.

I would be happy to debate the issue further.

• (1635)

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is an interesting debate. I would like to add a point and hear my colleague's comment.

I have a constituent who was a member of the armed forces and was part of the negotiating team when the pension was changed. His comments to me were very direct. He said that this is the worst kind of political manipulation that there could possibly be. He said that they negotiated for a better pension. They had a pension where members could receive it sooner, take an earlier pension at a lower benefit and therefore get more in the long run.

I would appreciate hearing the hon. member's answer on the political manipulation.

Business of Supply

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, I am not exactly sure which time my hon. colleague is talking about. Let me say that the pension that I paid into for 31 years for pension purposes I received at age 47, which I was very grateful for. It was a full pension, even though I had only paid for part of it. I am still collecting that pension. It allowed me to retire at age 47 and get on with other things, which I did, 12 years in the financial services business and then the first of what hopefully will be several years in this place.

I am not sure what political manipulation my hon. friend is talking about, but he and I will discuss it afterwards.

Mr. Gerald Keddy: The motion.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: The manipulation of the motion. It is easy to manipulate people's emotions. It is more difficult to do the right thing with all the facts.

It is difficult to have the integrity and honesty to do it when I am taking money out of my own pocket, but that is what I am doing.

Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Mr. Speaker, excuse me, my apologies for interrupting, but I rise on a point of order.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to set the record clearly straight on something that happened yesterday. As recorded in *Hansard* on page 4570 during the conducting of a vote on a private member's bill I rose on a point of order after you had declared that the motion was carried on division.

I would like to put on the record what actually happened and this is how it occurred. If you look at the speeches on that particular bill, you will see that a number of our members indicated that they were voting against it. When you called for the question, there were a number of us who were saying no and I know why you did not hear us. It is because there were many Liberals right next to you, they had your ear and they were very, very loud and so our gentle nos were not heard. I rose on a point of order after that.

There is one other factor. The vote was conducted in French and we who are unilingual Canadians appreciate the work of the interpreters so much, but there is about a five to eight second delay. When you were already proceeding to declare the motion cast, that was only the time at which we were receiving the interpretation.

Mr. Speaker, with that clarification I want you to know that in my opinion you did everything exactly right. Having heard some nos, you then proceeded to ask for all the yeas and all the nays.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I very much appreciate the generosity of the hon. member, but this matter was dealt with last night, and I thank you.

Before I move to the hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie, I would like to inform the House that 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 Davenport, Foreign Affairs.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie.

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this very important motion brought forward by the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore. I will

be splitting my time with my NDP colleague, the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan.

I have a few things that I want to say on behalf of the veterans in my own community and across the country and on behalf of my caucus in response to some of what I have heard so far in the debate. There may be a fair bit of confusion on all sides where this issue is concerned. I would recommend very strongly that the House take the advice of the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore, who has worked on this issue for a long time and knows about what he speaks.

We should take a chance and step up with courage on behalf of our veterans and pass the motion. Let us get it into committee so that folks can come forward and make their case to all of us. Together we can come up with a bill to meet the needs of the veterans and of the government in terms of being accountable and managing finances responsibly. I would suggest very strongly that is the attitude we should take on the motion before us.

Having said that, I am a little disappointed that we still have not heard clearly from the government members whether they are going to support the motion and allow it to go forward. I am pleased that the Liberals and the Bloc are going to support my colleague and our caucus in this effort. It is an important and noble work that we do here. We do a lot of work in this place, but I do not think there is much of it that can be classified as noble in the same way that today's motion can be classified.

All of us have veterans in our ridings who are struggling to make ends meet. They are trying to participate and to contribute, but they are finding it hard because the cost of living keeps going up. They have been hurt in many instances. They came back from the war with skills that in many cases were not adaptable to the workplace at that time, and even more important, the workplace that is there now. They struggle. They are trying to find a way to make ends meet. They are not as lucky as the member for Edmonton Centre who was able to go on to a career in finance and then to become a member of Parliament with all that means in terms of income, security and support.

Many of the veterans in my community are poor. They struggle from day to day to pay the rent, to feed themselves, to look after their families, to clothe themselves. They want to participate in the community. They want to go to the odd hockey game and enjoy the life of the community. They fought across the water so that we would be free to do just that.

We stand here today, in particular the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore, to drive this agenda. We ask respectfully for the support of the House to sent the motion to a committee so that we can deal with some of the issues that have been raised and which have to be addressed. I do not think there is anybody here, including the member Sackville—Eastern Shore, who wants to put something through simply because it is the emotionally feel good thing to do. We want to do it because it is the right thing to do. We want to do it because it is the smart thing to do. We want to do it because it will help veterans in the long run.

Business of Supply

I say to the members of the government caucus, and I often say to myself in terms of my public life and the work that I do as a member of Parliament, if one cannot be helpful, at least do no harm. The do no harm position where this motion is concerned is to move it forward because veterans are expecting us to do that for them and with them.

I want to address another issue that was raised by some of the members, that possibly the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore went to bed one night, had a dream about how wonderful it would be to do this, that and the other thing on behalf of veterans, got up the next morning, wrote it down, and decided to introduce it as a motion in the House. Nothing could be further from the truth.

● (1640)

The member for Sackville—Eastern Shore, and the member for Edmonton Centre has given him credit for this, has worked long and hard on this file. He has worked directly with veterans over a long period of time. He is known in this place and around the country as a bit of a champion on behalf of veterans. I think he would probably be recognized in any legion hall, which he walked into, as someone who stands up, is not afraid, has courage and speaks passionately and emotionally on behalf of veterans.

What he brings before us here today is the result of work done by veterans and veterans organizations. They looked at the situation within which their members had to live on a day to day basis in their communities. They met with their veterans. They asked them what they thought the government could do to help them in their situations, such as poverty, health issues, lack of good housing and transportation, all the challenges that men and women across the country face on a day to day basis, particularly some of our veterans who have been hurt, who have emotional scars, who perhaps have lost family and are trying to keep it all together.

They tapped into the emotional vein of those who went and did a job that not many of the rest of us would have been willing to do. They put their lives on the line to ensure that we could continue to enjoy the freedom, peace and good government. Then when they came back, they perhaps found themselves in a situation where they felt, in the quiet of their room, as they reflected on this at night, that maybe no one really cared or maybe what they had done was not important.

Therefore, one of the ways we can indicate to them and to our men and women in the armed forces, going forward, is to ensure that all of them are well looked after and helped.

I know in my community, and in the community that I grew up in as a young man after I came to Canada from Ireland in 1960, the legion was the centre and heart of the community. Legion members back in the 1960s and 1970s were young. They worked at the plants. They coached hockey and baseball teams. They were fathers and mothers of the children who went to school. They ran the PTAs. They were on the school board. They were the heart of our community.

When our community celebrated, we went to the legion hall. On a Friday night in Wawa, the adults would be drinking, dancing and singing in the basement while upstairs was teen town. We would all be there having a great time listening to music, having sock hops.

Under this rubric of do no harm, the cuts the government has made recently will affect our veterans as well, cuts to housing, literacy and particularly, to the volunteer not for profit sector. It is the volunteers in our community who support and look after these people, who were the heart and soul of our community. They are now our elders, our seniors in their waning years. The volunteers in our community ensure they have a quality of life that speaks of dignity and respect. The government has cut serious money out of the programs and the ability of those volunteer not for profit sectors to do this job.

If the government is going to do that, then maybe it needs to be doing something else to make up for it. This is one way it could do that.

I appeal particularly to members of the government caucus, and I know the Liberals, the Bloc and ourselves will do this, to move it forward one more step so we can get it to committee, so we can have that very important, real and intelligent discussion about what the right thing is to do. We can sort out the numbers. Is it \$2 billion or is it \$300,000 to \$500,000? There is a difference of opinion on the numbers as we go forward. We can do the math in a number of different ways.

● (1645)

I ask the member for Edmonton Centre, knowing where he comes from, what his experience is and his passion for this, to work with us to move this ahead, to do the best we can with what we have and at least salvage—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Questions and comments, the hon. member for Edmonton Centre.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, I thank all members for their speeches. All of them have been well-meaning, sincere and so on, regardless from where we come. I acknowledge and thank him for his statement, that there is such good governance in the country. I appreciate that.

One thing he brought up were the volunteers. Does he really think people stop volunteering because there is no organization with people being paid to tell them to volunteer?

● (1650)

Mr. Tony Martin: No, Mr. Speaker, I am not suggesting that for a second, but there are supports that volunteers need to do that work effectively.

More and more we find volunteers being asked to do work that is sophisticated, technical in nature and it requires a certain level of expertise. They need training, support and sometimes they need transportation. There is a whole bunch of things that well-meaning volunteers need to have in place if they are to do their work and be effective.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member mentioned at least three or four times in his speech about sending this to committee. It is not going to committee and we should not cause anybody to misunderstand what happening. When it says “in the opinion of the House”, it is to capture the mood of the House.

Business of Supply

My comment for the member, given this is not bill to go to committee, is this. The sample speech the Minister of Veterans Affairs send out to us basically said that we owed veterans an enormous debt and that debt could only be repaid through remembrance. I disagree with that point, and I hope the member does as well. We can show our appreciation for seniors by at least picking up one or two of these suggestions and making them happen.

Mr. Tony Martin: Mr. Speaker, the member is correct that this is a motion and not a bill. The hope was that somebody like the member for Edmonton Centre might talk to his minister and bring it forward as a bill, which we could take to committee to discuss and perhaps do the right thing.

I suggest there is a variety of different ways we can help our veterans. I spoke about stopping the cuts to the volunteer and not for profit sector, putting in place an affordable housing initiative across the country to would provide affordable housing to some of the veterans who are finding it difficult to stay in their own homes or to pay the mortgages and taxes on the homes they are in now.

There is a myriad of ways that the government can be helpful to our veterans. It just takes political will and it means an investment of resources. As it said in the paper the other day, we are awash in surplus cash around here so why not spend it in a way that would see some of our vets getting some relief.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member for South Shore—St. Margaret's I believe used the word "manipulation", as if I woke up, had an epiphany on how to put the government's back to the wall by coming up with something and throwing it out there for debate. That is not true.

There are three individuals in my riding, all ex-servicemen, who served just as proudly as the member from Edmonton and others. John Labelle, Roger Boutin and Mel Pittman came to me and asked if there was anything that could be done to bring this to the House of Commons. This was almost two years ago. They themselves set up the website. They themselves encouraged debate among some very important people from across the country, including members of the RCMP. They are the ones who asked me to put this forward.

If the government thinks it can support only certain parts of this motion and cannot support the others, then vote for it. We will move the issues that it finds contentious into a committee to move it forward so we can respect the wishes of constituents who asked us to do the very same thing.

Mr. Tony Martin: Mr. Speaker, absolutely. I had a lot of surprises when I was elected in 2004. One of them was the number of veterans who came into my office asking for help with very basic day to day issues. They were looking for help with respect to getting money to put food on the table and to pay their rent. They were also looking for help with respect to finding health care or transportation.

This is an important motion. It is an important motion for my constituency. I suggest it is an important—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to the motion. I want to thank the member for Sault Ste. Marie for sharing his time with me and for very ably

outlining some of the issues facing veterans. I must thank the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore for his tireless work on behalf of veterans and their families.

The member for Sackville—Eastern Shore has rightly pointed out the fact that this motion was not some light bulb going on in the middle of the night. The motion was the result of his working very closely with veterans and their families and with veterans organizations, talking about some of the critically important issues facing them. The motion is the result of input from people in his riding and from other parts of Canada. It is incumbent upon us, as members of the House, to hear what veterans and their families are saying is important to them. I encourage each and every member in the House to support the motion and the work that has been done by the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore.

As the member for Sault Ste. Marie pointed out, one of the things we do as parliamentarians is work with people who come into our constituency offices. Oftentimes it is heartbreaking to hear the stories from veterans and their families. These are men and women who have served our country ably. They have often given up time with their children as they were growing up. These men and women came back to Canada as changed people. They lost not only years, but they often lost some innocence. After having served this time for their country, it is important that we recognize their efforts not only annually, but also recognize that they deserve a quality of life.

A couple of things I heard from veterans surprised me and disappointed me. The men and women who work in veterans affairs are able and caring, but oftentimes our veterans are very frustrated by bureaucratic tangles, which are difficult for them to sort through. They will fill in one piece of paper and then they are told they need another piece of paper. If they do not have somebody to advocate on their behalf, they get lost in the tangled bureaucracy.

A couple of medical issues have come before us and one of them is around hearing loss. Many of these veterans are now at the stage where they are suffering fairly serious hearing loss. They are often told by the bureaucracy that the hearing loss is just a part of natural aging and those kinds of things. If they need support for hearing loss, we should be able to step up and help them. Many of our veterans are living on inadequate amounts of money and they just do not have the wherewithal to buy the kinds of hearing equipment they need.

The other thing we have heard from veterans has to do with the challenges they face with respect to their pensions. Whether they need some assistance in completing paperwork or extra documentation, we need to bend over backwards to ensure they get all the assistance they need. We should make it as easy as possible for them to access the benefits to which they are entitled.

Some veterans who served have been deemed to not have enough time in active duty. The rules say that the individual must have served on full time active service for a minimum of 365 days during either of the following periods: August 4, 1914 to August 31, 1921 or September 1, 1939 to August 15, 1945.

Business of Supply

I have heard stories from veterans who have come to my office that they had 323 days, or 315 days or 340 days. Surely there must be something we can do for these veterans. There must be some latitude. Some of them did serve a period of time at the end of the war, but just do not have that magic 365 days. I know people will say that there must be a cutoff, but we also must recognize the dislocation in the lives of these people. I would urge us to take a look at this problem, which is admittedly facing a small number but it is impacting on their quality of life.

• (1655)

There are so many issues facing veterans. I must mention a man by the name of Frank White from my riding, who has been a tireless worker on the Korean war service medal. He has been working hard over a number of years to keep this issue front and centre. He has written letters to the current Prime Minister, the past prime minister, the ministers and members of Parliament. Korean war veterans are asking for some appropriate recognition for the Korean war service medal. I would encourage this House to support the Korean veterans on this issue.

There are numerous issues and I want to touch on one other, but before I do, I want to specifically mention that this is the 60th anniversary of the war brides. We know that many women married Canadian Forces personnel and came to Canada to start a new life. I was happy to be able to attend a tea on the weekend at which the women there informed me of the statistics that say the war brides and their partners are responsible for 25% of the new generation that came about, so I think we owe a word of gratitude to those war brides.

The final thing I really do need to touch on is aboriginal peoples. Cliff Chadderton, the chair of the National Council of Veteran Associations in Canada, has been working again to have full and equal recognition of aboriginal peoples. In his Cliff's Corner article, he outlines a whole series of events touching on aboriginal people.

A newspaper article in the *Edmonton Journal* of June 22, 2006, talks about the following facts:

More than 3,000 aboriginal troops served in the Second World War, and several hundred more in Korea. Many were denied the same compensation, retraining and housing services provided to others who returned from duty. They were denied because they lacked education, lived off-reserve or were outright targets of racism.

Although there has been some remedy, it did not go far enough. Just to let members know, on June 21, 2002, the then minister of veterans affairs offered the sum of \$39 million as compensation for approximately 1,800 treaty Indians who had returned to the reservation lands following their war service. However, the problem with this is that it did not recognize a whole class of people, including Métis and aboriginal peoples who lived off reserve.

Mr. Chadderton and others have been working over a number of years and asking that this wrong be righted. He has indicated that this agreement to pay out the 1,800 people on reserve, or their families, is actually an admission of failure on the part of the government to make provisions for a certain class of Indians on the same basis as that offered to other veterans under the Veterans' Land Act. He went on to talk about the fact that for all aboriginal veterans or their widows, it was based on demonstrated discrimination, in that

they were deprived of post-war rehabilitation benefits available to non-native war veterans.

In this day and age, the number of aboriginal veterans is declining. We should move expeditiously to right this wrong. We have already acknowledged the 1,800 people on reserve. We need to acknowledge the Métis people and the off reserve people to make sure there is adequate recognition of the sacrifices they made for this country.

In closing, we need to acknowledge our veterans. We need to acknowledge their families. I would encourage all members of this House to support the motion of the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore.

• (1700)

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for her intervention and I also want to thank my colleague from Sackville—Eastern Shore for bringing this motion forward. I think it is fitting that in Veterans' Week we are having a day-long debate in the House of Commons about our veterans, who paid the ultimate sacrifice by going to two world wars, the Korean war and numerous peacekeeping missions around the world. And now we have veterans already returning from our war effort in Afghanistan.

I am so proud of and grateful for our veterans. Our ability to live our free lifestyle, to have the standard of living that we do and not to be under the thumb of anarchy and oppressed like some in the world is largely due to the huge sacrifice and effort made by our veterans.

There are a lot of parts of the motion that I can support and that I think the government can support, but the one thing that does present a real concern to me is messing around with the Canadian Forces superannuation fund.

I have talked to a lot of veterans in my riding. I have 17 legion branches and a couple of army, air force and navy veterans associations as well. I have spoken to them. They often hear that they are getting shortchanged when their annuities transfer over when the CPP benefit starts getting paid out at age 65.

The way the plan was originally envisioned and developed back in 1966, it took into consideration that CPP was a reality and that all Canadians, including civil servants and people who served in the armed forces, the RCMP and other government jobs, would receive CPP benefits and that the annuity would then adjust accordingly, so that the overall dollars they received, early retirement versus after age 65, would not change. It would be the exact same dollar figure.

Business of Supply

I am concerned that if we move forward with some of the suggestions here they would actually increase the cost, and not just to government. My concern is that it is going to increase the cost of the premiums to the people currently involved in the plan. That is going to have a great impact on today's soldiers. I want to know why those members would want to off-load this cost onto today's soldiers.

• (1705)

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, the current government has a surplus. There are numbers of mechanisms by which we could look at this. I think what we really need to do is talk about our commitment to veterans and their families. There is a saying about how if there is a will there is a way, and I would argue that if we are asking Canadian men and women to lay their lives on the line, then we have to be willing to make sure they are well looked after when they return to this country.

If we are just going to knock everything down to dollars and cents when we are asking people to do the kind of work that many of us probably are not prepared to do, I think we actually have to make sure that we support them when they come home.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask further, then, of the member, what price do we put on the life of a veteran? It seems that the Conservatives are looking at this strictly in terms of dollars and cents. This is not about costs, although we are all cognizant of the need to do things in a fiscally responsible way. This is about recognizing our veterans, who have given so much for our peace and our freedom.

The question becomes, then, does the government not have the means today, with a \$13 billion surplus that was just put against the debt, with not a penny put toward veterans? Do we just say that is all we can do even though we have that kind of surplus? Or do we start to say that it matters and therefore we will do something important? For example, we will follow what other institutions do and simply increase survivors' benefits from 50% to 66%. Everybody else does it. Why can this government not do it for our veterans?

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Winnipeg North for her intervention. She is our very able financial critic, and if anybody can speak to the dollars and cents on this, it is certainly this member.

Again, there are mechanisms that other organizations have in place. If we have a commitment to our veterans, we need to demonstrate that commitment, not only by speaking the words and remembering them annually, but by putting the financial dollars and cents behind it as well. These people commit their lives and their families and we must be willing to honour that sacrifice they make.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in this debate this afternoon.

I want to begin by congratulating my colleague from Sackville—Eastern Shore on introducing this motion and making it the focus of an NDP opposition day. I think that my speech will not deal with the motion at all, because my colleague from Saint-Jean and my colleague from Magog have done a very good job of stating the Bloc's positions on this motion. The Bloc Québécois will vote in favour of the motion. I only hope that the government will not put

the motion in file 13, the round file, but will draw conclusions from it and make something of it.

I would like to remind this House of how the people in government treat our veterans. I will start with the case of one veteran, whom I will name: Armand Pilon. This Montrealer, along with other veterans, has been fighting since 1987 to receive a pension because of his injuries. I will briefly tell the story of Armand, a man over 80 who fought for democracy, freedom, peace and justice in the world.

At the tender age of 17 or 18, Mr. Pilon enlisted in the Canadian Forces. Unfortunately, Mr. Pilon is not a big man. He stands 5 feet, 2 inches tall. He was sent to a training camp in Rimouski, in my colleague's riding, Rimouski—Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques. During a night exercise, while skiing, he fell into a hole. A number of his comrades fell on top of him, injuring his back. He sustained injuries to his L1, L2 and L3 vertebrae.

Hon. members will recall that in the early 1940s, many people enlisted to make a decent living while serving their country. Canada had just been through a depression and money was scarce.

My friend Armand is hurt. That still happens nowadays as we saw in the report of the army ombudsman, Mr. Yves Côté. His superiors tell Armand to not report his injuries, to not go to see the doctor, that the nurse will take care of it because it could hurt his career, because perhaps he will not be able to continue in the army and because he may be forced to leave. Armand stays at home, does not say a word, massages himself, takes or is given my grandmother's treatments—I have nothing against them, there were some good ones—because that is the way it was in those days. They rub him with Minard liniment and he is given six to eight weeks' leave, the time needed to get him back on his feet.

I think that the army brass realized that Armand would never be able to go to the front because of the injury that was not reported in his medical file on the advice of his superior.

• (1710)

Armand is sent to the coast of Newfoundland where he will specialize in sending messages in Morse code to aircraft. He will do this work until the war ends. After the war, he is told that because he is not in good shape and he is not very big there is no longer a spot for him. And he is sent home.

Armand returns home and still has back pain. At the time, Armand felt, just as an old hockey player would, that he should keep his injury a secret out of fear that someone would take his place and out of fear that upon his return he would no longer have a job. Armand said to himself that it was better to work with some pains here and there and that they would go away.

Business of Supply

Armand returns home. He is in pain all the time and often sees doctors. His son, who is a lawyer, told me that when he would get out of his car he had difficulty standing up and moving. The son had always known him to be like that.

In 1952, Armand was unemployed. He was married and had children to feed. In the early 1950s, he has the opportunity to enlist in the army to work in Saint-Hubert, in the Montreal area, where there is a naval base and an air traffic control service. Armand has experience in that field. He goes there, has a medical exam and nothing is detected. Armand does not say he has a bad back because if he does, he will not get the job. He needs to earn money to take care of his family. He enlists.

After two or three years, he can no longer take the pain and decides to leave. He spent his whole life suffering and using Quebec's health care system. This happens in other provinces as well. Every month, two or three times a month, Armand went to his doctor, a physiotherapist and other specialists to take care of his problem.

It was in 1987 that his real problems began. He applied for compensation, for a disability pension because of his bad back. He submitted his claim and told his story. The Department of Veterans Affairs explained to Armand that there was no evidence that he was injured and therefore it could not pay him benefits. Armand said he hurt himself skiing and told the story that I have just relayed.

Armand decided to appeal, which made matters worse. Anyone who is familiar with the appeal process knows it can be complicated. The first time someone appeals, a group of blue collars and white collars, who have no medical experience, review the file amongst themselves, flip through some documents only to uphold the decision.

Since when can a court of justice—because it is court of justice—take decisions without even giving the person concerned the chance to give his testimony?

That is how Veterans Affairs operates. Armand did not provide testimony and his case was dismissed. The process took two or three years, from 1987 to 1988, from one court of appeal to another.

Finally, in 1988, Armand had all the documentation. He went to see doctors and their reports proved that his L1 vertebrae was fractured, and that it happened when he was young. Armand said that he fell while he was skiing, which could indeed cause this type of fracture. Armand had all the documentation. However, since it had not been reported in 1946, or while Armand was training, he was not entitled to a disability pension.

● (1715)

Armand is like a bull dog, and by that I mean he does not give up easily. So, he went back. This time, in order to increase the pressure, he appeared before the tribunal, along with his wife and child.

He was represented by a lawyer paid by Veterans Affairs Canada. As the adage goes, don't bite that hand that feeds you. Furthermore, I must wonder if the lawyer was more faithful to his client or the department. Armand appeared before the tribunal and testified. The three commissioners told him that they believed him and that they thought his documentation was valid. No one thought he had lied,

and no one thought his wife had lied. The documentation served as evidence and an expert, Dr. Tadros, confirmed that it happened during a skiing accident when Armand was young. Everyone believed him and, yet, the ruling remained unchanged. This is now 2006. The only thing Armand should now do is take civil action against Veterans Affairs Canada.

What is even more amazing, as I was telling my friend, the member for Ahuntsic, is that he had to pay for all the examinations and assessments that the Department of Veterans Affairs requested. Armand had to pay \$600 out of his own pocket. A mere \$600. That is nothing for a man who served his country and went to war for democracy. It cost him \$600, and he is still owed that money. He has never received his \$600. He has never been repaid. He is still owed that money.

The last time he went to court was in 2001. I have hope for my friend Armand, because I have requested a meeting so that he can plead his case to the minister. I do not know when this will be over or how it will turn out, but I believe that his only hope is to lay down some more money and launch a civil suit. I know that he will, because he is like a bulldog.

His life and his marriage have been destroyed because of that blasted injury. He has suffered from it for his whole life. In my opinion, it is time to give him the benefit of the doubt. The law says that, but it is not put into practice. When it is difficult to hand down a decision on a case, the court should always decide in favour of the soldier or veteran. But that is not what happens. A court has never handed down a favourable decision based on hearsay or given the soldier or veteran the benefit of the doubt. I have never seen it, even though I have handled a number of cases. Armand's case is typical, and there are many others like it.

Now, I would like to talk about my other friends, the people I affectionately call "my messed-up buddies". These are people suffering from psychological problems as a result of serving as peacekeepers, young people suffering from post-traumatic stress.

I will name a few of them, to please them and let them know I remember them. Max Steben, I am thinking of you; François Gignac, I am continuing to work for you; Simon Bois, we are going to win; George Dumont, we have to keep on and not give up. There is also Yves Côté, my friend Louise Richard, Joy Anderson of London, Shane Bruha. These are only a few of the young men and women—the same age as my son and daughter—who suffered enormous pressure during the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, which caused them psychological problems.

Even though it is dinner time, I will tell a story, which I hope will not turn anyone's stomach.

● (1720)

How might we react if we were walking along one day and saw a pregnant woman whose stomach had been cut open like a stuck pig, and whose baby's throat had been slashed. Would we not be left with some mental problems? I would certainly think so.

Considering all the atrocities these young people have witnessed, it is only normal that they have problems and are suffering from PTSD. It is time that the government acknowledge these young people. It is time we all join together to give them what they need.

Business of Supply

That is how we treat our veterans. I am not even referring to those who went to war, but those who served on peacekeeping missions. Consider, for instance, Somalia and General Dallaire, who threw himself into the Rideau Canal, here in Ottawa, because of post-traumatic stress problems. General Dallaire is now a senator. He is a very intelligent man. He is a wise man who served in Somalia. Imagine young people who have less experience. Some of them experienced war much earlier. Think of these young people.

What are we doing for our young people who participated in Desert Storm, where they were exposed to toxic gases and depleted uranium? What are we doing for Louise Richard? Since she came back, she has been fighting little by little. Fortunately, yesterday, Yves Côté, the National Defence ombudsman, gave us a reason to hope. He told us to make recommendations, and that those recommendations might make a difference. The Department of National Defence says it somehow lost some medical documents and cannot find them. Were those documents lost accidentally or on purpose? Half of these young people's medical files are missing. They have disappeared.

What are we doing to provide fair treatment to these young people who are fighting for democracy? They are fighting not for Canada, but for democracy around the world, to bring it to Afghanistan and to bring it back to Kosovo, and elsewhere. We have to take care of these children, of my children.

I wish I had two more hours to say all I have to say. It has been exactly seven years since I began meeting these young people every day, and every day, I cry.

I will stop now because I cannot go on any longer. But before I finish, I want to take a deep breath and calm down by reading some lines by a well-known Quebec singer-songwriter, Raymond Lévesque. Had I not shouted earlier, I might have enough of a voice left to sing.

When people learn to love each other
There will be no more misery
My brother

I might add:

When people learn to love each other
There will be no more war
My brother

● (1725)

[English]

Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to share a short story because I know I do not have a lot of time. I am going to ask the hon. member to share a different perspective.

My father is 84 years old. He fought in the second world war, as did his brothers, my uncles. My father was a tank instructor. He was in ordinance originally, and was on a motorcycle and worked his way through different parts. He was from Edmonton.

His name is Eddy Warawa. I am very proud of this man. He got married, moved to British Columbia with my mom, and they had

four children and I am one of those children. He is a man of great respect. He has worked hard over the years.

It was about four years ago that he had a serious heart operation and he needed to go into rest home. Our family is not a rich family. He is an honest man. He has worked hard all his life and is proud of Canada, as are his brothers. The brothers served in the navy. The whole family made it back from the war. We are very thankful for that.

In these later years, as I have been losing my uncles, who have been passing on, I have now been able to get some of the stories that they did not talk about before.

The point I want to come to is how the Canadian government treated these veterans. I hear first-hand. I am not hearing second-hand or third-hand. It is my father. These are my uncles and they have nothing but praise for the Government of Canada in the way they have been treated as veterans. They are proud of this country and they are proud of the way they have been treated.

My father needed some help. Financially, he was not able to stay in this private rest home after his heart operation. We contacted Veterans Affairs Canada. He is at George Derby. He is receiving wonderful care. He has nothing but praise as a Canadian veterans and the way he has been treated.

I ask the member to look at a different perspective. Do not beat the desk. Tell us what Canada has done for veterans. Tells us good stories, not just the bad because there are both.

● (1730)

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: Mr. Speaker, I heard what our colleague just said. Yes, there are some good stories, but there are also some bad ones.

There is something about all this that really strikes me. I will ask a question and I would like someone to answer. How is it that the majority of members, especially those who sat with me on the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs—I will not name them, they know who they are—before coming into power, when they sat on this side of the House, accused the Liberals of being a bunch of crooks who did nothing and so forth, and today, now that they are in power, they have changed their story as easily as changing their hat or shirt? Previously, they told a tale similar to mine.

Let us be serious. It is not a question of defending one position or another. We must treat younger and older veterans equally. That is what we have to do.

I will talk about the case of another friend. I will give his name because I like to give people's names. That way you can always check. Vic Smart is a veteran from Rivière-des-Mille-îles, in my riding. At a party like the one I am going to hold this weekend to pay tribute to the deceased, Vic told me: "The young soldiers of today are no longer strong between the ears. In my time, we were tough and things went well. We did not suffer from post-traumatic stress syndrome". I did not reply. His wife said to him: "Vic, remember that when you went to war you were a good family man. When you came back, you treated your illness with lots of gin. You use gin to cope with your post-traumatic stress syndrome".

The father of the member for Laval was in the army. She told me about the horrors experienced by veterans. Unfortunately, they would not complain. The “old guys” were not crybabies. Our fathers and grandfathers were not crybabies. It was normal, there was nothing to it. They were satisfied with what little they had. Those days are long gone. We must look after our young and old veterans, those of every age. We must do everything possible for them.

• (1735)

[English]

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the passion, the emotion, and the sincerity of the presentation by the member. He speaks as though he has experienced or has personal knowledge of some of these people who are out there trying to live their lives and finding it difficult. These people need some help. Sometimes getting help is very difficult. It is very expensive because what they need is some health care and an ability to look after themselves and to get housing, et cetera.

In the member's experience with veterans, and he has obviously had quite a bit, what would be the first priority in terms of what we should be putting in place that is not there now?

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: Mr. Speaker, my colleague across the floor just sparked a long debate. The role of the ombudsman is to protect citizens. He should report to the House, and not to the minister.

How could an ombudsman who reports to the minister remain objective? As the saying goes, don't bite the hand that feeds you.

Consider, for example, André Marin, the former ombudsman who submitted a fine report sometime around June 2003 regarding that infamous insurance, SISIP. His recommendations were so good that the Liberal government of the day told Mr. Marin that it would not renew his contract on July 5, 2005.

An ombudsman must report to the House, otherwise, it would be useless. The opposite would be impossible. We could not do any worse.

I do not lay blame on the ombudsmen. I would do the same thing. In order to save my job, I would not bite the hand that feeds me. It would mean one's livelihood.

The Public Protector Act has existed in Quebec for over 30 years and it is working well.

According to the presentation given by Mr. Marin yesterday before the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, legislation exists similar to that of Quebec and it is working well. He said that New Brunswick has similar legislation that works and that produces good results. Manitoba has legislation regarding ombudsmen that works well and produces good results. It is going very well in British Columbia, as well, and they are seeing good results.

What is Ottawa waiting for? The messiah?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): It being 5:39 p.m. it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings.

Private Members' Business

[English]

Pursuant to order made earlier today, all questions necessary to dispose of the opposition motion are deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Tuesday, November 7 at the expiry of the time provided for government orders.

* * *

[Translation]

WAYS AND MEANS

NOTICE OF MOTION

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 83(1), I have the honour to lay upon the table a notice of ways and means motion to amend the Income Tax Act.

[English]

I ask that an order of the day be designated for consideration of the motion.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1740)

[Translation]

FOOD AND DRUGS ACT

The House resumed from September 18 consideration of the motion that Bill C-283, An Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act (food labelling), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to Bill C-283, which I consider to be very important.

I am sorry if I am not in my usual spirited form or if I do not speak with my usual passion. I listened to Michael Fortier's recommendations and took my little Valium pill to calm my nerves. I am therefore a little less excited today than I usually am.

All joking aside, this bill is very important. It is so important that we made it a discussion point in our caucus meeting yesterday. This is a bill to amend the regulations and legislation in order to require restaurant owners and merchants to list on their menus or on their food items the amount of calories, trans fats, sodium, etc. This is an important matter that should not be taken lightly and should be reviewed very carefully, thoroughly and seriously. Such regulations have repercussions on the industry.

Private Members' Business

Even if we are talking about manufacturers or restaurant chains that do over \$10 million in annual sales, these food chains are very important to the economy of the various provinces, to Quebec's economy in particular. In Quebec, the restaurant industry is quite developed. It provides many jobs to many people. These jobs are very appreciated since, for the most part, they can be filled by women and single mothers because of their very flexible hours. Men also choose this line of work because they find it quite agreeable, even though it is very physically demanding.

As far as Bill C-283 is concerned, we are aware that it addresses a problem and that is important for Quebecers and Canadians to know what they are eating. We have talked about this a number of times: when we called on the government for the labelling of GMOs; when we called on the government to let Canadians know, through the food guide, what they are eating, what they should be eating and what is good for their diet.

But even Health Canada, in the person of Ms. Bush, who is working on Canada's Food Guide, is telling us that we should not encourage people to count calories. I do not know.

Is Health Canada going against the wishes of parliamentarians who want the public to be more aware of the number of calories they are consuming? In my opinion, this is important, because I myself have a weight problem and I often go to Tim Hortons. Recently, for breakfast, I ordered the healthiest items on the menu: a bran and carrot muffin and orange juice. I told myself that I was starting my day off right, that I had made a healthy choice, and that I was not eating fatty food, but healthy food. To my astonishment, when I went to the Tim Hortons website later, I realized I had consumed 512 calories by having a muffin and a glass of orange juice. Can you believe it? That is one third of the calories I should eat in a day. On top of that, I was hungry again at 10 a.m., because the muffin I had eaten at 8 a.m. was not very nutritious and I digested it quickly.

When someone tells me that putting calorie information on foods is not important, I am sorry, but I do not believe it. In my opinion, the number of calories should be indicated.

That said, we will have to be very careful not to hurt the industry with this bill. When we try to go too fast in passing a bill in order to please certain people, we can end up upsetting a large segment of the population.

In addition, because Bill C-283 targets major restaurant chains that make more than \$10 million a year, it is easy for us to forget—and this is quite paradoxical—that the food sold in small restaurants is often loaded with trans fat. I am talking about fries, hamburgers, smoked meat sandwiches, and so on. These restaurants may not make \$10 million a year, but they easily sell 10 million calories' worth of food a year. Bill C-283 will not affect these people.

• (1745)

As we consider this bill, we must ensure that we are not pleasing some by causing problems for others just because we want to legislate quickly.

In committee, it would be worth taking the time to examine all of the available options. I believe that restaurant owners are also prepared to make changes. Recently, I read that Kentucky Fried Chicken is planning to eliminate trans fats by changing the oil it

uses. That is a good start. Yes, it is still a very fatty food, and it is still breaded, but this is an improvement.

The Saint-Hubert rotisserie chain, which is headquartered in my riding, has a healthy menu. They are making considerable efforts. They will soon be posting the nutritional content of their menu items, including calories, trans fats and sodium, on their web site. McDonald's and Harvey's are also making an effort, although I am a little less pleased with what McDonald's has done. All of their nutritional information is printed on the back of their trayliners. People are unlikely to read anything printed on the back of a liner under their hamburger, fries and Pepsi. When they finish eating, they do not bother removing everything, turning the trayliner over and reading what is printed on the back. People are not interested and, what is more, they do not want to feel guilty. Obviously, they will not look at it. I much prefer what Harvey's decided to do, although they too provide far too much information. It is very confusing for people to look at all the numbers on a Harvey's pamphlet.

There are definitely things to be done, changes to be made. However, these changes must meet with the approval of everyone involved and with the approval of the restaurant industry. That is no small feat. If we are not careful, restaurant chains throughout Canada could suffer greatly. We are asking them to follow rules that will be the same everywhere; however, menus are often not the same everywhere because ingredients are not the same everywhere. So, using the ingredients, how do you calculate how many calories there are in such or such a food? I do not know. Something has to be done, we have to look at this, that is certain.

I would vote for the principle of this bill. However, I am not saying that once it goes to committee I will agree with the rules to impose on the restaurant industry or the merchants. We must ensure that they can comply with the rules and continue to turn a decent profit. We know that the purpose of any company is to make a profit. Yesterday, we saw that even the government decided to axe the income trust program in order to recover the taxes it was losing.

Restaurant owners are just as smart as the next guy, and of course they want to make money. We will have to reach an agreement with them. I am sure that parliamentarians will find a way to do that thanks to all of the advice we will receive in committee when we hear the witnesses, if our colleagues let this bill get to that stage. I am sure we can find a solution that works for everyone; we will have much to gain by doing so.

Private Members' Business

I would like to know what I am eating, and I want to be careful about the calories I consume. That is not always possible here, but I want to make an effort, and I need help from the industry, Health Canada and my colleagues. Together we can find a solution, but we will not find that solution by legislating against the wishes of the restaurant industry.

• (1750)

[English]

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to join in the debate on Bill C-283, an act to amend the Food and Drugs Act regarding food labelling, put forward by my colleague from Scarborough Southwest.

I am prepared to accept that labelling of many of the ingredients in the processed foods we eat is beneficial. It is a good idea. I can say at the start that we intend to vote for my colleague's bill. I recognize his long commitment to this issue and I appreciate the opportunity to address it today. I qualify my support somewhat though by saying that even though labelling is useful, I think it is of limited use.

First of all, a healthy and balanced diet is largely a matter of personal choice. Therefore, labelling will be of great value because in order to choose the right foods, we have a right and a need to know what is in those foods, but I will also say that government has a duty and an obligation to ensure that the foods we eat are safe and that the materials labelled in those foods are safe.

While I welcome having saturated fats, the total amount of calories, sodium, cholesterol, et cetera, listed on the label of these products, I do not ever want to see trans fatty acids listed on a label of foods sold in Canada, because I do not want trans fatty acids to be allowed to be a part of food in Canada. While labelling is advantageous, it is not a substitute for the obligation that Health Canada has to eliminate certain aspects from the food supply system.

In the context of childhood obesity and the current study under way at the health committee, I sometimes sit in on the health committee as an associate member when my NDP colleague is unable to be there. There is a very interesting study being done on the whole issue of the near epidemic incidence of childhood obesity.

I had a conversation with Senator Wilbert Keon, a medical doctor, a cardiologist who runs the cardiac centre. I worked with him very closely on the campaign to ban trans fats. His comment to me while we were riding on one of the little green buses the other day was that caloric intake is the single biggest health problem that our society faces in terms of general public health, not in terms of diseases, but in terms of general public health. I agree with him. We are poisoning a generation of kids by supersizing them. I will not overstate things and say that we are killing children; I am simply saying that the quality of life of our children is suffering and the long term general health of our children is suffering because of their caloric intake, the amount of calories they are ingesting. It affects the quality of life of children in very scary ways.

At the health committee there was a cardiologist who appeared as a witness. He said that children three years to 10 years old were coming to his office with arterial sclerosis, clogged arteries. Imagine, children three years to 10 years old with symptoms we would expect

from middle aged out of shape men like me who sometimes present with those symptoms.

It creates lethargy. Even if children are not showing any overt symptoms of illness, they are sluggish. They are not feeling well. They are probably not participating in activities at school because their little arteries are clogged with these terrible fatty acids or saturated fat, whatever it is. They are unable to enjoy their young years to their fullest because they are being hobbled by this terrible problem.

I know that diet is only one aspect of healthy children. Activity is just as important. There are two sides to the same coin to create a generally healthier population. There are programs, such as in the inner city of Winnipeg, that cost very little to get very little children busy and active.

• (1755)

There was one program called Wiggle, Giggle & Munch, which teaches new mothers to get their children moving and active even at six, eight and nine months of age. This program costs \$5,000 for 18 classes for 20 and 30 young moms and their newborn babies to come together once a week and learn the importance of diet, eating the right snacks, and getting their kids active. Do members know how hard it is to find that \$5,000 to renew that program? It is like pulling teeth. It is one of the frustrations that we face in this era of budgetary cutbacks, that we are not prioritizing important small programs like Wiggle, Giggle & Munch in my riding of the inner city of Winnipeg.

I would like to dwell again on the trans fatty acids issue. I know that my colleague's bill calls for labelling. I think the general population, though, has come to a realization that trans fatty acids are the worst possible type of cooking fat or cooking oil we could imagine. The scientific community is onboard. The industry has come to this realization, where companies like KFC have now eliminated trans fats from their products even though they used to be one of the worst offenders. Voortman cookies, New York Fries, all these companies have realized that they do not have to compromise quality or taste or shelf life to eliminate this material.

In speaking in favour of my colleague's bill, I think in the same context the member for Scarborough Southwest will not mind if I use this as a platform to advertise this other important initiative that has been running along parallel to the activism of my colleague on the food labelling. It is interesting to note that all of New York City may in fact take steps to unilaterally ban trans fats if its federal government is too slow to act.

I think the federal government should take note of this debate today and recognize that it is safe political territory to take this step and ban trans fats.

Private Members' Business

I do hope we pass Bill C-283, but I also hope that the current government of the day realizes that Parliament has spoken on trans fats, too. We had a vote in the 38th Parliament and we essentially gave direction to the Government of Canada to take steps to virtually eliminate, as far as is reasonably practical, trans fats from our food supply. It is rare that one single food product gets debated in the Parliament of Canada and is subjected to a vote as this product has.

A blue ribbon task force took 18 months to agonizingly, but thoroughly, analyze the problem from coast to coast to coast. It came back with a very firm recommendation as well: ban trans fats. I do not understand what the holdup is now.

Governments are reluctant to take steps if they think it is politically dangerous, but I can assure this government that banning trans fats is politically safe. I will be the first one to acknowledge the government and to recognize it if it does in fact take this step.

Getting to my colleague's bill, Bill C-283, the only thing that I would like to see revisited at committee, as far as specifics of the bill, is the threshold that my colleague has built into this bill, where it does not apply to a person who has, I believe, gross annual revenues of less than \$500,000.

I believe there should be ways around that, even if it is done through associations or restaurants, et cetera, that may be able to cooperate to take some of the burden off smaller restaurants, so that they are not dealt with a disproportionate cost factor in listing these items.

I will simply close by saying that I admire and respect those who use the private members' system to champion a cause patiently, year after year. It is a good system and it can be used to the advantage of the general public by those who are patient enough to use it well. My colleague from Scarborough Southwest should be recognized for taking this important step that may in fact end up elevating the general public health of all Canadians.

Hon. Roy Cullen (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-283.

I want to congratulate my colleague from Scarborough Southwest. He and I are working together on another committee right now and we are doing that very well. He will not be surprised, though, when I speak against his bill because I have done so before when the bill was in a different parliament, in different numbers and in different forms.

He has the objective right. Canadians need to understand better what it is they are eating, and if there was a way to do that which was economically feasible, I certainly would support it. I do not think the bill as it now stands does that.

We have heard from others about the importance of diet, about the problems with obesity, and if there is a way to educate Canadians better on these facts, we should be doing so. The food service industry has been doing a lot of that through their voluntary measures and some of the measures introduced by our government to comply with nutritional labelling. However, the bill goes a little bit too far.

My riding of Etobicoke North is out by the airport. There are a lot of restaurants and also a lot of light to medium sized industry, food

processing companies, and yes, I have heard from them. If I thought the bill was for the benefit of all Canadians and it was workable, I would support it, but I do not think it is workable, economically feasible or technically feasible to accomplish what the member so rightly wants to accomplish.

I would like to talk about a few of those factors. First, just to recapture, the bill would require companies with over \$10 million in annual food service sales to list calories, salt and the sum of the saturated fatty acids and trans fats per serving for each menu item on their printed menu and to list calories per serving for each menu item on their menu board.

I see a number of problems with that. As I say, I think the objective is a good one, but I see a number of practical problems. Right now, if we go into a fast food restaurant, we will see menus displayed throughout the restaurant. To add another layer of information would cause some difficulties in terms of fitting it all on one menu board, or else the lettering would have to be reduced to a point that it would be illegible.

The other problem I see is that there are many trends now for customized meals. Let us face it, these fast food restaurants are here to stay and they are very popular, particularly with our pace of life, and people use them. That is the reality. When we get into these combos that fast food restaurants have, which are very popular, people will say, "I want a big Mac, but I do not want the fries; I want the salad, and by the way on that salad, I would like this dressing. Actually, you can supersize the fries, double up on the cheese, hold the bacon and give me the onions", et cetera. It sounds mundane, but this is what is happening. In fact, fast food restaurants are marketing in this way. They want to give consumers more choice.

What would we do then? I think we could do it technologically on a computer and on a website, and I think that many of the businesses are doing that now, so if we want to know exactly, we could go to various portions. It will do all the arithmetic. It will add it all up and it will tell us what we are eating in terms of calories, salt and these various elements. If we do that, what that information does for us is another thing, but for those people who want that information, there might be ways of getting it from some of the bigger chains.

However, for some of the smaller restaurants, I know that there is an exemption here of \$10 million in sales, but that actually creates another issue. I know what the member is trying to achieve, but it creates a level field that is not quite fair or even. We could have a Harvey's that is required under the bill to comply with all these nutritional elements and put this on its menu board for all the various combinations, and then we have Joe's hamburger shop next door, just a one off little independent, and it will not be required to do that. There is a cost to doing this. We have to have access to a nutritionist.

Private Members' Business

● (1800)

How could a regular manager of a Harvey's do this work? How could the owner of Joe's hamburger stall? He would not have the information to do that and would have to hire a nutritionist. That is why, quite rightly, the member would exempt small businesses, but then it would create a problem of an uneven playing field.

I read an interesting book not too long ago called *Freakonomics* and in it there is an interesting part where it talks about Starbucks, the coffee people. Actually, every day on the way to work I pick up a Starbucks. I am a Starbucks fan. That is the way it is.

The author says, and I think he can probably demonstrate it, but I did not do an audit on his numbers, that in a Starbucks coffee shop there are something like 3,000 different permutations and combinations of what people can ask for. I must say this is borne out by my experience when I go into Starbucks and listen to people as they place their orders. I am not that conversant with all the products. They will say they want a double latte, topped up by this, warmed up, doubled up by this and that. They will want Halloween or pumpkin sauce and they want this and that. Apparently, there are about 3,000 different permutations and combinations.

I am asking this question. How would Starbucks do that? I could see how it could do that on a computer or a website. If someone wanted to go in and say they wanted to do this combination, permutation number 1,876, boom, plug it in and it would give all the nutritional content of it. How could that conceivably be put on a menu board? I have no idea how that would work.

The other problem is that there are many restaurant chains that have operations right across Canada. There is an issue, I believe, with supplier variability. I think that some are discounting the argument. I am not going to argue that it is an insurmountable issue but it is an issue.

We have, for example, Tim Hortons chains. I know they backward integrate. They standardize in a very holistic and very professional way, but if they are buying their flour and all the ingredients, let us say in Nova Scotia, and they are making their muffins there, and they are buying their ingredients in British Columbia from a different source, notwithstanding that they are going to have very tight standards and requirements, there is going to be some difference, I think.

Perhaps I used a bad example because Tim Hortons chains would probably have the most standardized and most integrated supply chain management system around, but I can think of other examples where they might not have that consistency. What do they do then? Do they make an assumption that the flour that is bought in Halifax is the same as the flour that is bought in Trail? I do not know. I think it is an issue.

Do not forget that we would be asking the restaurants to comply with these laws and rules if the act is passed. It is not to be taken lightly. They would have to comply.

I have many food processors in my riding and they are also concerned about section 5.3 of the bill which basically requires manufacturers, people making biscuits or bread or what have you to comply.

It says that manufacturers are to prescribe in the ingredient list the percentage by weight of the three most prevalent ingredients and all those that are of vegetable, fruit, whole grain, legume or added sugar. Additionally, manufacturers would be required to list the percentage by weight for ingredients emphasized on a food label using words or pictures.

First of all, to comply with the requirements that our previous and this government is requiring has cost the industry, in terms of mandatory nutritional labelling, about \$300 million. This would cost a lot of money and the industry argues, and I think with some merit, that it would create not necessarily more knowledge or information, but it could add in fact more confusion.

I will tell my colleague that I never like speaking against a private member's bill. I brought in a private member's bill a couple of years ago on user fees, Bill C-212. It took me two years, a lot of blood, sweat and tears, so I congratulate the member for taking this initiative, but I will not be supporting it.

● (1805)

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I well recognize the intent and the spirit with which Bill C-283 has been brought forward. The member for Scarborough Southwest and I have shared some of the finer nourishment that is available in many parts of the globe. I recognize the desire to enjoy, as all the public should, food that is safe, that is consistent and that we recognize will provide a long term benefit to society.

Having said that, I would like to comment on the bill because I have reservations. I would like to comment from two perspectives, both as a legislator with the inherent responsibilities that come with passing legislation that is reasonable and responsible, and as a 30-year veteran of the hospitality industry. I am a person who has been involved as a builder, owner, operator, consultant and teacher and I have been exposed to the many different facets of the hospitality business for literally a lifetime.

From a legislative point of view, it should be noted that Health Canada carefully considered the issue of the provision of nutrition information for foods sold in restaurants and food service establishments during the development of the nutrition labelling regulations for prepackaged foods. Health Canada, at that particular time, chose to exempt these foods from these requirements due to the inherent variability associated with the food service industry.

As we all know, the food industry is a very complex and diverse business. It is not a one size fits all. The unique challenges associated with the food service industry, where recipes and ingredients are often not standardized and customization is common, makes it difficult to provide accurate nutrition information to consumers.

From experience, many menus are changed on a daily, weekly, monthly and a quarterly basis within restaurants and food service operations, even within cafeterias. It is almost improbable to suggest that every time there is a menu change, which could be done on a daily basis, that we should come up with and be expected to provide data to the public on a consistent basis.

Private Members' Business

I note that before the introduction of mandatory nutrition labelling on prepackaged foods in Canada, provisions for the voluntary labelling of these food products had existed since 1988. We have seen a recognition that the public does not want to know more of what they are eating. There has been a move to seek more information and I think the industry has responded. In a voluntary fashion, there has been a great move from those who have the capacity and the capability to do so.

We have had considerable research and information on consumer use and interest in this information and on industry implementation.

The nutrition labelling regulations were developed after an extensive five year consultation period. This was not just a let us think about how we are going to make food safe. There was an extensive period of consultation within industry and with regulatory boards. This lengthy consultation period was necessary to obtain the buy-in necessary to ensure the new regulations not only met consumer needs, but that they were capable of being implemented and utilized in an effective fashion by industry. In other words, that they were workable on a day to day basis. The result was a nutrition labelling system within the industry, which, to many jurisdictions around the world, has been referred to as the international gold standard.

What we have within our health and our labelling and our criteria in the CFIA is actually recognized very well. It certainly sits up at the top of the bar with regulatory regimes around the globe.

However, it is extremely difficult to justify mandating the provisions of nutrient information to consumers if the benefits are unclear or unknown. The cost of providing such information to consumers should be measured against the benefits that would accrue to the customers or the consumers as well.

This is a balancing act and if the pendulum is too far out of balance either way it will be made very difficult to implement.

It should be noted, however, that nearly 10,000 locations, representing approximately 40% of the major restaurant chains in Canada, voluntarily provide nutrition information to their customers under the Canadian Restaurant and Food Service Association's voluntary nutrition information program. It is astounding that this is being done on a voluntary basis but it happens to be the type of operation where there is a consistency in menu and it has the resources, the talent and the traffic volume to substantiate the cost.

• (1810)

Under this program, participating establishments provide nutrition information to consumers that is consistent with the requirements of Canada's mandatory regulations.

While larger firms have some access to this expertise required to comply with the regulations that are making progress in implementing the Canadian restaurant and food services voluntary guidelines, this is obviously not the case with the entire industry.

The cost of implementing and enforcing this bill must also be considered. The cost of laboratory analysis for nutrition information ranges widely depending on the complexity, the number of items on the menu and the prices charged by individual laboratories. This has the possibility of being a technical and costly nightmare.

The Centre for Science in the Public Interest has estimated that it would cost between \$11,500 at the low end and \$46,000 at the high end to analyze the entire menu of larger scale restaurants with between 50 and 200 items on the menu. We can just imagine the cost.

If we were to extrapolate that across the entire population, we would realize that this assumes that the menus never change. As I said earlier, sometimes the menus change monthly, quarterly, weekly or daily. It is just not practical at this particular point.

I also note that in addition to these initial costs, there would be ongoing associated costs with the analysis of new items as they are added to the menu every day and the analysis of reformulated items because menus change and products change. A rice product today might be a different rice product tomorrow. It might be from a different manufacturer. We might have seasonal implications whereby we are getting oranges from one particular area one day and the next week we might be getting oranges from a different area and they may have a different nutritional component.

This bill just does not make a whole lot of sense.

We then, of course, have marketing which is crucial to any business these days. All of these businesses, regardless of their size, need to market. The cost of marketing and the cost of tools, equipment and the reprinting of materials for menus is astronomical. Is it enough to ask small business operators to bear the cost of that once a year but, as their menus change weekly or daily, on an ongoing basis? The cost is just not feasible.

We also have the significant cost of enforcing the law. Having a law is one thing but enforcing it is another. What kind of bureaucracy would we need for that? It is estimated that Canada has 50,000 restaurants, 24,000 grocery outlets, 5,300 unregistered manufacturing plants, 1,710 registered fish, seafood and meat establishments, and 3,400 unregistered importers who would be subject to the inspection to verify the provisions of this bill.

We could discuss a number of other items in the bill, but one of them is not just a fad but a reality. One of the problems facing society right now is obesity. It is important to stress that there are many factors that may contribute to obesity. As the hon. member from Scarborough brought forward, people want to know what they are eating. They want to ensure they are getting value for dollar and that they are getting the nutritional component.

I am not sure if the member opposite was pointing to my waistline when I mentioned obesity.

While it might be laudable to deal with all this, the reality is that it is our duty to ensure that when we mandate by law, the law has to be practical, cost efficient and it must provide the results that we are seeking.

In closing, the member's intentions are honourable and the spirit of the bill is honourable but the practicality of implementing this just is not there.

Private Members' Business

● (1815)

Until a way is found to build a better mousetrap to protect the Canadian public and provide the food safety Canadians want and need, let us strike a balance between practicality and desirability. Let us work toward an accommodation that will satisfy all of us in the House.

● (1820)

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it gives me pleasure to speak in the House especially on a subject like this one, which I have had the chance to speak on in the past, but most important because of the timing. The time of day that we are debating this bill is interesting because, like other members in this place, I am getting a little hungry with all this talk about food; there is no doubt about it.

We have to put this debate into perspective. We have debated this issue a few times in the House. We have heard the different concerns that come with this type of proposal. It is clear that Canadians want to have as much information as they possibly can.

I will provide an example. In that hunger I spoke about, after this debate is over I am looking forward to going to a restaurant, probably not too far from here, and enjoying a meal. I am usually satisfied with what restaurants have to offer when it comes to information on their menus. When I make a decision, hopefully it will be a wise one, although some may argue that point at times in the food that I choose to eat. I do not want to see incredible detail.

Often that information will be lost on the majority of consumers who go to restaurants. If Canadians want to know exactly what is in their meal, they will find that restaurants are more than willing to provide detailed information on request. There is no need to have the type of detail that the bill is asking for. I think the majority of Canadians are satisfied with the information that restaurants provide.

Most restaurants try to provide as much information as possible to keep their customers happy, to keep them coming back and hopefully to help them make healthy choices. It seems to be a little redundant for governments to step in and force a very costly measure on restaurants, as many of my colleagues have mentioned, and considering what the ramifications of this bill would be in terms of the detail that would be required on menus.

A colleague from the NDP raised the issue of trans fats. I recall that debate which took place in the House. Granted, it raised awareness and gave us a chance to hear the positives and negatives of that product, but in the end there was no action taken by government. Other than a motion being passed in this place, no legislation was enacted forcing the banning of trans fats. The motion initially talked about the banning of trans fats but then went on to suggest we should be studying the effects of trans fats, which is why I think this is a healthy debate to have.

As my colleague mentioned, we are seeing a huge shift in the restaurant business and food service industry. People are moving away from products like trans fats because consumers are demanding healthier choices. That speaks to the point of whether the government should be involved in regulating in such detail as the bill is calling for when it could be done on a voluntary basis and it

could happen quite quickly due to the almighty dollar and the market actually dictating choices.

In fact, if consumers demand certain things in their choice of products, the people who provide the products and services are going to react by making that change. If they do not, obviously their business will suffer and consumers will look to other alternatives in the market, and clearly that is not how to do business in the restaurant world. I can say that for sure, having had experience in the restaurant business. Restaurant owners want to provide consumers with the best possible product and the most up to date information because they want those people to come back to their establishments.

I will leave the trans fat issue. It demonstrates the importance of raising awareness but, as I mentioned, government should take a step back to see what would be the negative effects of going too far and what effects legislating certain bans, for instance, could have on certain industries, particularly the food service industry.

● (1825)

I want to take a step back to when I was involved in the restaurant business. My family is still involved in the restaurant business. I ran a franchise for quite a number of years, about four years prior to getting involved in politics and then for another four years afterwards. I found it was very difficult to maintain, as members can imagine, because it was an establishment that was quite hands on.

My colleague from Prince Edward—Hastings has been in a similar business, as have many of my other colleagues. The intense labour and effort that restaurateurs have to put in on a daily basis made it very difficult for me to maintain control and work in that sort of environment while also maintaining my responsibilities here and in my constituency. Unfortunately, I had to get out of that particular business.

I think back to the amount of work that it takes to run this type of business. I think back to what sort of service I tried to provide my customers and even now the type of service that my parents are providing. Theirs is quite an intense restaurant business. A lot of work is involved in providing information on a daily basis to those who demand it. A lot of work goes into ensuring, as my colleague mentioned, that a menu changes regularly and choices change regularly to keep up with the demands of consumers.

A lot of this information is at the fingertips of the restaurant owner, especially, as I said, if consumers want to demand it. By no means would regulating this particular side of things and enforcing these sorts of labelling requirements on menus make restaurant operators' lives any easier.

Let me give the House an example. Let us think about all the work that has to go into running a restaurant. I can tell members that it was a lot of work. We want to encourage people who run restaurants, whether they are franchises or larger operations, to provide the best possible service by doing what they do best, which is providing restaurant and food services. We do not want them becoming bureaucrats trying to write up extra regulations that governments feel will help them provide their service.

Private Members' Business

In fact, all it will do is require them to take their focus away from their businesses and providing the best quality of service to doing lab testing and providing detailed makeup of compounds. Many of them are not in the business to become physicists or to develop skills in taking apart certain products on their menu. This will be taking away from what they do best, and that is providing quality food to those consumers who like to purchase their products.

I honestly think that trying to implement something like this is not workable. Trying to get restaurateurs to provide the type of detail the bill is calling for is really not workable. The amount of work we would be putting on this particular industry and families currently in the restaurant business would unfortunately take away from their main focus. That is not what our government would like to do. I do not think most Canadians would like to see this happen.

Again, I want to put the emphasis on these restaurants and food service businesses voluntarily providing the best possible information to those customers who would like to have that information. By no means would this have to be regulated.

As I talk about the implementation of this bill, I have to ask myself how governments would be able to enforce this type of labelling. Would we put in some heavy fines when it comes to people who are not complying? How would we ensure that the makeup of certain things is in fact being properly reported? Are we going to introduce a whole new level of bureaucracy to police this?

It seems to me that it is really an unreasonable request, even on governments if they were going to implement this sort of direction, to ask for this to be enforced in any way that is going to be effective and also cost effective for taxpayers in the long run. It seems to me that it would create a whole new set of problems, which unfortunately, as I mentioned, would not only cause extra burden and unnecessary work for restaurant owners, but which really would be almost impossible for governments to implement and enforce.

My final point is one my colleague mentioned. When it comes to actual compounds, especially when we think about menus changing on a regular basis, and food products and different choices changing on a regular and sometimes an hourly basis, how can we expect restaurateurs in particular to be able to change their menus to reflect that?

• (1830)

I have faith in my family. I have faith in other restaurateurs. As I mentioned, I plan to enjoy a nice meal this evening. I am sure if I want any detail about anything I plan to eat off my plate I can get that just by requesting it from the restaurateur. If I do have a problem with certain choices, I can make sure to indicate to them that I would like to see a change. I am sure I will get a faster response from those people involved in the industry than if governments go down what I think is really the wrong road.

I encourage all members not to support the bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Resuming debate.

There being none, the last speaker will be the mover of the motion, with five minutes for a rebuttal. I recognize the hon. member for Scarborough Southwest.

Mr. Tom Wappel (Scarborough Southwest, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately the nature of private members' business is such that I am allowed only five minutes to attempt to make some points in relation to the points that have been made in the two hours of debate.

Allow me to begin by saying that this is really the second hour of debate on second reading, with a request that if the bill passes at second reading it would go to committee. This is not a debate on passing the bill in the House of Commons and then suddenly having this legislation pass tomorrow, thus causing all kinds of undue hardship for the restaurateurs of this nation.

Many interesting and good points have been made in the debate, all of which can be studied by the health committee of the Parliament of Canada. The evidence can be tested. The anecdotal statements that have been made by members can be tested. We can hear from experts at Health Canada.

I have been involved in this issue of nutritional labelling since 1989. What is fascinating is that all of the arguments I have heard against this bill also were made against nutritional labelling for prepackaged foods.

The pre-eminent one among them is that the voluntary nature of providing the information works. It does not work. It demonstrably does not work. The evidence of that is not simply this member saying it. The evidence is that after 20 years of voluntary information on prepackaged foods, the government felt it was necessary to regulate and put into legislation the kind of information that is put on prepackaged foods. That in itself is evidence that voluntary information does not work.

Why? Because if there is voluntary information, it is going to give the information that the manufacturer thinks is in its best interests, not the information that should be given in the best interests of providing consumers with a proper choice.

This is a topical matter. I note, for example, that there was an editorial in the *Globe and Mail* on November 1. I am going to read only one line from it, as follows: "Better to educate the public and, a crucial point, to give them the information they need to make a decision". That is all the bill is trying to do.

The hon. member for Laval has observed that fast food chains are already starting to provide nutritional information. That is accurate. Why is that? Because consumers want it. Even the members opposite who spoke against the bill and my own colleague who spoke against it have acknowledged that consumers are asking for this information.

I want to deal with a couple of things, namely, that this cannot be done. I am holding a menu from White Spot Restaurants, a well known chain. I want to read a couple of things in it: "Lifestyle choices, low carb steak and caesar dinner, 2.4 grams of carbs, 58 grams of protein". There is plenty of room for further information. Another entry provides for the number of calories of a chicken dinner and then there is still—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Adjournment Proceedings

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Order, please. The Chair needs to hear what is said in the House. I would like to listen to the hon. member for Scarborough Southwest and no other, thank you.

I will add 30 seconds to the hon. member's time.

Mr. Tom Wappel: Mr. Speaker, the menus that I was referring to also provide for caloric information for certain foods, so this is already being done. There is still plenty of room on the menu for additional information. One would think from the way hon. members are talking that I am asking for a very long list.

We are asking for calories, salt and fat content. That is not a lot of information, particularly after what we heard from the hon. member for Winnipeg Centre, who quoted Senator Keon as saying that caloric intake, and I am paraphrasing, is the single biggest threat to our overall health in Canada. The health committee is doing a study on obese children as we speak.

The costs are a bogus argument because the information is already available on websites. It is already available if the consumer asks for it. It is in fact available on the back of the menu, the tray liner. One would think that we are asking for all this information on a menu board. In fact, for businesses that have a menu board, we are simply asking for the number of calories and nothing else. How can that possibly crowd a menu board?

I am urging members to send this bill to committee so that the committee can examine the comments that have been made and can hear from the health department officials who will testify that they had to bring in mandatory nutritional labelling because voluntary nutritional labelling did not work.

I am not asking for the House to pass the bill. I am asking for the House to let it go to committee for further study.

• (1835)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): 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 Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the division stands deferred until Wednesday, November 8, 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.

[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it has now been five months since I first asked this question for the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Why Canada has yet to ratify the optional protocol on torture? Let us talk about torture and Canada's role in ending the horrendous practice across the globe.

Canada has always been a leader at the United Nations and around the world. Canada was a leader in bringing peacekeeping to the United Nations, a leader at Kyoto and a leader on many other fronts. However, now, we have simply abandoned our role in the world. We walk away from international treaties like Kyoto. We leave people of Darfur to their suffering. We ignore the plight of Africa as it is ravaged by AIDS. Truly this is an embarrassment of national proportions.

Canada can and should be working on a global scale to fight injustice and torture. Capital punishment, which in my view is a form of torture, continues unabated across the world. Gay youth are stoned to death in Iran. Prisoners are electrocuted only to be found innocent afterwards. The death penalty is simply unconscionable and represents one of the most backward forms of punishments. It eliminates any chance of redemption and cannot be reversed when applied in wrongful convictions. In many countries, it is used to blackmail prisoners into coerced confessions or to implicate other innocents. The psychological effects of such treatment are analogous to torture, and the death penalty must be eliminated from this earth.

We have partners we can work with on these issues, such as Senator Robert of Badinter of France, whose tireless work against the death penalty in that country is an inspiration. As a country that should be leading the world on human rights, it is not enough to eliminate such practices at home, but we must also work tirelessly around the world to see an end to these practices. We can and must do better.

Many of our European allies, from France to Portugal to Great Britain, have signed the optional protocol on torture and enough countries have ratified it to make it international law. Shocking is that Canada still has not.

Adjournment Proceedings

On June 1 the government said that it was following the issue closely. I, therefore, ask the minister this. Why has he allowed Canada to be sidelined on this important issue when we should have been leading? Recent events have shown just how torture affects us here at home. Canadians expect action on this issue, so much so that they assume we are doing the right thing, without being aware that in the past year Canada has stalled on this issue.

I just do not get it. It makes no sense. Why are we not ratifying this treaty?

There is no doubt in my mind that the hon. minister, along with all members of the House, abhor torture. That is not the question. The question is, what are we going to do to stop it? After another five full months of inaction, are we going to sign and ratify the optional protocol on torture or not?

The time to act was five months ago, but failing that, now will have to suffice.

• (1840)

Mr. Peter Van Loan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government is firmly committed to international efforts to prevent and eliminate torture in all its forms. Our core values in relating to the world are clear. We stand for freedom, for democracy, for human rights and for the rule of law.

An examination of our track record on the international stage reveals strong, consistent support for international measures designed to investigate allegations of torture, support victims, bring perpetrators to justice and strengthen the protections afforded to persons deprived of their liberty.

Canada was one of the first states to ratify the convention against torture and has accepted the competence of the committee against torture established under the convention to consider individual complaints. Canada supports the resolutions on torture adopted by the United Nations, as well as the work of the UN Special Rapporteur on torture, and Canada contributes to the United Nations fund for the victims of torture.

Closer to home, Canada has many mechanisms to protect persons in places of detention from torture at the federal, provincial and municipal levels. These include correctional investigators, police oversight agencies, human rights commissions, the courts, ombudsmen and others.

Canada supports the principles of the optional protocol on the prevention of torture and Canada voted in favour of its adoption, first, by the Commission on Human Rights on April 22, 2002, and then by the United Nations General Assembly on December 18, 2002. Since then, 28 states have ratified the optional protocol and it entered into force on June 22.

Since coming into power, the government has taken up the issue and is considering becoming a party to the optional protocol, which requires state parties, as a main obligation, to establish or designate one or more domestic bodies which would conduct regular visits to places of detention in order to prevent torture.

As the hon. member is no doubt aware, Canada's reputation on the world stage is grounded, in large measure, on the fact that when we undertake an obligation, whether it be our mission in Afghanistan, our work in Haiti, or treaty obligations, we take those obligations very seriously. We say what we will do and we say when we will do something, but after we say it, we go out and we do what we say. That means doing the homework necessary to ensure that we live up to our word. Our track record of strong, consistent support for efforts, both internationally and domestically, to prevent and eliminate torture speaks for itself.

On this issue, that is precisely the task that the new government is undertaking, ensuring that we live up to our word and preserve our international reputation.

Mr. Mario Silva: Mr. Speaker, sadly the hon. member's answer is not enough. What is needed is action.

The optional protocol on torture adds legal force to the covenant on civil and political rights. It is designed to facilitate and encourage freedom around the globe, by allowing the human rights commission to investigate and judge complaints of human rights violations from individuals from signator countries. One would hope that Canada has nothing to fear from such oversight.

Furthermore, our conspicuous absence from the protocol gives the impression that Canada will condone torture. As vice-chair of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights my question is this. When will the minister bring the ratification to a vote? Why has it not happened sooner? What are the next steps he will take to ensure that Canada is a leader in fighting torture abroad?

Mr. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, I think the member for Davenport, before he poses those questions, has to look deep within his own party. The member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore, who will likely be his next leader, has spoken and written at length about the issue of torture. It is a position that seems profoundly different from that of the member for Davenport. He said:

To defeat evil, we may have to traffic in evils: indefinite detention of suspects, coercive interrogations, targeted assassinations...

He also wrote:

I do not see any trumping argument on behalf of the rights and dignity of security detainees that makes their claims prevail over the security interests.

In May 2004 he wrote in the *New York Times*, when he was still living in the United States, the following:

—defeating terror requires violence. It may also require coercion, secrecy, deception, even violation of rights.

I appreciate the heartfelt sentiments of the member for Davenport. Perhaps he should speak to his next leader, where I think his real problems lie, someone who seems to sympathize with torture.

• (1845)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): 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 6:46 p.m.)

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