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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, May 13, 2015

—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, May 13, 2015

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

• (1400)

[*English*]

The Speaker: It being Wednesday, we will now have the singing of the national anthem led by the hon. member for Sackville—Eastern Shore.

[Members sang the national anthem]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

WILFRED LAURIER UNIVERSITY

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Wilfred Laurier University's decision to launch a satellite campus in downtown Brantford was a game changer for my community. At the time, our downtown core was in shambles. Laurier restored it and integrated its historic buildings into a modern, downtown university campus. An influx of students followed and new private investments followed them.

Today, downtown Brantford is the place to be. Now we are set to break ground on another game changer, the new YMCA Laurier recreation complex.

Overlooking Harmony Square and designed to reflect the commercial fronts that once lined Colborne Street, the new building will be an architectural landmark. Built into a three-story drop overlooking the Grand River and raised to provide spectacular views, one will not find anything like it elsewhere.

I am proud that our government supported the project and all the opportunities it will unlock for students, families and the continued revitalization of my community of downtown Brantford.

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[*Translation*]

TEMPORARY VILLAGE

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last summer, Montrealers enjoyed taking over the shores of

the St. Lawrence thanks to a temporary project called Village éphémère.

This year, the Association du design urbain du Québec, an organization called Pépinière & Co and the citizens' group AmiEs du Courant-Sainte-Marie are working very hard to bring their joint project of a village at Pied-du-Courant to life again. With the iconic Jacques Cartier Bridge and the St. Lawrence on the horizon, the village at Pied-du-Courant will be a gathering place where people can learn about the creativity of our local designers.

The organizers are inviting all Montrealers to contribute to the project in their own way. I will be there for sure.

Congratulations to all of the people who are rolling up their sleeves and getting involved to create a space that highlights our natural places and our heritage.

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• (1405)

[*English*]

SPORT IN AURORA

Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during this year of sport in Canada and with the Pan Am and Parapan Am Games around the corner, Canadians are applauding their athletes for dedicating themselves to being athletically fit and at the top of their game.

Unfortunately for many, staying fit is not part of their daily routine. The town of Aurora has decided to draw a line in the sand and proclaim that it wishes to become Canada's most active community. It plans to get everyone involved, with the ultimate goal of building durable citizens who are active and remain active their entire lives.

Aurora is involving sports leaders, students, seniors, corporations, government officials and organizations to help the entire town become physically fit, more active and above all, make this athletic movement sustainable.

Over the next five years Aurora will assemble the building blocks to become the most active community in Canada. It encourages everyone to follow its journey online at beactiveaurora.ca.

*Statements by Members***CBC INNOVATION AWARD**

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise and recognize Andrew Furey, who recently received CBC's innovation award at *Atlantic Business Magazine's* top 50 CEO awards.

Andrew was recognized for the major contributions he has made as a member of Team Broken Earth. Team Broken Earth is a volunteer task force that includes physicians, nurses and physiotherapists from across Canada committed to delivering and improving health care for people in Haiti.

I congratulate Andrew and thank all members of Team Broken Earth for the work they do. They make us proud to be Canadians.

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CITIZENS OF THE YEAR

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize two of Red Deer's finest citizens. This past week Sheila Bannerman was named Red Deer's citizen of the year and Stephanie AuBuchon was named Red Deer's young citizen of the year.

These two constituents exemplify everything it means to be model citizens.

Sheila Bannerman has served central Alberta through a number of organizations, including the Red Deer Public Library Board, the Red Deer & District Museum Society Board and the Central Alberta Historical Society, and most recently as one of the main drivers of Red Deer's centennial.

Stephanie AuBuchon has volunteered with the St. John Ambulance Youth Brigade since she was 12. Stephanie has shown leadership by leading a number of initiatives including co-chairing the first Hunting Hills High School Bike-a-Thon. Stephanie also volunteers with the Red Deer Regional Hospital Centre and plans on continuing to give back to the community by becoming a nurse.

Sheila and Stephanie are truly model citizens and I speak for all of Red Deer when I say that their contributions to our city embodies the spirit of our community.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, once again I rise to draw attention to the failings of the Conservatives when it comes to the west coast water protection.

When I first began working on water issues in the late 1980s, as the executive director of the Pacific Peoples' Partnership, one of our concerns was the rapidly growing great Pacific garbage patch, which at that time was as big as Vancouver Island and is now a monster of plastic garbage as large as British Columbia.

I was disappointed when the Conservatives reneged on their vote to ban the plastic microbeads that are so rapidly accumulating in our local waters. Residents in my riding, like those involved with the Peninsula Streams Society, are far ahead of governments when it comes to working to protect and restore water quality and fish habitat.

That is why I introduced legislation to support local volunteers by restoring federal environmental protection for the Goldstream, Colquitz, and Sooke Rivers.

I am also disappointed that the Conservatives decided not to support NDP Bill C-638 to make the Coast Guard responsible for derelict vessels and for tracking down the owners to make them pay removal and cleanup costs.

We must act now to protect our water, fresh and salt, if not for the fish, if not for the whales, then, ultimately, for ourselves and our fate on this planet.

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NEPAL

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pride that I rise to share a few words on what Canadian development work abroad means today. Doing development the Canadian way means helping where we can and because we can. It means responding to those who call out for help and protecting those made most vulnerable by disaster or conflict.

Today marks almost four weeks since the deadly 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck near Kathmandu, Nepal. In the first 24 hours of this disaster, Canada decisively responded with a \$10-million contribution to provide life-saving assistance through experienced humanitarian organizations. We deployed disaster response teams, and supported the great work of the Canadian Red Cross and its delivery of emergency medical assistance, including critical maternal, newborn and child health services to as many as 200 people per day.

To anyone who lives in this country, with the luxuries of security and stability, 200 is not a great number, but to the families whose lives have been completely uprooted by this disaster, this number means something great. It means hope and it means that Canada's help abroad can and will continue to make all of the difference in the lives of those who need it most.

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● (1410)

POLAND CONSTITUTION DAY

Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I celebrate Poland's Constitution Day with Polish-Canadians, like my parents.

May 3 marked the 224th anniversary of Poland's constitution, which is the oldest in Europe and second in the world only to the United States. Liberty and democracy were foundations of this document and it was regarded to contain dangerous concepts to Poland's central and eastern European neighbours at the time of its introduction.

Other key principles included: the right to rule by majority; secret ballots; and religious freedom and autonomy for all people. It established a constitutional monarchy and introduced ministerial responsibility in its parliament.

Statements by Members

Polish-Canadians have brought to Canada their long-standing historic love of liberty and democracy for which they struggled so long. Poland today is free, economically prosperous, and a close friend and ally of Canada.

Polish and Canadian troops are presently serving side by side on Operation Reassurance in Poland. On Thursday evening, Poland's Ambassador Marcin Bosacki will host a celebration at the war museum.

I hope that all members will attend.

* * *

[Translation]

BELCOURT 100TH ANNIVERSARY

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to rise today to recognize an important anniversary in my riding. The village of Belcourt is celebrating its centennial this year.

Originally called Café, which was borrowed from the railway station, the village changed its name to Goulet, after the first permanent settler who arrived in 1915. The village was officially renamed Belcourt in 1958, in honour of Senator Napoléon-Antoine Belcourt, who became well known for taking a strong stance in favour of Franco-Ontarians.

To celebrate this milestone, a wide range of activities are planned. For instance, a huge dinner will be held at the Belcourt community centre on the weekend of July 3, 4 and 5.

I invite anyone and everyone who is in the Belcourt area to stop and visit this beautiful village, which is in a beautiful region, in a beautiful riding, represented by your humble servant.

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[English]

TAXATION

Mrs. Pat Perkins (Whitby—Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it should come as no surprise that our Conservative government is the only one that stands up for middle-class Canadian families.

Through our low-tax plan for families, our government is helping 100% of families with children receive the benefits they need. All families with children will benefit from our family tax cut and enhanced universal child care benefit. That is over four million families.

The Liberal leader has admitted that he will take away the universal child care benefit. He will take away income splitting and he will take away the tax-free savings account.

Canadians can trust this government to deliver on their priorities: keeping taxes low and helping them keep more money in their pockets.

[Translation]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Sunday was Mother's Day.

Today, I want to acknowledge the remarkable work of those mothers who are making Canada the country it is today. My thoughts are also with all the mothers in developing countries who do not celebrate Mother's Day, women who are facing hardship and fighting oppression and inequality every day, women who are rising up to ensure that their children can live in equality in a democratic world.

I am proud to belong to a party that supports women and recognizes that in providing aid to those countries, Canada must also fund women's advocacy groups, and that includes committing funding for family planning and reproductive and sexual health.

The status of women is important to the NDP. It is something we feel strongly about and will promote outside our borders.

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•(1415)

[English]

TAXATION

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, constituents in my riding of Essex know that it is fair to provide support that benefits all Canadian families with children. That is why our Conservative government has balanced our federal budget, and we are now helping Canadian families balance theirs. Thanks to the family tax cut and universal child care benefit, 100% of families with children will be better off.

However, the Leader of the Liberal Party wants to take away the universal child care benefit, he wants to take away income splitting and he wants to take away the tax-free savings account. He even said "benefiting every single family is not what is fair".

He will raise taxes on the middle class. Our government will not let that happen.

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives' new income splitting is not just unfair; it is so complex even tax experts writing the legislation got it wrong no less than three times.

To apply for income splitting, Canadians must follow an 85-step process. I saw what looked like an error in how it was calculated, so I asked about it at the budget bill briefing Monday night. In response, a Finance official confirmed that some families were being shortchanged on their 2014 tax return by as much as \$750.

The error affects families who qualify for both income splitting and education-related tax credits. The error was in ways and means motions that passed on November 4 and March 25, and in Bill C-57.

Oral Questions

The budget bill is the Conservatives' fourth attempt at getting the legislation right. The Liberals' plan for fairness is much simpler. We will replace income splitting and a complex array of programs with one bigger, fairer, tax-free monthly cheque on which Canadian families can rely.

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TAXATION

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Liberal Party's high-tax and high-debt plan is a disaster for the middle class.

The Liberal leader admitted that he would have to raise taxes on Canadians by replacing our family tax cut with a family tax hike. He will take away the universal child care benefit, take away the tax-free savings account and, yes, take away income splitting. The Liberal leader is a take-away leader.

Yesterday, regarding taxes, he said, "benefiting every single family is not what is fair". On this side of the House, unlike the Liberal leader, we believe it is fair to provide support to 100% of Canadian families with children, and so we are.

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TAXATION

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives continue to abuse taxpayer funds with a massive partisan advertising campaign, yet it is the Liberals who tell us they will stand up for the taxpayer.

Wait, is that not the same party that blew \$1 billion on self-promotion when it was in government? Have the Liberals turned over a new leaf? Hardly. If we look at the report of the Ontario auditor general, it says that the Liberals will gut the law to create a flood of dumbed-down, partisan advertising for the Liberals, all at the cost of the taxpayer.

Such is Liberal policy. The Liberals are for partisan advertising when it is Liberal advertising. That is the party that promised open, democratic nominations, but let us not go there. That is the party that supports the charter, except when it guts it with Bill C-51. The party is now attacking journalists who have the temerity to point out that the Liberal leader cannot do arithmetic.

Canadians see through this. This fall they will be like the people of Alberta. They will vote for the change they want, and this time actually get it.

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TAXATION

Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Liberal Party is just in over his head. He admitted that he would raise taxes on people earning less than \$60,000 a year by cancelling their expanded tax-free savings accounts and by taking away our family tax cut, and instead introducing his family tax hike. Furthermore, he said yesterday "benefiting every single family is not what is fair". He is absolutely wrong. Our government will benefit every single family with children, and that is what is fair.

The leader of the Liberal Party, who thinks budgets balance themselves, is clearly out of touch with the priorities of middle-class Canadians. Fortunately, our Conservative government has and will continue to deliver a balanced budget and tax relief for all Canadians.

ORAL QUESTIONS*[English]***ETHICS**

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when Ray Novak was first appointed chief of staff by the Prime Minister to replace Nigel Wright, the Conservatives swore up and down that he had nothing to do with the Senate scandal. However, now we learn from RCMP documents that Ray Novak did, in fact, know about Nigel Wright's plan to falsify the Duffy audit report.

When exactly did Ray Novak tell the Prime Minister that he knew the Duffy report was doctored?

● (1420)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, obviously, I do not agree at all with the very selective and creative reading of the material before the courts by the leader of the NDP. It is Mr. Duffy's actions that are on trial before the courts. The government has provided all information to the RCMP and to the prosecution.

We will continue to work with the Crown and let the court make its own decisions on these matters.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, how much information did it give to the court in the case of Carolyn Stewart Olsen?

[Translation]

This all started when the Prime Minister appointed Mike Duffy to the Senate to represent Prince Edward Island, even though everyone, including the Prime Minister, knew that Duffy actually lived in Ontario. The Prime Minister claimed that Duffy had signed a declaration stating that he was a resident of Prince Edward Island before he was sworn in.

If that is true and if these declarations exist, why is the Prime Minister refusing to show them to Canadians? He certainly would not want people to think that he was not telling the truth.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, the constitutional rules for senators are clear. The government followed the practices that have existed for nearly 150 years. It is Mr. Duffy's actions that are on trial, and I will not comment on matters that are before the courts.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us be clear: 150 years, Kanata, Cavendish, same thing.

Oral Questions

The Chief of the Defence Staff gave the order to ignore key recommendations in the Deschamps report, before the report was even tabled. I quote:

The current sexual misconduct investigation and justice system authorities will remain unchanged....The definition of harassment...will remain in effect.

The military is refusing to make any changes. Was the Prime Minister informed by his Minister of National Defence that this directive to ignore the report on sexual harassment in our armed forces had been issued?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP leader is quoting from a letter that was written two months before the report was released.

After the report was released, the Chief of the Defence Staff accepted all of the recommendations. He has been very clear about that.

[English]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, these are our sons and daughters. These are the people who protect us.

These soldiers and their families deserve to know that there will be civilian responsibility and oversight. They deserve to know that we will fight to protect them the same way they fight to protect us.

Will the Prime Minister stand, do his duty and tell military leaders that every step must and shall be taken to put an end to sexual harassment and sexual violence in the military?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Chief of the Defence Staff accepted the recommendations from the Deschamps report, and is acting on it. In fact, the person he appointed on this, General Whitecross, said, "What we are going to do is move out on all 10 recommendations, including number three which is this independent, centralized organization."

Frankly, to quote a letter two months before that and apply something else is unfair to the Chief of the Defence Staff and to the men and women in uniform.

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TAXATION

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): On Monday, Mr. Speaker, the House voted unanimously for the NDP motion to end the discriminatory tax on feminine hygiene products. The New Democrats will be moving to amend the budget implementation act to include the change immediately. Getting rid of this fundamentally unfair tax represents exactly one hundredth of 1% of the federal budget.

Will the Prime Minister do the right thing, support the NDP amendment and end this discriminatory tax against women right now?

• (1425)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think the NDP leader was very revealing in that comment in that he only supports this tax cut because he sees it as very very small. The fact of the matter, of course, is that the NDP's real agenda may be to give tiny tax cuts like that while raising the GST by some

\$10 billion on Canadian consumers. That is obviously not acceptable to this government. That is why we cut the GST from 7% to 6% to 5%, and we are going to ensure it does not go—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Papineau.

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for a middle-class family earning \$90,000, with two kids, the Liberal plan automatically provides a tax-free child benefit of \$490 every single month. That is \$2,500 more than the Prime Minister's plan provides every single year.

Why is the government providing more benefits to those who need it the least instead of investing in our middle class and those working hard to join it?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Liberal Party says that benefiting every single Canadian is not what is fair. That is why, of course, he wants to take away from every single family their universal child care benefit; why he wants to take away income splitting, which has benefited both families and seniors; and why he wants to take away tax-free savings accounts.

Even after he does all those things, his numbers still do not add up. Canadians are going to be smart enough not to be fooled by that and stick with the benefits they actually know are in their pockets.

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the Prime Minister thinks that wealthy families like his and mine should be getting new benefits, then I look forward to the debates.

Our plan increases benefits to \$6,400 every year, tax free. It has been called a new guaranteed income for children in low-income families. That is over \$1,000 more, tax free, per child to the Canadians who need help the most.

Why have the Conservatives instead given more to those who need help the least?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what the Liberal plan means is tax hikes and massive deficits, plans that do not add up and will result in even more benefits being cut, just like they were when the Liberals were in office. That is why, on this side of the House, we are proud of our record of cutting taxes, balancing the budget, and making sure we deliver for Canadians.

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, fairness means giving more to those who need it and less to those who do not.

[Translation]

With our plan to give money back to the middle class, a single-parent family with one child would receive \$533 tax free every month. A family earning \$90,000 a year with two children would receive \$490 tax free.

Our plan is much more generous than the Prime Minister's plan.

Why does the government continue to help the wealthy instead of helping middle-class families and people who are working hard to join the middle class?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Liberal Party wants to eliminate the universal child care benefit. He wants to eliminate income splitting, which benefits seniors and families. He wants to eliminate tax-free savings accounts, and his numbers do not even add up. This will be disastrous for families.

Families will vote to keep money in their pockets, money we delivered for the Canadian public.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have repeatedly asked the Minister of Foreign Affairs whether a status of forces agreement has been reached with Iraqi authorities. However, he remains evasive and refuses to give a clear answer.

We have just learned that, in fact, there is still no agreement in place.

What is taking so long? How does the minister explain that we still do not have a status of forces agreement with the Iraqi authorities?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of National Defence and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government has been working closely with its counterparts in Iraq.

The Prime Minister and I met with the Prime Minister of Iraq last week in Bagdad. We have very close ties, and Iraqi authorities are very grateful for the Canadian Forces' contribution to defending their country and their people.

We continue to work on a status of forces agreement.

• (1430)

[*English*]

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a status of forces agreement is critical to ensure that there are clear rules that protect our soldiers and surround our military involvement in a foreign country. We have asked repeatedly when this agreement would be concluded with Iraq, as far back as September. Now it turns out that there is no agreement at all, and a meeting last week just does not cut it.

We are not talking about a one-month training mission. We have already been there eight months, and Canada is going to be in Iraq, including on the front lines, for at least another year.

Why has the minister failed to secure such a vital and basic agreement?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of National Defence and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has worked closely with the Government of Iraq to ensure appropriate protection for Canadian Armed Forces members participating in coalition operations against the genocidal terrorist organization of the so-called Islamic state.

The status of forces agreements, of course, are binding treaty level international commitments that often take years to develop, and we do not have years to wait to save the Iraqi people from genocide, to

save those women from sexual slavery, and to work with two dozen other countries in reinforcing this critical aspect of international security. That is why we are there acting rather than sitting on the sidelines.

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NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Americans have one, but we do not. The women and men of the Canadian Armed Forces deserve better.

Canadians were shocked today to find out that the Chief of the Defence Staff issued orders precluding the adoption of key recommendations of the Deschamps report. This would be a betrayal of the victims of sexual assault and harassment who came forward, shared their experiences, and called for change.

The minister needs to exercise his authority and take responsibility. Will he guarantee that the Canadian Armed Forces will establish an independent body to handle sexual misconduct, yes or no?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of National Defence and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Yes, Mr. Speaker.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Éline Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this kind of attitude on the part of the Office of the Chief of Defence Staff is simply unacceptable.

The directive sent by General Lawson clearly shows that, in order for attitudes to change within the armed forces, the minister needs to intervene and take responsibility, instead of passing the buck. He must accept the 10 recommendations of the Deschamps report immediately.

How does the minister justify his failure to act? When will he finally implement all of the report's recommendations?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of National Defence and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, military officials received Justice Deschamps' report only last week, and they have already implemented some of the recommendations. They agreed in principle with all 10 recommendations. General Lawson appointed Major-General Christine Whitecross two months ago to lead a team to address this very important issue. Now, that is action.

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CHILD CARE

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, while the Conservatives hide their heads in the sand, a million children still do not have access to regulated child care spaces.

Spring into Action for Child Care is in full swing. Across the country, parents are organizing gatherings, stroller brigades and forums. They are asking for quality, affordable public child care.

Will the Conservatives finally get on board with the NDP's plan to create a million child care spaces for \$15 or less per day?

[English]

Hon. Candice Bergen (Minister of State (Social Development), CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is the difference between the NDP plan and our plan. Our plan gives benefits to every family in Canada, regardless of how they decide to care for their children, whether they decide to stay at home with their children, whether they decide to use licensed day care spots, or whether they decide to use another family member. Whatever their choice is, we respect it. We believe that it deserves support. We are going to continue giving direct support to Canadian families. The NDP would create a multibillion-dollar plan that would help fewer than 10% of Canadian families. Ours helps all Canadian families.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there are more than one million children without a regulated child care space. That is nothing to be proud of.

It is child care week, and across this country, moms and dads are participating in stroller brigades, picnics, pop-up play groups, and kitchen table conversations calling for more affordable child care. Parents are tired of paying fees that break the household budget.

Will the government listen and adopt the NDP plan to provide affordable child care at no more than \$15 a day?

• (1435)

Hon. Candice Bergen (Minister of State (Social Development), CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadian families are tired of being insulted by the NDP and being told that if they do not use regulated daycare spaces, they do not deserve support. Canadian families are tired of being told that if a parent decides to stay home, they are not really incurring a cost.

The NDP members are wrong. They are not listening to rural Canadian families. They are not listening to Canadian families doing shift work. They are not listening to families who are staying home with their children.

We are listening to all Canadian families and giving every family support, regardless of their choice, because we respect and we trust Canadian families.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is real Canadian families that are calling for regulated child care space. It is child care week and all across the country—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. We have moved on to the next question.

The hon. member for Newton—North Delta still has the floor. Members need to hold off and let her ask the question.

The hon. member for Newton—North Delta.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, the government talks about real Canadian families. Let me tell members that they are wanting affordable child care spaces. This past weekend, parents in Vancouver marched to demand more affordable child care. They are paying as much as \$15,000 a year for child care, and they are fed up. The Liberals and the Conservatives have no plan to make child care more affordable, but the NDP will create child care spaces that will cost no more than \$15 a day.

Oral Questions

Why not listen to parents and adopt the NDP plan?

Hon. Candice Bergen (Minister of State (Social Development), CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is NDP disrespect. They consider a family that is not using a regulated daycare space not a real family. It is not up to the government to decide what is a real family or what is child care. That is up to Canadian families themselves. That is up to moms and dads. Parents are the real experts.

We are going to keep taxes low for all Canadian families, who we consider to be trustworthy and worthy of the money that belongs to them. We are going to keep putting money back in their pockets and let them decide how to care for their children. We will reject the insults of the NDP to all Canadian families.

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[Translation]

TAXATION

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is a simple question, but we cannot seem to get a clear answer from the Conservatives.

They could take action now to put an end to the unfair tax on feminine hygiene products. We have been forced to pay tax on these essential items for 24 years now even though consumer goods such as wedding cakes are exempt. That is just not fair.

Will the Conservatives amend their budget bill to remove this unfair tax once and for all?

[English]

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch (Minister of Labour and Minister of Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as has already been said in the House, this government is focused on lowering taxes. We have gone from 7% to 6% to 5% on the GST. The opposition voted against that. Our focus is on making sure that taxes are lower on Canadian families, particularly on Canadian women. I wonder why the NDP members never supported any of those actions. I encourage them to support this budget and lower taxes.

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if the Conservatives were serious about ending this discriminatory tax, they would commit to amending the budget bill immediately. Women have been paying this unfair federal tax for more than 24 years, so we thank the Conservatives for voting for our motion. It is very nice, but we must not make women wait any longer to end this sexist tax.

Will the Prime Minister allow his caucus a free vote on removing this unfair tax in this year's budget?

Oral Questions

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch (Minister of Labour and Minister of Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the NDP were serious about supporting families, they would support our budget and lower taxes. We have been very focused on making sure that Canadians all experience lower taxes. The GST went from 7% to 6% to 5%. That is making sure that we have lower taxes. In fact, they are the lowest they have been in 50 years in Canadian history. I encourage the opposition to get on board and lower taxes for Canadians so they have more money in their pockets.

* * *

● (1440)

EMPLOYMENT

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have been spending \$100,000 per self-serving partisan ad during the NHL playoffs. Each of these ads could fund 30 summer student jobs. While we are sad that there are no Canadian teams left in the playoffs, there could be one winner, and that could be Canadian students.

Will the Prime Minister commit here and now to redirect the remaining money that was allocated for partisan ads during the playoffs and instead invest it in providing jobs for hundreds of Canadian students?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are directing money into the pockets of moms and dads across the country. We have increased the universal child care benefit to almost \$2,000 for kids under 6 and \$720 for kids 6 through 17. However, there are still 200,000 people who have not signed up for that benefit to which they are entitled. The advertising, in part, is designed to inform them so that they can get those benefits.

We know the Liberals want to take that money away. That is why they do not want Canadians to know about it in the first place. Yesterday, the Liberal leader said, "...benefiting every single family is not what is fair".

We believe it is fair to benefit every single family and we will make sure that families receive those benefits.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are 169,000 fewer jobs for young Canadians today than before the downturn. While students are struggling to find work, the Conservatives are holding back money that was budgeted for programs to help fight youth unemployment. At the same time, the Conservatives are wasting tax dollars on self-promotional ads during the NHL playoffs. The money spent on each one of those ads could fund 30 summer jobs in the Canada summer jobs program

When will the Conservatives stop wasting tax dollars on ads to promote themselves and start helping young Canadians find work?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me read a quote:

It is important to communicate with residents across the country. People want to know about the tax credits that are available to them and the job hiring grants. Many parents want to know about the fitness tax credit, for instance, and we need to communicate with Canadians to let them know about the money that is available to them. It is their tax dollars.

Who said that? It was the Liberal member for Mississauga—Brampton South.

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PUBLIC SERVICE OF CANADA

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, those in the current Conservative government have become masters at coming up with solutions for problems that do not exist, especially when it comes to attacking organized labour. Bill C-377 and Bill C-525 sort of come to mind.

These are benefits that have been fought for at the bargaining table and won.

It is obvious that the minister has come to the table with public servants to dictate, not to negotiate. Will the minister restore fairness into the process and show a little bit of respect for public servants?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in fact, my bargaining representatives have had close to 200 meetings with union representatives to date, and there are 47 other meetings that had been scheduled before the union unilaterally declined to sit at the bargaining table. We have made some fair and reasonable offers: fair and reasonable to the employees, but more importantly, or as importantly, fair and reasonable to the taxpayer, and we will continue to make those offers.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, internal RCMP documents obtained under access to information show that the RCMP timed the release of the video made by the Ottawa shooter on October 22 so that it would not overshadow public hearings on Bill C-51.

A Friday release was recommended because "...attention on the video will be very high over the weekend, but that the issue will die down early the following week so that the focus can be on the Bill C-51 hearings."

Did the minister ask the RCMP to delay the release of the October 22 video?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have full confidence in the judgment of the RCMP. While respecting the operational independence of the RCMP, our government shares the view of the public safety committee, on which the member sits, and approves of the principle of transparency. On this side of the House, we are not afraid to call a spade a spade. What took place here on October 22 was a terrorist attack. When will the NDP come clear on that?

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it appears that the RCMP scheduled the release of the video of the October 22 shooting to coincide with the political timetable for Bill C-51. That is quite disturbing. The idea that the RCMP could be coordinating its work with the Conservatives' partisan political timetable raises quite a few questions.

My question is very simple. Did the minister personally have anything to do with the RCMP's decision, yes or no?

• (1445)

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker.

Operational decisions are made by the RCMP, in which I have complete confidence.

Our government, like the committee that my colleague belongs to, believes that there must be transparency and respect for the investigation process. That is what we are doing, and that is why we have to call a spade a spade. What happened here on October 22 was a terrorist attack.

When will the New Democrats face reality and come up with solutions like our anti-terrorism measures?

* * *

VETERANS

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government is playing a dangerous political game. After making cuts to care and services for veterans and spending over \$700,000 to defend itself against a class action lawsuit filed by veterans, the government is now trying to pass Bill C-58 in the middle of dozens of other measures, without debate, without examination in committee and without any consideration for veterans.

Why is the government playing partisan politics at the expense of veterans?

[English]

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member well knows, the provisions in Bill C-58 will be going to the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs for review, even though most of the provisions in that bill were recommended by that very committee last June.

He should stop the rhetoric in the House, recognize that some of these recommendations were adopted by all sides, and get behind Bill C-58, the budget implementation act, making tangible progress for veterans and their families.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday in committee, the Minister of Veterans Affairs was extremely economical with the truth, blaming the opposition for the delay of passage of Bill C-58 when they themselves introduced a bill and never brought it back.

The Conservatives are shoving it in Bill C-59, an omnibus bill, knowing full well that we in the NDP will never vote confidence in the Conservatives.

Will the government now agree with our motion after question period to move Bill C-58 immediately to committee for immediate review?

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, over the last few months, as we have rolled out new benefits and programs for veterans and their families, that member has opposed and criticized almost every one, including standing in this House to criticize a new benefit that he recommended last year as part of the standing committee.

I have made a commitment to veterans and their families that these new benefits will pass before this summer. Whether their delay is intentional or not, I am not going to allow delays to stand in the way of veterans and their families getting these important benefits.

This BIA will pass.

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unlike the leader of the Liberal Party, our government has put forward a plan to support 100% of Canadian families with children.

Can the minister of employment please update the House on how our government's plan is providing support for all of those Canadian families?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our family tax cut and benefits help 100% of families with kids. In contrast, the Liberal leader said, "benefiting every single family is not what is fair". That is why he would scrap the universal child care benefit, scrap the family tax cut and income splitting, scrap the child tax benefit and gut the tax-free savings accounts.

Even after all of those clawbacks and tax increases, the Liberal leader is still short by billions of dollars every year. He is not ready, and neither is his plan.

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Pic Mobert First Nation has been working since 1992 to acquire a small 16 square kilometre parcel of land that will give the community the room it needs to grow. There is no cost to the government, but the delay is costing the first nation and is holding back projects, including an industrial park.

The province has signed, the band has signed, but the government is missing in action. When will the minister sign the agreement that will let the Pic Mobert First Nation grow its on-reserve economy?

Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member will know, the additions to reserve process is often a lengthy and complex one. I will speak to the minister directly about this specific case.

Oral Questions

Certainly, we are working with willing partners in first nations communities to advance their economic needs and to advance their economic participation in Canada. Every time we do that, that member and her party vote against it.

• (1450)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, aboriginal communities are tired of waiting on a minister who does not answer their questions.

The Prime Minister promised to work toward reconciliation. Nevertheless, all we are getting from this government is meaningless answers. One minister said that my bill, which seeks to uphold the fundamental rights of indigenous peoples, was “utter nonsense”. My question is simple: rather than being part of the problem, will he now try to be part of the solution?

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the highest form of aboriginal and treaty rights, acknowledgement and protection is constitutional protection, and section 35 of the Constitution of Canada achieves that. Furthermore, the human rights of all Canadians, including aboriginals, are protected by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Again, every time we bring forward new measures to give rights to people on reserve, such as matrimonial property rights on reserve, human rights on reserve, that party and that member vote against them.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the refusal of the minister to join the RCMP in apologizing for an unacceptable report that termed Idle No More activists as bacteria is another indication of a broken relationship. Instead of taking the opportunity to tell indigenous communities that they are respected and that the government wants to work with them, the parliamentary secretary accused me of not supporting law enforcement. Let me be clear. The RCMP did the right thing by apologizing. The minister, on the other hand, did not.

Will he stand in the House today and say he is sorry?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have to say that I agree with my colleague.

Like her, I can confirm that the RCMP apologized and that that was the right thing to do.

[*English*]

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, we want to hear an apology from the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

He will not apologize even though the RCMP called first nations bacteria. He blamed aboriginal men for violence against aboriginal women instead of standing with the rest of us and supporting a national inquiry. He accused first nations youth in New Brunswick, who are growing up in abject poverty, of being lazy. He told Yukon first nations that they are not “real governments”. Enough is enough.

Does the minister recognize that his words are deeply disrespectful and his actions damaging to the relationship with indigenous peoples?

Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since taking office in 2006, our government has given women living on reserves the same matrimonial rights as all Canadians. We have taken concrete action to ensure that first nations have the same drinking water standards as those off reserve. We have invested in jobs and skills training, which lead to greater first nations participation in the economy. We have taken action to strengthen the on-reserve election system and increased the level of accountability and transparency required of first nations government.

Every time we work to improve the lives of first nations living on reserve, that party votes against it. Why do New Democrats not get on board with us in making things better for first nations in Canada?

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Deschamps external review into sexual harassment in the Canadian Armed Forces had 10 recommendations to address these serious problems. The government fully accepted only two of them. In fact, the Chief of the Defence Staff issued an explicit order ruling out key recommendations of the Deschamps report before it was released. The defence minister has been completely silent for two weeks, sitting on the sidelines.

Why has the minister not ordered the Chief of the Defence Staff to rescind this order and fully implement all 10 recommendations; not in principle, but fully and in practice?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of National Defence and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member does herself and this place a disservice by asking such a misleading question, filled with inaccurate premises.

Of course, we reject any form of sexual misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces, which is why the Chief of the Defence Staff commissioned the independent inquiry from Madam Justice Deschamps. It is why he, two months ago, appointed Major General Christine Whitecross to lead a team to address this issue. It is why the Canadian Armed Forces has accepted not two, but, once again, all 10 of the recommendations made by Madam Justice Deschamps.

It is true that the military has not been able to implement all 10 of those recommendations in the last week, but will. It will do so.

•(1455)

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in her report, Ms. Deschamps made 10 recommendations to deal with the serious problem of sexual harassment in the armed forces.

However, we have just learned that, in February, before the report was even published, General Lawson gave explicit orders rejecting important recommendations in the report. Meanwhile, the Minister of National Defence remained silent.

Why did the minister not order General Lawson to rescind the directive and implement all 10 recommendations?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of National Defence and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows the answer to that question. He was in the House and heard me answer it here on numerous occasions. I said that the government and the Canadian Armed Forces have accepted all 10 recommendations. Not just 2, but all 10.

The orders that he is referring to were issued two months ago, before the report was published. The Canadian Armed Forces have been clear: they are going to implement the recommendations in the report. We will never condone sexual harassment in the Canadian Armed Forces.

* * *

[English]

PUBLIC SERVICE OF CANADA

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Supreme Court has ruled that free and fair collective bargaining is protected by the charter, yet Conservatives are trying to use their budget bill to undermine this fundamental right. The government wants to give itself unprecedented powers to dictate the outcome of negotiations with the public service.

The question, then, is this: why are Conservatives attacking the rights of public servants to free and fair collective bargaining? After all, these are the women and men who provide public services to all Canadians, even to the current government.

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. Indeed, we have had close to 200 meetings with various union bargaining agents to date, at which time none of the bargaining agents were even willing to discuss the issue of a better, fairer, more equitable, more accountable sick leave system.

It is at that point that we had the budget. However, I have said to union leadership that I am willing to continue with these discussions, and certainly I will continue to be fair and reasonable: fair and reasonable for the employees, and fair and reasonable for the taxpayer.

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when the minister's mind is already made up, we do not call that collective bargaining.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

The Conservatives have no respect for workers or the right to collective bargaining. The Supreme Court was clear. This is a charter right. However, the government is doing whatever it wants. In an unconstitutional move, the government is tossing out this right that is guaranteed to thousands of public sector workers.

Why is the government attacking public sector workers' right to free collective bargaining?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to sick leave, it is important to have a system that is fair to both taxpayers and employees, of course. There were around 200 meetings, but we need to have a solution that is fair to taxpayers and, at the same time, fair to employees.

* * *

[English]

TAXATION

Ms. Joyce Bateman (Winnipeg South Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Conservative government's universal child care benefit and family tax cut are going to help every single Canadian family with children. That includes each and every family in my riding of Winnipeg South Centre.

Could the Minister of Employment and Social Development please update this House on our government's plan for all families?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we disagree with the Liberal leader, who says that benefiting every single family is not what is fair. He is very wrong.

In fact, our family tax cut and benefits deliver for every family, regardless of their child care choice or income. Through income splitting, families can save up to \$2,000. The universal child care benefit grows to almost \$2,000 per child under six and to \$720 for kids aged six through 17. In July, a first lump sum payment in that increased universal child care benefit will arrive, and I encourage all members to inform their constituents to make sure that deserving families get the cheque.

* * *

•(1500)

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me say also that 90% of families would receive more with the Liberal plan.

Neglected by the current government, the Copyright Board cannot fulfill its mission. The average time to render a decision is between two and three years. Only two out of five board seats are filled, and the chair's position has been vacant for a year. It seems hard for the minister to find a chair who is competent and Conservative enough.

When will the minister give the board resources so that it can render sound and timely decisions?

Oral Questions

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government takes great care to ensure that our appointments are of a high quality and have high merit. This is another example of where we will be doing that.

We have been focused on reforming our intellectual property regime. Our recent budget includes changes to extend intellectual property rights for those in the creative classes in Canada. They are very appreciative of those changes, and we are going to ensure they have the fullest protection possible to allow our creative classes to flourish.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week Major Marcus Brauer was informed that his claim for home equity assistance benefits has been rejected. It is devastating news to Major Brauer and his family.

This Canadian Forces member lost \$88,000 on the sale of his home when he was ordered to relocate. The Conservatives have spent almost as much money fighting with Major Brauer as it would have cost to simply honour the commitment.

Why do the men and women in uniform in our country have to fight the government tooth and nail for the benefits they deserve?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what I can tell the House is that in compliance with the Federal Court's May 2014 order, there was an independent, impartial review that was conducted. Of course we relied on the advice of that independent third party expert in the conclusion that in fact the market was not depressed.

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MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we celebrate National Mining Week, I would like to reflect on how important the mining industry is to the Canadian economy. In fact, nearly 400,000 men and women are employed in the mining sector, which contributes close to \$60 billion to Canada's GDP and one-fifth of Canada's merchandise exports.

Could the Minister of Natural Resources share with the House what our government is doing to support this vital sector of our economy?

Hon. Greg Rickford (Minister of Natural Resources and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question.

Tomorrow, as part of National Mining Week, I will open the Toronto Stock Exchange and celebrate our government's support for the mining sector.

In our recently tabled balanced budget, we are extending the mineral export tax credit as well as making new investments in geoscience, in geomapping innovation, and in the separation technology needed to develop such metals as chromite and rare earth elements located in the Ring of Fire. These measures reduce

taxes and lower costs for the mining sector, and the sector appreciates that.

Sadly, the opposition votes against creating jobs, growth, and economic prosperity for our mining communities. Why?

* * *

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Maraichers du coeur is a program in Rimouski that provides young dropouts with work experience creating a community garden. They consistently received federal funding from 2000 to 2013.

However, Service Canada's Skills Link program is undermining this project for the second year in a row because the funding is being held up. Last year, the project was approved in September. Vegetables are planted in spring. This is the eleventh hour. I informed the minister of the situation three weeks ago.

Can he make sure he provides a response by the weekend, so that the young people can start their work?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our non-partisan officials look at every application for funding with objectivity and this file will be no different. I assure the hon. member that a fair and equitable decision will be made.

* * *

[English]

JUSTICE

Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, the cornerstone of any democracy is an effective, reliable, and fair legal system that promotes the rule of law and timely access to an independent and properly resourced court. However, for some time now Alberta has had the lowest number of Court of Queen's Bench justices per capita in Canada, and senior Alberta federal prosecutors have been warning for three years that increasingly complex cases and a shortage of senior lawyers jeopardizes those cases, as delays violate the right to be tried within a reasonable time.

With voluminous vacancies both in the Public Prosecution Service and on the Alberta Court of Queen's Bench, the government's so-called tough-on-crime agenda is impeded. When will the government stop taking Albertans for granted?

● (1505)

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member will know, coming from the province of Alberta, that the Public Prosecution Service is an arm's-length organization.

When it comes to the staffing of the Public Prosecution Service, let me quote their spokesman, Mr. Dan Brien, who recently said, “The Public Prosecution Service has sufficient resources to fulfill its mandate.” He added that no cases have been lost as a result of workload.

The reality is that almost all of the positions are filled. We have recently hired more, with plans to hire more. The reality is that the Public Prosecution Service is doing great work on behalf of all Canadians.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of the Honourable Gordon Wyant, Minister of Justice and Attorney General for the Province of Saskatchewan.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

RESIGNATION OF MEMBER

The Speaker: Order, please. The Chair has notice of a point of personal privilege for the hon. member for Barrie.

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of personal privilege today. With my recent election win as Leader of the Ontario PC Party, I stand today to announce that I will be tendering my resignation as the member of Parliament for Barrie. It is an emotional but exciting day for me because over the last nine years it has been a privilege to serve the city of Barrie. It has been one of the greatest honours in my life.

I thought I would highlight today a few of the success stories that our city of Barrie has seen under this government during that time.

On an infrastructure level, I am very proud to have seen the health and wellness centre built at Georgian College. I was honoured to see the Allandale Waterfront and Barrie South GO train stations introduced to the city of Barrie; the Dunlop Street fire station; the Lampman Lane Community Centre; the Eastview Arena refurbishments; and the downtown theatre, bring culture to the downtown of Barrie.

This government has brought unprecedented funding to Lake Simcoe. When I first became a member of Parliament, I think phosphorus levels were one of the greatest challenges on Lake Simcoe. I see the member for York—Simcoe cheering that. I know he was one of the biggest champions of the Lake Simcoe cleanup, and the member for Simcoe North as well. We take great pride in knowing that the lake today is healthier than it has ever been thanks to the \$60 million Government of Canada investment to clean up Lake Simcoe.

Another of the fine examples of investments in Simcoe County that I take a great degree of pride in is the Canada First Defence Strategy. Very near to the city of Barrie is CF base Borden, in the riding of Simcoe—Grey. My good friend there I know is very proud of the fact that since 2006 we have seen over \$210 million invested

Routine Proceedings

into CFB Borden. Simcoe County takes great pride in base Borden and what it has meant to our region. It is great to see a government that has invested so significantly in that base.

Barrie is also home to a very active charitable sector. One of my greatest pleasures as an MP has been trying to channel that goodwill to causes about which I care dearly.

I think of the Royal Victoria Hospital. Nine years ago I made it my project to raise funds for the hospital through an annual hockey game. I think of my grandmother, who volunteered there for 50 years. She was known as a “blue coat”. Any volunteer at RVH is known as a blue coat. However, with the assistance of the community and through a hockey night in Barrie, we were able to raise \$1.4 million for the cancer centre and for mental health.

It has not just been a charitable hockey game; in the last four years we have grown that to include the annual Barrie Waterfront Half Marathon. I know a number of my colleagues have participated in that half marathon, whether they wanted to or not. I managed to rope a few of them into doing it. However, we have actually managed to raise \$170,000 through the half marathon for causes as important as the David Busby Street Centre, Gilda's Club Simcoe Muskoka, Autism Ontario, Talk is Free Theatre and JDRF. This year the race is continuing in support of the YMCA of Simcoe/Muskoka, CNIB and the Alzheimer Society of Simcoe County.

Another area that I wanted to highlight outside of my riding is with respect to my favourite projects in Ottawa, one being my work with India.

I have had the honour to serve as the Canada-India Parliamentary Association chairman for nine years. During that period, I have worked with a number of my colleagues on a relationship with India. I have had the fascinating privilege of going there 15 times. In that work, we have been able to expand trade with India, educational linkages, energy agreements and even an opportunity to develop a personal friendship with India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

One story that I laugh about now is when the member for Calgary Northeast joined me on the Canada-India executive. I asked him to come to India for a weekend to open the centre in Gandhinagar, which was to be Narendra Modi's prize project as chief minister. Members are not supposed to leave for a weekend to go to India, so we had to leave on a Thursday. Therefore, I told the member for Calgary Northeast that it would just be an extended bathroom break. We got into a bit of trouble with the whip, but I know, today, that the Prime Minister of India fondly remembers the trip we made there, for practically a day.

● (1510)

Another one of my favourite projects in Ottawa has been working with the Tamil-Canadian community. As a constituency MP, we learn about issues about which we may not know a lot.

Routine Proceedings

I remember in 2009, an individual by the name of Ranjit Shreskumar came to my office, sat on my couch and cried about what was happening in Sri Lanka. The one thing I take great honour in seeing is how our government has responded over the years to the genocide that took place in Sri Lanka. It has been the world's largest critic on what has happened in Sri Lanka and the human rights abuses that took place. This is an example of how a community like the Tamil community engaged with MPs, raised the issues and many of us who did not know a lot then became its advocate and its voice in the House of Commons. This has been a real honour.

During my leadership convention, I was honoured that the Indo-Canadian community and the Tamil community stood firmly by my side. Those friendships and support I will never forget.

The last item I want to mention is the issue of neurological research. One of the things I enjoyed most in Ottawa was back in 2008 when we set up a neurological disorders subcommittee. It was an all-party committee on which I served. We had hearings on neurological disorders for three years.

We were all on that committee for different reasons. I was there because I saw what happened to my grandmother who had Alzheimer's. Other MPs from different parties were there for similar personal reasons, but I saw it as an opportunity to work together on an issue that had brought us all together. The report was finally published, and in budget 2011, an additional \$100 million was allocated to the brain Canada trust. It is in moments like that we see why government is so important and why public service is so important.

I want to thank a few people today in my final speech in the House of Commons. I want to thank my family for their love and support. My late grandparents, "Honest" Joe and Edna Tascona, moved to Barrie in the 1940s, and I am very glad they did. My father Edmund Brown, my mother Judy, my sisters Stephanie and Fiona, my brother-in-law Chuck and my nephews Colton and Harrison are a never-ending inspiration.

I also want to say thanks to my past EDA presidents. I know every MP appreciates having a strong EDA, and I benefited from some great presidents: Alison Eadie, Trudie Waldinger, Larry Pomfret, Bruce Macgregor and Gary Perkins.

I also want to thank my staff. We all know we cannot do our jobs without our staff members. Their knowledge, dedication and professionalism has enabled me to serve the people of Barrie. I want to thank Heather McCarthy, Shawn Bubel, Samantha Flynn, Pat McFarlane and Cindy Bugeja.

Serving Barrie has been the greatest honour of my life. Barrie will always be my home. The people of Barrie are an incredible part of who I am and it is with excitement that I start this new journey.

One thing I forgot to mention is that I am indebted to our Prime Minister. It has been an honour to serve in his caucus and in his government. I have had the honour to serve as the GTA caucus chairman. As I leave the House, I am as proud of the Prime Minister's work on behalf of Canada as I was on day one. We have a Prime Minister who has made Canada the envy of the world. I truly believe he will go down in history as one of our greatest prime ministers.

I am compelled to public service in Ontario because I believe I can make a great contribution there. I believe Ontario can be the economic engine of Canada once again. I believe we can and must do better as a province. It is for that reason that I make the difficult choice to say goodbye to friends in the House and to say that I will be in public service at a different level. It has been an honour to sit among the quality of the individuals in this chamber on both sides.

● (1515)

The Speaker: I certainly wish the hon . member well in his future endeavours.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Ed Fast (Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the treaty on the World Trade Organization agreement on trade facilitation. An explanatory memorandum is included with this treaty.

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GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

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

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INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian delegation of the Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association respecting its participation in the Meeting of the Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region, held in Washington, D.C., March 10 and 11.

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, four reports of the Canadian delegation of the Canada-United States Inter-Parliamentary Group.

The first concerns the 68th Annual Meeting of the Council of State Governments, Southern Legislative Conference, held in Little Rock, Arkansas, United States, July 26 to 30, 2014.

[*Translation*]

The second concerns the Canada-United States-Mexico Trilateral Inter-Parliamentary Group meeting held in Washington, D.C., United States of America, from December 1 to 2, 2014.

The third concerns the National Governors Association winter meeting, held in Washington, D.C., United States of America, from February 20 to 23, 2015.

[*English*]

The fourth concerns the U.S. congressional meetings that were held in Washington, D.C., United States of America, March 23 to 25.

Routine Proceedings

Our group has been very busy lately and we have been tabling many reports on the fine work of all parliamentarians of the Canada-United States Inter-Parliamentary Group.

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fifth report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration relating to Bill S-7, an act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, the Civil Marriage Act and the Criminal Code and to make consequential amendments to other Acts. The committee has studied the bill and has decided to report the bill back to the House without amendments.

• (1520)

PUBLIC SAFETY AND NATIONAL SECURITY

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 12th report of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security in relation to the main estimates of 2015-16.

HUMAN RESOURCES, SKILLS AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE STATUS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 10th report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities in relation to Bill C-643, an act to establish National Spinal Cord Injury Awareness Day. The committee has studied the bill and has decided to report the bill back to the House without amendment.

I also have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 2013 Annual Report on the Administration of the Centennial Flame Research Award Act. This report includes the 2013 Centennial Flame Research Award report submitted by Ms. Sara Carleton, entitled, "Clara Hughes: Opening Hearts, Opening Minds", as well as the financial statements of the Centennial Flame Research Award Fund for the fiscal years ending March 31, 2014, and March 31, 2015.

[*Translation*]

FINANCE

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the ninth report of the Standing Committee on Finance in relation to its study on the main estimates 2015-16.

* * *

INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. Mathieu Ravnat (Pontiac, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-677, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (post-traumatic stress syndrome).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am proud to introduce in the House this bill which, for the record, was inspired by a veteran in my riding, Mr. Daniel Bélanger.

This bill would provide financial assistance to veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome by making them eligible for the medical expense tax credit and the disability tax credit.

I hope that my bill to help our heroes will be supported by all members of the House regardless of their party affiliation.

[*English*]

The bill has one aim, which is to help the heroes of our country, who are suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome, get some financial relief for themselves and for their families when it comes to tax time. They deserve it and we should be supporting this bill as we go forward. I hope to have the support from all members of the House.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

* * *

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-678, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (property of Holocaust victims and survivors).

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is important for me to stand in the House today to present my private member's bill, which is an act to amend the Criminal Code of Canada regarding the property of Holocaust victims and survivors.

This bill would amend the Criminal Code to make it an offence to sell or purchase personal property that was owned by or in possession of a victim or survivor of the Holocaust for the purpose of willfully promoting hatred against any identifiable group.

This is an issue that is very close to my heart and it is certainly important to my constituents in the riding of York Centre. I hope all members in this place will support this bill.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

* * *

• (1525)

COMMUNICATIONS SECURITY ESTABLISHMENT REVIEW COMMITTEE ACT

Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, Ind.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-679, An Act to Establish the Communications Security Establishment Review Committee and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to rise and introduce the communications security establishment review committee act.

The proposed legislation would establish a five-person civilian committee to review the activities of Canada's signals intelligence agency. It would be a technical committee comprised of a full-time chairperson, an information technology expert, a security expert, a privacy expert and a lawyer with expertise in civil procedure.

The committee would conduct statutory reviews but would also investigate complaints made by Canadians and would report any violations to the Attorney General and the Director of Public Prosecutions for further investigation.

Routine Proceedings

The committee may also conduct joint reviews with the Security Intelligence Review Committee and the RCMP Complaints Committee. The committee would be empowered to compel persons and documents, and also to take evidence under oath.

We know that Canada's electronic spy agency works collaboratively with the NSA, farms in metadata, and sifts through millions of videos and documents downloaded online.

Given that Bill C-51 would increase the reach of Canada's entire spy agency establishment without any additional oversight, I encourage all hon. members to support this legislation and defend the privacy rights of all law-abiding Canadians.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

* * *

FOOD AND DRUGS ACT

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-680, An Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act (microbeads).

He said: Mr. Speaker, the bill would amend the Food and Drugs Act to prohibit the sale of personal care products containing pieces of plastic of up to five millimetres in size.

As we know, this has been a subject of some considerable debate. The reason for moving the bill at this time is that even though the House spoke passionately, eloquently and, ultimately, unanimously in favour of doing something, we have noticed a pattern in the past of motions of the House being ignored.

This will no longer be ignored. The government will have to respond with a response to the legislation itself. I would encourage all members to support it.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

* * *

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties. I believe that if you were to seek it, you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, during the debate today on the Business of Supply pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), no quorum calls, dilatory motions or requests for unanimous consent shall be received by the Chair and, within each 15-minute period, each party may allocate time to one or more of its Members for speeches or for questions and answers, provided that, in the case of questions and answers, the Minister's answer approximately reflect the time taken by the question, and provided that, in the case of speeches, Members of the party to which the period is allocated may speak one after the other.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Does the hon. government House leader have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

● (1530)

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Speaker, I would like to seek unanimous consent for the following motion which, coincidentally, is currently on the order paper, standing in the name of the Minister of Veterans Affairs, that Bill C-58, an act to amend the Canadian Forces Members and Veterans Re-establishment and Compensation Act and to make consequential amendments to another act, be now read a second time and referred to the Standing Committee of Veterans Affairs.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Does the hon. member for Sackville—Eastern Shore have the unanimous consent of the House to propose the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

* * *

PETITIONS

ARMS TRADE TREATY

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions today from Calgarians.

The first petition calls upon Canada to ratify the arms trade treaty. The petitioners advise us that half a million people die a year in arms conflict, that the trade in arms traps civilians in crime, conflict, poverty, and disrupts the delivery of humanitarian aid. They are concerned that the Government of Canada continues to approve exports of weapons to places such as Brazil, Colombia, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, and so forth.

The petitioners are calling upon the Government of Canada, which voted for the text of the arms trade treaty in 2013, to sign, ratify and implement the arms trade treaty.

NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition from Calgarians calls upon Canada to take steps, finally, toward nuclear disarmament.

The petitioners are concerned that over 16,000 nuclear weapons are in existence, 2,000 on alert. Canada joined 190 states almost 40 years ago saying that it would pursue an arms treaty.

The petitioners are calling upon the Government of Canada to urgently request the U.S. and Russia to reduce the alert status of their nuclear weapons and publicly affirm its willingness to engage in negotiations on a nuclear weapons convention or an equivalent framework of agreements.

JUSTICE

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition which calls upon the Government of Canada to make changes to the current drinking and driving laws in Canada, and to make a change to the Criminal Code of Canada.

Routine Proceedings

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present several petitions with hundreds of signatures from people in and around Guelph who feel that multinational seed companies are replacing the immense diversity of farmers' seeds with industrial varieties through an increasing number of patented seeds and that UPOV'91 will deter or outlaw the saving and exchanging of seeds between farmers, all of which affects both Canadian farmers and peasant farmers in third world countries.

The petitioners ask Canada to adopt policies, internationally and here at home, that support small farmers, especially women, and to ensure the exchange and preservation of seeds.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition from members of my constituency of Victoria calling on the Government of Canada to work with the provinces and territories to implement the NDP plan for affordable child care in Canada.

It notes that 900,000 children of working parents have no affordable regulated child care space and asks that \$15-a-day maximum child care be available to Canadians.

JUSTICE

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present three petitions signed by thousands of Canadians. The first proposes to update Canada's impaired driving laws.

FIREARMS LEGISLATION

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is signed by hundreds of Canadians from coast to coast who call on Parliament to enact common sense firearms laws by passing Bill C-42, the common sense firearms licensing act.

HUNTING AND TRAPPING

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the third petition from Canadians calls on Parliament to support the environment committee's current study on hunting and trapping, and asks that the Liberals and New Democrats stop playing their partisan games at that committee.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present two petitions. The first is from residents of the Vancouver area calling on the government and the House to take whatever steps we can to pressure the People's Republic of China to respect the human rights of the practitioners of Falun Dafa and Falun Gong.

CBC/RADIO-CANADA

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from residents of the Victoria area calling on the House to create stable, predictable and sustainable funding to the nation's public broadcaster, the CBC.

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by dozens and dozens of residents of Kitimat, British Columbia in northwestern B.C.

The petition is entitled "The respect for the right of small scale family farmers to preserve, exchange and use seeds".

The petitioners note that Canada has not adopted international policies that aid family farms, particularly small farms, and particularly those run by women, and that we must recognize their vital role in the struggle against hunger and poverty. They also note that all Canadian policies, both here and abroad, should support programs that consult with family farmers and that protect the rights of small family farms in the global south to preserve, use and freely exchange seeds.

• (1535)

JUSTICE

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present a petition that sadly informs the House that Duane Pearson was tragically killed by a drunk driver. The Pearson family has been left devastated.

Families for Justice is a group of Canadians who have also lost loved ones killed by an impaired driver. They believe that Canada's impaired driving laws are much too lenient. They want the crime called what it is: vehicular homicide. They call on the government to introduce legislation that will provide mandatory sentencing for vehicular homicide.

SEX SELECTION

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the next petition I am presenting highlights that there is discrimination against girls and it is brutal. It is called sex selection. There are over 200 million girls missing internationally because of the use of sex selection. The petitioners call upon Parliament to condemn the practice of discriminating against girls through the use of sex selection.

HEALTH

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions today. The first one is from my constituents in Surrey, Newton and North Delta.

The petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada to create a ministry for people with disabilities and mental health issues. Of those with mental health issues, only one-third who need services in Canada actually receive them.

Routine Proceedings

The petitioners feel that creating a ministry for those people would build a healthier harm reduction solution that is much needed. New Democrats recognize the importance of ensuring that Canadians who are living with mental illness have access to the supports they need.

IMMIGRATION

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my second petition is also from my constituents in Surrey, Newton and North Delta.

The petitioners call on the Government of Canada to make reuniting families a central priority in Canada's immigration system. They feel the government's two-year freeze on reunification applications for parents and grandparents was a misguided response to growing backlogs and that it weakened Canadian communities.

New Democrats agree that we should focus on family reunification to strengthen our communities and our economy by making Canada a more welcoming place for immigrants from around the world.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I would just point out that normally, during presentation of petitions, we avoid any commentary in respect to supporting one way or the other the petition being presented.

The hon. member for Nickel Belt.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions I would like to present today.

The first one is from many communities in Nickel Belt, including Warren, St. Charles, Field, Val Caron, and Hanmer, and it calls on Canadians to support their public health care system. The petitioners want to ensure that every Canadian has access to the same high-quality health care services wherever they live.

DEMENTIA

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition calls on the government to support a national strategy on dementia.

* * *

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if Questions Nos. 1135 and 1136 could be made orders for return, these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 1135—**Mr. Stephen Woodworth:**

With regard to government funding in the riding of Kitchener Centre, for each fiscal year since 2007-2008 inclusive: (a) what are the details of all grants, contributions, and loans to any organization, body, or group, broken down by (i) name of the recipient, (ii) municipality of the recipient, (iii) date on which the funding was received, (iv) amount received, (v) department or agency providing the funding, (vi) program under which the grant, contribution, or loan was made, (vii) nature or purpose; and (b) for each grant, contribution and loan identified in (a), was

a press release issued to announce it and, if so, what is the (i) date, (ii) headline, (iii) file number of the press release?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 1136—**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:**

With respect to Canada's submission to the 20-year review on progress and challenges in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action: (a) what specific consultations with provinces and territories did Status of Women Canada (SWC) undertake regarding Canada's National Review, (i) on what dates did each consultation occur and with whom, (ii) what review process was put in place to ensure provinces and territories' perspectives were adequately reflected; (b) who specifically drafted Canada's National Review, (i) what departments gave specific input and on what dates, (ii) how many drafts of the submission were produced and on what dates, (iii) what departments and specific people reviewed each draft; (c) what Canadian NGOs were present at the NGO Forum before the United Nations Economic Commission of Europe Regional Review, and was there an opportunity to give feedback to SWC on the National Review, and, if so, what was the specific feedback; (d) what are the specific outstanding challenges the government acknowledges regarding the (i) pay gap, (ii) occupational segregation, (iii) violence against women and girls, (iv) participation of women in key leadership positions in Canadian business; (e) what specific annual investments has the government made between 2006 and the present to address each of the outstanding challenges identified in (d), and what legislative changes has the government passed to address these specified challenges; (f) what specific annual investments has the government made to reduce poverty since 2006 among (i) Aboriginal women, (ii) immigrant women, (iii) senior women, (iv) women with disabilities; (g) what legislative changes has the government passed to reduce poverty among (i) Aboriginal women, (ii) immigrant women, (iii) senior women, (iv) women with disabilities; (h) how is Canada a "leader in promoting gender equality", including international rankings of Canada's gender gap; (i) how did Canada "take seriously" its domestic commitments to achieve the goals of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and what are the specific annual investments made for each of the 12 priority themes for the years 2006 to the present; (j) how did Canada "take seriously" its international commitments to achieve the goals of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action; (k) what specific annual investment has the government made between 2006 and the present in (i) strengthening national systems to protect children and youth, especially girls, from violence, exploitation, and abuse, (ii) supporting safe and secure schools, (iii) providing opportunities for youth at-risk to find alternatives to crime and violence; (l) what information does the government possess concerning violence against women, specifically (i) what are the economic costs of spousal abuse in Canada, (ii) what percentage of survivors of spousal abuse are women, (iii) what specific annual investments has the government made to end violence against women and girls since 2006; (m) what specific annual investment has the government made in child advocacy centres across Canada since 2006; (n) what was the specific cost to create the new online resource centre "Stop Family Violence," (i) how many hits has the resource had, (ii) how many times has it been used to create new programming or improve programming across the country; (o) what specific projects to assist women and girls fleeing domestic violence have been funded through the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, and what has been the investment in each project; (p) what specific projects has the government funded regarding emerging issues, specifically "violence committed in the name of honor", and what was the amount invested; (q) what specific projects has the government funded regarding emerging issues, specifically "engagement of men and boys in violence prevention", and what was the amount invested; (r) what was the specific cost to produce the "Stop Hating Online" resource, and how many hits has the site had; (s) what is the SWC's annual investment in projects to end violence against women and girls between 2006 and the present; (t) what specific annual investments has the government made to prevent sexual violence between the years 2006 and the present; (u) how is Canada recognized as a leader in the protection of women's rights with respect to (i) reproductive, (ii) maternal, (iii) newborn, (iv) child health; (v) what investment has the government made in the protection of women's rights identified in (u) for the years 2006 to the present; (w) what are the specific target and indicators Canada is advocating for with respect to child marriage, early marriage, and forced marriage in the post-2015 development agenda; (x) what specific annual investments has Canada made with respect to First Nations and Inuit to improve health outcomes between 2006 and the present; and (y) how much money is set aside annually to ensure compliance with the "Health Portfolio Sex and Gender-Based Analysis Policy"?

Government Orders

(Return tabled)

[English]

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

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all notices of motions for the production of papers be allowed to stand.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1540)

[English]

ECONOMIC ACTION PLAN 2015 ACT, NO. 1

Hon. Peter MacKay (for the Minister of Finance) moved that Bill C-59, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on April 21, 2015 and other measures, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a great pleasure to be here today to discuss Bill C-59, the new chapter of our government's economic action plan.

It is apparent that our plan continues to yield results. Indeed, Canada continues to move forward in the face of a fragile external environment and global economic uncertainty. Despite this uncertainty, Canada has achieved one of the best economic performances among G7 countries over the recovery. Real gross domestic product has increased more in Canada than in any other G7 country since the end of the recession. Furthermore, since we introduced the economic action plan to respond to the global recession, Canada has recovered all of the jobs lost during the recession, and more. In fact, the Canadian economy has posted one of the strongest job-creation records in the G7 over the recovery, with over 1.2 million net new jobs created since June 2009.

Today's legislation would continue our government's hard work. It would help families and communities prosper, support jobs and economic growth, ensure the security of Canadians, and of course, fulfill our promise to balance the budget.

In my allotted time today, I would like to highlight some of the important and thoughtful measures in Bill C-59 and illustrate how they would benefit Canadians.

Our government holds a fundamental belief: those who work hard to earn their dollars deserve to keep them. It is why we have cut

taxes over and over again. In fact, this government has lowered taxes every year since coming into office. That is over 180 different times. As a result, the overall federal tax burden is now at its lowest level in more than 50 years. Canadians at all income levels are benefiting from the tax relief introduced by our government, with low- and middle-income families receiving proportionately greater relief.

In 2015-2016, Canadian families and individuals would receive \$37 billion in tax relief and increased benefits as a result of our government's actions taken since 2006. For example, a typical two-earner family of four would receive tax relief and increased benefits of up to \$6,600 in 2015 thanks to measures such as the family tax cut, the universal child care benefit, the GST reductions, the introduction of the children's fitness tax credit, and other broad-based income tax relief measures.

By reducing taxes consistently and enhancing benefits to Canadians, the government has given families and individuals greater flexibility to make the choices that are right for them. Canadians know that it is only the Conservatives who can be trusted to truly lower taxes for them.

Bill C-59 would go even further to help Canadian families make ends meet by supporting tax fairness through the family tax cut, which would allow a higher-income spouse to in effect transfer up to \$50,000 of taxable income to a spouse in a lower income bracket. By increasing the universal child care benefit for children under age six and expanding it to children aged six through 17, parents would be eligible for a benefit of \$160 per month for each child under the age of six and \$60 per month for children aged six through 17. This is great news for every Canadian family with children. Increasing the child care expense deduction dollar limits by \$1,000, effective for the 2015 tax year, would mean that the maximum amount that could be claimed would increase to \$8,000 from \$7,000 for children under age seven and to \$5,000 from \$4,000 for children aged seven through 16, and to \$11,000 from \$10,000 for children who are eligible for the disability tax credit.

Every single Canadian family with children under the age of 18 would benefit from these important measures. The Liberal leader admitted that he believed "benefiting every single family is not what is fair". I disagree. Our government believes that every single Canadian family would keep more of its own money, and that is the absolute definition of fairness.

• (1545)

We would also increase the tax-free savings account annual contribution limit to \$10,000 to help Canadians save more of their hard-earned money. Whether they want to purchase a new home or car, start a new business, or save for retirement, Canadians have many reasons to save at every stage of their lives. That is the whole reason our government introduced the tax-free savings account in the first place. The TFSA provides greater savings incentives for low- and modest-income individuals, because in addition to the tax savings, neither the income earned in a TFSA nor withdrawals from it affect a person's federal income-tested benefits and credits, like the Canada child tax credit or old age security and guaranteed income supplement benefits.

Government Orders

I am proud that Bill C-59 would give Canadians more options when it comes to saving for their future and would let Canadians, not the government, manage their own money.

Just as we are making it easier for Canadians to save, we want them to feel confident that they will be able to enjoy their golden years. The fact is, Canadians are living longer than ever and are opening new rich chapters in their lives in retirement. That is why Bill C-59 introduces measures to give seniors more freedom and flexibility when it comes to managing their retirement income.

For example, Canadians' retirement savings are typically held in tax assisted registered plans, such as RPPs, registered pension plans; registered retirement savings plans, RRSPs; registered retirement income funds, RRIFs; and tax-free savings accounts, TFSA's.

Bill C-59 would adjust the RRIF minimum withdrawal factors that apply in respect of ages 71 to 94 to better reflect more recent long-term historical real rates of return and expected inflation. As a result, the new RRIF factors would be substantially lower than the existing factors, helping seniors across the country. By permitting more capital preservation, the new factors would help reduce the risk of outliving one's savings while ensuring that the tax deferral provided on RRSP and RRIF savings continued to serve a retirement income purpose.

This is another example of how we are supporting seniors, not looking for new ways to tax them. Unlike the opposition members, who would much too eagerly jump at the opportunity to tax Canadian seniors, and they have proven that recently, we believe that the best thing we can do is provide extra support for seniors with lower taxes, solid pensions, and a strong health care system.

Let me take a minute to recognize the brave men and women who have stood and fought, and continue to, for our freedom. Those are Canada's veterans. We must never forget the contribution veterans have made to our freedom and security. They have willingly defended the security of Canadians knowing full well the potential cost of their own commitment. We owe them our compassion, our respect, and our gratitude.

With the implementation of the new veterans charter in 2006, the government significantly increased the range of benefits and services it provides to veterans. This included not just compensation but support to help restore their ability to function back at home and in their communities. However, we can always do more for these heroes, which is why I am extremely proud that Bill C-59 proposes additional improvements to the charter, including new investments to enhance benefits for moderately to severely disabled veterans and increased support for family caregivers. Specifically, it would create a critical injury benefit, which would provide a \$70,000 tax-free award to Canadian Armed Forces members and veterans who have suffered service-related severe, sudden, and traumatic injuries or diseases.

Furthermore, many veterans depend on the support of friends and family who often provide informal caregiving services. Therefore, the bill would create a new tax-free family caregiver relief benefit to seriously disabled veterans who require daily assistance from an informal caregiver. This new benefit would provide annual financial

support of \$7,238 to eligible veterans so that they could better afford paid services and give respite to their loved ones.

When I speak with veterans in my home riding of North Vancouver, I appreciate the sacrifice these Canadians have made. I am pleased that the bill can go a long way in giving them more of the assistance and support they need.

● (1550)

However, there is still more, and I would like to turn my attention to small businesses.

We know that small businesses are the lifeblood of the Canadian economy. They account for over 90% of all businesses in Canada and employ two-thirds of all Canadians. Needless to say, our government believes that small businesses should spend their time growing their businesses and creating jobs, not choking on high taxes and excess red tape. It is why we have repeatedly cut taxes significantly for small businesses and their owners. Building on our record, today's legislation would reduce the small business tax rate to 9% by 2019, the largest tax rate cut for small businesses in more than a quarter of a century.

For example, for a Canadian small business with taxable income of \$500,000, as a result of this tax cut and other measures since 2006, the amount of federal tax paid would be 46% lower than in 2006, which is nearly half of what it was just nine short years ago. This would mean an annual tax reduction of up to \$38,600 that could be reinvested in the business to fuel its growth, retain capital and create long-lasting jobs.

I would now like to discuss one of our government's most important promises: balancing the budget.

When the great recession hit us, we responded quickly and effectively with a historic stimulus program. Our plan worked. We emerged from the recession faster and stronger than virtually any other major advanced economy. When the crisis passed, we set out on a course to balance budgets, but we did not do it by raising taxes or slashing transfers for education and health care, like the Liberals did in the 1990s.

It is really important to point out that we balanced budgets while keeping transfers now at the highest level in history. We focused on controlling operating expenses for federal departments, identifying efficiencies that focused on making government operations better and more efficient. As a result, the deficit has been reduced from \$55.6 billion at the height of the global economic crisis to a projected surplus this year of \$1.4 billion and \$1.7 billion the year after. This is great news for Canadians everywhere.

Government Orders

Indeed, when we survey the state of the global economy, Canada's reputation for sound fiscal management is ironclad, and the world looks to Canada as a leader and economic powerhouse, well tested against the odds. That is a reputation our government intends to keep and it is exactly why Bill C-59 introduces balanced budget legislation. The legislation would ensure that the hard-won gains achieved over the past five years would remain in place for future generations.

We have said it before and we will say it again: budgets do not balance themselves. The opposition members, who seem preoccupied with high taxes and deficits, may think that they do, but here on this side of the House we know that fiscal discipline, balanced budgets and strong leadership will leave our children and grandchildren with an even more prosperous country.

The legislation would also ensure that the only acceptable deficits would be ones that respond to a recession or an extraordinary circumstance, such as a war or natural disaster. Deficits outside of a recession or an extraordinary circumstance are unacceptable and the need to return to balanced budgets is immediate. To that end, this legislation proposes that, should Canada again enter into deficit, the finance minister would be required to testify before the House of Commons committee on finance within 30 days and present a plan with concrete timelines to return to balanced budgets.

Moreover, should the deficit be due to a recession or other extraordinary circumstance, operating spending would be frozen, as would the salaries of cabinet ministers and deputy ministers government-wide once the recovery begins. If on the other hand the deficit is due to mismanagement, operating budgets will be frozen automatically and the salaries of cabinet ministers and deputy ministers alike would be reduced by 5%.

This approach would ensure that any increase in spending to respond to a recession, war or natural disaster would be temporary, targeted and timely. It is just another way that our government is taking leadership to ensure long-term prosperity for Canadians.

•(1555)

I could list many more measures in this bill that would benefit all Canadians, but I see that my time is almost up.

Our government's hard work has borne fruit. Our economic action plan is working, and we continue to get noticed on the global stage for our rock solid economy. In fact, ours is the largest economy that still has a Triple-A long-term credit rating. Canada is one of only a handful of countries in the world that still has that Triple-A credit rating.

For example, the World Economic Forum rated Canada's banking system as the soundest in the world for the seventh year in a row in its annual Global Competitiveness Report. This is unheard of. According to KPMG, total business tax costs in Canada are the lowest in the G7, and 46% lower than those in the United States. In fact, Bloomberg says that Canada is the second best place in the world to do business. When was the last time that happened? I do not think that has ever happened.

This economic resilience also reflects the actions that our government took before the global crisis, including lowering taxes and paying down debt. In fact, we paid down about \$39 billion in

debt prior to the recession. We have also reduced red tape and promoted free trade and innovation.

Our government's priorities have always been to create well-paying and secure jobs for Canadians and Canadian families, to lower taxes for Canadian families and businesses, and to balance the budget. Bill C-59 does not stray from these priorities. In fact, the bill would ensure that Canada's future is secure and prosperous, with a healthy economy fuelled by low taxes and sustainable public finances, all while helping families, seniors, veterans, small businesses and many more. It is another reminder that a government can reject high-tax and high-spend schemes that would put us back in a deficit and still provide meaningful support for all Canadians.

I encourage all members of the House to read the legislation. I hope that the opposition gives the bill the support that it deserves.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, where do I start? I notice that parliamentary secretaries were not included in those who have to take a pay cut if the government runs deficits. It is utter hypocrisy, but that one section of this massive omnibus bill is truly hypocritical. My friend neglected to mention that it is an omnibus bill. It is another kitchen sink bill of another 157-odd pages with everything thrown into it, particularly things that the government does not want Canadians to see.

Even in the Conservatives' balanced budget legislation, it is a bit of a deathbed conversion for the Conservatives, because they have added more than \$150 billion in deficit since taking office. Notice how they did not have any of that legislation in place while they were running those massive deficits. It was just as they crept toward a balance, which they achieved through cuts to rail service, rail protection, food inspection, cuts to veterans, cuts to the CBC and selling off GM shares.

My colleague from Parkdale—High Park says that the Conservatives looked through the couch, got out all of the change that they could find and then sold the couch as well in order to creep toward that balance. Now we see them coming forward with this motion around a balanced budget.

Let me take on one aspect of what my friend raised today. The doubling of the TFSA has been studied by many economists, both Conservative and progressive. They show that the top 20% of Canadians would realize 180% more of the benefits than everybody else. Again, the top fifth, the absolute wealthiest part of this country, will get 180% more benefit than everybody else in the country.

I wonder how my friend can possibly justify that particular measure when so many Canadians, particularly in the middle and working classes, need a break?

Government Orders

• (1600)

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Mr. Speaker, I am glad that the member opposite asked me that question, because it gives me the opportunity to again repeat that the tax-free savings account is the most popular savings vehicle since RRSPs were introduced half a century ago. In fact, 11 million Canadians have already opened TFSA's, and the vast majority are middle and low-income Canadians, including 600,000 seniors with incomes below \$60,000. They are maximizing their TFSA room, and they will benefit from this measure.

It would give Canadians another opportunity to save for their retirements, to save for that down payment on a house and to save for their children's education. It is just another opportunity for Canadians to save with tax assistance from the government.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when I listen to the member, what comes across my mind when he boasts about the economic action plan is that the government has really missed the mark by not recognizing that this budget is not a fair budget. It is not a budget that addresses the many needs of Canada's middle class. It is not fair. It gives more to Canada's wealthiest, while at the same time, does not give the attention necessary to the hard-working middle class and those who aspire to being part of Canada's middle class.

The former Conservative minister, Jim Flaherty, said income splitting would favour 14% of Canada's population, the wealthiest of Canada's population, and the middle class would have to foot the bill.

Does the member believe that Jim Flaherty and others who have been critical of the government's taxation policy are wrong? How does he justify to Canadians that this is a fair budget when we know in reality it is not a fair budget?

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Mr. Speaker, when it comes to fairness, it is the middle- and low-income Canadians who have actually benefited the most as a result of our measures. Here is a quote from Mackenzie in Swan River, Manitoba. She said:

This helps a lot for single parents.... Thank you for helping us raise our children.

The Liberals want to raise taxes on middle-class families. They think that budgets balance themselves. They want to raise taxes on middle-class seniors and they want to raise taxes on middle-class consumers. That is their plan, to raise taxes on the middle class.

In contrast, our Conservative government is reducing taxes on the middle class, and in fact benefiting all Canadian families, but do not take my word for it. This is a quote from the CFIB:

CFIB gives 2015 budget an "A": Big tax cut for small business

....small business owners across the country will be thrilled to see several small business friendly measures in the 2015 budget...

What is good for small businesses is good for Canadians and good for employment.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, my question is to the hon. parliamentary secretary, and I echo the concerns of my friend from Skeena—Bulkley Valley. When we are presented with yet another omnibus budget bill, we fear that as in the previous multiple omnibus budget bills, the independent different sections of this one will not get adequate study.

I am particularly concerned in this first question about division 20 of part 3. I have read the bill. It is on page 147. How can we possibly claim that the Treasury Board and the Government of Canada have entered into collective bargaining with our hard-working public sector workers when we are unilaterally, through the legislation, changing the approach to sick leave?

I am very embarrassed by this. I think those people who work so hard in the Government of Canada are beleaguered by repeated efforts to make it look as though they do not work hard and do not deserve the support of the Canadian public. I ask my hon. colleague to reconsider division 20 of part 3.

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague may have read that section, but she obviously does not understand it.

Economic action plan 2015 reaffirms the government's commitment to pursuing a new disability and sick leave management system. The 40-year old sick leave accumulation system is antiquated and not responsive to the needs of the majority of our employees.

Over 60% of the employees in the public service do not have enough banked sick leave to cover the waiting period before accessing long-term disability benefits; 25% have fewer than 10 days banked sick leave. This places them at risk of income loss. A modernized system would provide adequate support for all employees, regardless of age, medical history and years of service.

The system is not equitable, leaving younger or newer employees without means to handle a short-term illness or injury. The current system also does not have a provision to address mental health issues.

We are resolving those in this budget.

• (1605)

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when the tax-free savings account was first established, it was heralded as the best innovation in retirement savings since the RRSP, and we fulfilled a promise that we made to the Canadian people to double the tax-free savings account. I believe that it is the responsibility of government not only to help those who need help but to provide tools for those who can help themselves so that they can make sure they have adequate savings to have a comfortable retirement.

I am wondering if the parliamentary secretary could elaborate on the benefits of the increased TFSA and what it is going to mean to millions of Canadians.

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Mr. Speaker, the tax-free savings account is being heralded across the country as the best savings vehicle since the RRSP was introduced half a century ago, as I mentioned. As a result, 11 million Canadians have chosen to take up the TFSA, and the vast majority of them are middle- and low-income Canadians. These are people who want to save for their future so that they can be comfortable in their retirement.

Government Orders

The least a government can do is offer Canadians a vehicle with tax assistance. It is a voluntary vehicle, so it is up to people whether they want to contribute, but it is a tax-assisted vehicle so that they can save for the future.

It is not a mandatory vehicle of the kind the opposition wants to impose. This is a voluntary vehicle, because we believe Canadians are the ones best able to decide how and when they want to save for the future.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as always, I am honoured to speak in the House, but I am not particularly honoured to speak to Bill C-59. This bill is more than 150 pages long and will be devastating not only for the Canadian economy, but also for Canadian workers.

The Conservatives have once again introduced an omnibus bill designed to push through hundreds of changes that are not subject to study or oversight. This bill contains more than 270 clauses amending dozens of laws, most of which have nothing to do with the budget.

The Conservatives' income splitting plan will cost Canadian taxpayers billions of dollars and will benefit only the wealthy. The increase to the TFSA limit will only make things worse.

[*English*]

With more than 150 pages in this massive omnibus bill, yet again we see the Conservatives essentially abusing the parliamentary process. Today *The Globe and Mail* called it a “contemptuous disregard for Parliament” and “an ugly precedent”.

I remember what the current Prime Minister—and not for long prime minister—said while in opposition about omnibus legislation that he did not like. He said:

Second, in the interest of democracy I ask: How can members represent their constituents on these various areas when they are forced to vote in a block on such legislation and on such concerns?

We can agree with some of the measures but oppose others. How do we express our views and the views of our constituents when the matters are so diverse?

The massive omnibus bill that the Prime Minister was criticizing was 20 pages long. However, Conservatives have brought in three omnibus bills that were over 450 pages long, and another one topped out at over 880 pages.

Therefore, I guess what Conservatives are saying to Parliament and to Canadians is that in such an abusive relationship, this is just a small abuse, so we should accept it and tolerate it. However, in one fell swoop, dozens of laws would be affected, from Parliament Hill security to terrorism to veterans to undermining basic human rights protections for unpaid interns to undermining the charter protection for collective bargaining for public servants in this country. All of that is rammed into this one bill, and Conservatives are going to ram it through Parliament just as surely as day follows night.

Let us first set the context of where this particular budget lands in the Canadian economy.

Members will notice that the Conservatives' talking points about the economic performance of the government are increasingly stale. That is because the only numbers that show any positive light on

what is happening in the Canadian context are now three, four, and five years old, and according to the Department of Finance, for the last 15 months growth in Canada's economy has been less than 1%.

To put that in historical context, that is the worst record outside of a recession for any government in more than 40 years. I will repeat that: outside of recession, the last almost year and a half has been the worst growth record of any government in the last four and a half decades. Still Conservatives would have us believe that everything is fine, despite massive job losses in the energy sector, retail sector, and sectors like manufacturing. We have now lost more than 420,000 good-paying manufacturing jobs over the nine long years since the Conservatives took power. That is more than half a million manufacturing jobs lost since 2000.

This is devastating for the Canadian economy. As we have seen and as the Governor of the Bank of the Canada shows us consistently, when oil prices rise, the Canadian dollar rises, which tends to have a somewhat negative effect on manufacturing output, and when it drops, manufacturing typically picks back up in Canada. However, the Canadian dollar now hovers around 80¢. We have not seen that uptick in the manufacturing sector, because things are different now. Under the Conservatives' watch, the downturn in manufacturing has become more permanent.

•(1610)

There are in fact 250,000 fewer jobs in Canada right now than before the recession hit and more than 160,000 fewer jobs for young Canadians than before the recession hit. We have not yet recovered from the depths of the recession. We have not yet seen the recovery that Canadians were expecting. Certainly, if one believed all the ads the government has bought with taxpayer money—almost \$750 million worth—one would think everything was perfect. However, Canadians know different, because Canadians right now are carrying the highest debt loads in Canadian history. Each individual household is now carrying, on average, more debt than we ever have since our country was founded.

We also see, from a government that claims fiscal austerity and prudence, that the historical record has actually met the current record. The Conservatives have added more than \$150 billion to the national debt. That is \$4,000 for every man, woman, and child in the country. We know it is more than \$4,000 per person because by the time we pay that debt off—if we ever pay it off, and certainly not under our current government's plan—it will be much more than \$4,000, because when one borrows money, it always ends up costing more. Every Canadian has had that experience with student loans or car loans or a mortgage. However, that is how much the Conservatives have added to the national debt.

Government Orders

People might ask what we got in return. Did we get a robust economy? Did we get a more diversified and sustainable economy, such as the one the leader in Alberta, Rachel Notley, talks about creating for that fine province? No. We have again seen an overreliance on a soaring commodity price that goes up and goes down. We have seen yet another opportunity squandered by the government.

If the Conservative economic plan was working, then the Conservative economic plan would be working, and it is not. Canadians know it, and no \$750 million ad buy is going to convince them otherwise.

We have also seen in the budget document, this omnibus bill, that there are a lot of perks in it for the wealthy and the well connected. They do okay. In fact, they do great.

Bankers do not tend to use very colourful or aggressive language generally, but when asked about the performance of the Canadian economy just a few weeks ago, the Governor of the Bank of Canada called it “atrocious”. He is right.

In an atrocious economic environment, one would think job one from the government of the day would be to create jobs, to get people back to work, to diversify the economy, to invest in the economy in ways that would actually produce the jobs that we have been missing since the last global recession. Instead, we see the true priorities of the Conservatives when it comes to jobs, and that is their own jobs. They are hoping to buy back re-election just one more time.

“Give us one more chance”, say the Conservatives, “We’re going to figure this thing out this time.” What they are looking to do is buy some votes and trick folks yet again with something like income splitting, which will cost in the order of \$2.2 billion and do nothing for 85% of Canadian families whatsoever. It does something for 15% of families, and those families are particularly in the wealthier brackets. Nearly \$2.5 billion will go to help the top 15%, and produce what in the economy? Nothing, except a little help for those who already have had quite a bit of help.

One might say that is enough of a bauble to give to wealthier Canadians, but the Conservatives say, “Wait; there is more. We are going to take a thing called the tax-free savings account, which right now has a limit of \$5,500 per year, and nearly double it to \$10,000.”

When we look at the actual impact of doing something like this, we see that tax-free savings accounts, despite the claim from the government, have not increased savings for Canadians. There is no evidence whatsoever that since TFSAs were first introduced in 2009, there has been any increase in savings for Canadians, which is the whole reason the government brought in the program in the first place. If the intention of the program was to help people save and people are not saving as a result of the program, we enter the very definition of insanity, which is to keep doing the same thing and expect a different result. However, that is exactly what we get when we deal with Conservatives.

Let us look instead at what the doubling of the TFSA actually does. There was a moment of truth in this whole debate that came from the Minister of Finance. Occasionally he drops by and says some things or talks to the odd reporter.

● (1615)

He said that this thing gets very expensive later on, which was the question, because it does. The cost to the treasury gets up into the tens of billions of dollars. He said, “Why don’t we leave that to the Prime Minister’s granddaughter to solve that problem?” Is that not nice? Is it not nice when a generation before us says, “Yes, we’re creating a huge hole, but we’re going to let the people a generation or two down the line fill it in”.

Those are not the conservatives I know. In the place I represent in northwestern British Columbia, the conservatives I know always look to make things better for their kids and grandkids, and that extends beyond the financial into the environmental. It is the idea that we try to leave the place better than we found it. Both on economics and the environment, Conservatives are at least consistent. They are into the scorched earth policies. They are into the ones that they will pay later. They are like the guy in Vegas with the ATM card who just does not know how to quit.

According to the Parliamentary Budget Office, which the Conservatives routinely quote in this place, an office we helped the Conservatives create, if we all remember, some nine years ago, this doubling of the TFSA would give the top 20% who receive this benefit 180% more than every other group of Canadians below them. Think about that for a moment. Almost double the advantages, almost double the money, almost double the benefits of everyone else combined would go to the people at the very top of the pile.

We also know that the PBO expects the benefit to high-wealth households to increase by 35%, while low- and middle-wealth households are, and this is a quote, “not projected to be materially affected by the proposed changes”. Therefore, middle- and working-class Canadians get bupkes; nothing. It is for the wealthiest group, which does have 10 or 20 grand just burning holes in their pockets at the end of every year.

I do not know what middle-class group of Canadians the Conservatives are talking to, but the ones I deal with are struggling just to make ends meet, with the high cost of child care, electricity, paying for their mortgages, and just keeping their homes good and happy. Most of the families I talk to do not have \$10,000 or \$20,000. Do members know who does? Do members know who is maxing out on this already and will max out in the future? It is the wealthy households. This is why the Conservatives are able to skew the stats. The children of wealthy families are maxing out their TFSAs and will again. It is a shelter for wealthy Canadians, which is how they are proposing to use it, making the problem even worse.

New Democrats maintain that keeping the TFSA where it is is fine, but doubling it will end up costing tens of billions of dollars, and again we have to ask to what effect.

Government Orders

There is so much in this bill. Let us talk for a moment about a proposal the NDP made as the government was clamouring to get to a balanced budget. We said we have this child poverty situation in this country that years and years ago the House of Commons solemnly committed to eradicate, under the leadership of Ed Broadbent, the former New Democratic leader and a mentor to many of us. All members stood in the House, Conservatives included, and said, "We are going to get to this problem, because it is a problem that affects all of us. It does not know right and left. It is right and wrong, and this is right". The House of Commons said it was going to do something about it, so New Democrats came up with a solution.

The tax code is thousands of pages long, by the way. It costs billions of dollars for Canadians to file every year. The Conservatives only make that problem worse and more expensive for individuals and small businesses. They do not mind, because it is all about the next election. However, under that massive tax code, there is a little loophole for CEOs, for those who receive their pay in stock options. Again, I am thinking about the middle- and working-class Canadians I know. Not a lot of them get paid in stock options.

People who get paid in stock options pay almost half the tax that everyone else does. Is that not nice? Is it not nice to get paid in stock options and only pay half the tax? For people making north of \$250,000, \$350,000 a year, times are tough.

There is a \$750 million per year loophole in the tax code now that we said should be closed. It is easy, it is understandable, and we know what to do with it: take every single dollar from that loophole and help eradicate child poverty in Canada. Who is going to vote against that? Who is going to stand in this place and say no, no, no, the folks in the corner offices, the CEOs, the guys driving the Maseratis and the Ferraris, they need that money. It is hard to get to St. Barts and St. Kitts these days. Prices are high for that second, third, and fourth vacation home.

Instead, New Democrats said to use it to eradicate child poverty, which would help right across the board, not only the children and families involved who are living below the poverty line but our education system and our health care system, and it would help Canada be a more productive and prosperous nation.

• (1620)

We have also seen in this massive bill the ramming in of an entire veterans bill, which was before the House, Bill C-58, and that the government has been stalling on for years, to help out our veterans. After the Conservatives' shameful treatment, which continues to this day, denying veterans of this country the benefits they are so deserving of, they decided to pick it up *holus bolus* and drop it into an omnibus bill.

Just before this debate started, we sought the strength of the House of Commons to take that veterans bill and move it right to committee today. What did the Conservatives say? No. They said no. They said they did not want to do that. They would rather have it go through this process that will take weeks and perhaps months and go to the Senate and all the rest of that stuff. That is how much they care about veterans. It is a political football for them to toss around again and again.

The changing of Hill security, the changing of a constitutional decree about how security should be done on the Hill, is also in this.

New Democrats have been fighting, through the good work of a number of our MPs from all across the country, to protect unpaid interns from unreasonable work and sexual harassment at work. We had a bill we have been fighting for through Parliament. The Conservatives denied it. They put something in here, but they forgot to put the part in to protect unpaid interns from sexual harassment. They forgot, they said. It did not come up, they said. We had legislation going through the House. These are disproportionately young Canadians and they are vulnerable in the workplace because obviously, if they are seeking an internship, particularly an unpaid one, they are trying to get a resume together, trying to get a foot in the very difficult marketplace and job market. Yet Conservatives found no room in their hearts to actually fix this.

I have to say a couple of things that are positive, because I am an optimistic guy. There are four things out of 157 pages. That is not bad. Unsurprisingly, they were proposals we put forward to the House of Commons.

Before I went into politics, I was a small-business owner. I know intuitively, and the facts back it up, that small businesses are the engine of the Canadian economy. They create eight out of 10 new jobs in Canada in the private sector. They account for almost 45% of our GDP, the strength of this economy. While Conservatives and Liberals alike have been handing out billions upon tens of billions of corporate tax cuts to the largest corporations, we said how about a little break for small businesses. The NDP proposed a 2% drop in the small business tax rate.

We also said that manufacturing has been hammered. More than half a million jobs have been lost in just 15 years, and more than 400,000 jobs have been lost in manufacturing since the government took over. We said let us help out manufacturing.

We also said that we want to see innovation, because Canada's private sector consistently has one of the lowest levels of innovation in research and development of any of the developed nations. We have to change that, so we put a motion to the government and debated all day in the House of Commons. What did the government say? It said that is was bad economics and a bad idea, and the Conservatives voted against the NDP motion.

Government Orders

Lo and behold, surprise of surprises, those very same ideas ended up in the omnibus budget bill. I guess they were such bad economics that the Conservatives found themselves agreeing with the NDP's ideas. Good for them. Imitation is the best form of flattery, but imitation is obviously not as good as the original. The Conservatives decided to lower the small business tax rate twice as slow as what we had proposed. There is urgency in trying to buy some votes from wealthier Canadians, but they will take their time when it comes to helping small businesses.

Conservatives also changed some rules about RRIFs, which the member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River had proposed, and they extended the compassionate care benefits in EI to help people who are caring for a loved one at end of life. We think that is good. We think we need to change the rules around EI so that more people, particularly women, who are the ones who do 75% of this palliative care, actually qualify for EI.

In summation, to say this is yet another failed opportunity is far too gracious. This is a government so focused on its own prospects it is unable to see the concern we have, shared by the governor of the bank, by private sector economists, and by developed nations, writ large, that the Canadian economy is sputtering. It is not creating the jobs. It has not recovered those jobs.

• (1625)

Mr. Speaker, I move:

That the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word "That" and substituting the following:

"this House decline to give second reading to Bill C-59, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on April 21, 2015 and other measures, because it:

- a) fails to support working- and middle-class families through the introduction of affordable childcare and a \$15-per-hour federal minimum wage;
- b) imposes wasteful and unfair income-splitting measures which primarily benefit the wealthy and offer nothing to 85% of Canadian families;
- c) fails to protect interns against workplace sexual harassment or unreasonable hours of work;
- d) implements expanded Tax-Free Savings Account measures which benefit the wealthiest households while leaving major fiscal problems to our grandchildren;
- e) rolls a separate, stand-alone, and supportable piece of legislation concerning Canada's veterans into an omnibus bill that contains vastly unrelated, unsupportable measures; and
- f) attacks the right to free and fair collective bargaining for hundreds of thousands of Canadian workers."

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The amendment is admissible.

Questions and comments. The hon. member for Winnipeg North.

• (1630)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate many of the comments made by the New Democratic finance critic. It is safe to say that there are certain aspects we are in agreement with.

For example, in questioning the parliamentary secretary, I emphasized how unfair the taxation policy in this budget is. In the amendment being proposed, the member made reference to income splitting. We are in complete agreement that income splitting would benefit fewer than 15% of Canadians, and we are talking about some of the wealthiest Canadians.

We can talk about the tax-free savings account and how, again, it is disproportionately Canada's wealthiest people who would be able to take advantage of what would be provided by the government.

It seems to me that it would be the middle class that would be taxed to pay for these benefits. Therefore, the budget is an unfair budget, and we need to see some changes.

My question for the member is related to what has been a fairly well-received plan espoused by the leader of the Liberal Party and the Liberals. It deals with the 7% cut in income tax for the middle class. I have not heard what the NDP's position is on that sort of tax cut. Are the New Democrats in favour of the 7% tax cut the leader of the Liberal Party and the Liberal caucus have been advocating? It would be a fair tax cut and would assist Canada's middle class, because a healthy, strong middle class means a strong economy.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, my friend from Winnipeg was doing so well right up until the end there. We have to differentiate a couple of things that are important here.

The income splitting that has been in place for a number of years for Canadian seniors has within it a great deal of equity. It helps wealthier seniors but more importantly it gives middle-income and lower-income seniors the ability to split income. We want to maintain that.

The TFSA originally, with the cap of \$5,500, was a fine measure. It did not increase savings at all in Canada, which is purportedly the reason the government brought it in. However, in and of itself it is fine; it is the doubling. The Conservatives take two ideas that are okay and then warp them into something that is inherently unfair, which I think speaks to my friend from Winnipeg's point.

I have spent some time looking at the current version of the Liberal leader's tax plan. It has changed a couple of times. The only concerns I would raise is that two-thirds of Canadian filers do not receive any benefit whatsoever under the plan. That is according to Finance Canada and Statistics Canada numbers. There is a second piece where the largest share under the Liberal leader's plan goes to incomes between \$90,000 and \$200,000. That is the lion's share of the benefit. Last, I would say that the numbers are not yet quite complete for the Liberals' plan. There is at least \$2 billion they have admitted to, probably another billion dollars, that is missing, as well as just over-assuming the revenues from their tax augmentation and those north of \$200,000.

We have looked at it. We think we have a better offer. The \$15 a day child care for Canadian families would directly help the middle- and working-class Canadians, as well as a national \$15 minimum wage. That would clearly bring at least a few more people up into just approaching the poverty line, which I know sounds radical to the Conservatives, but this is something that the New Democrats believe we should at least aspire to.

Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if my colleague's intervention is not informative it certainly is entertaining. I did like the point he made about imitation being the finest point of flattery. That might explain why he has adopted my hairstyle. He does recall that he did also say in his own words that the imitation is not as good as the original. Therefore, I will claim to be the original bald guy here right now.

Government Orders

The member talked about the budget measures we are putting in place benefiting largely people with Maseratis and Lamborghinis, but nobody in my riding owns a Maserati or a Lamborghini. I have never even seen one.

This budget increases transfer payments to my home territory to record levels, in fact, 63% higher than previous Liberal government investments. It has record health care transfers. It is allowing local governments to determine their own priorities and needs at a local level. There are excellent measures in here to let local jurisdictions decide what their priorities are and then deliver them for the people of the north.

I am just wondering if the member opposite could explain this to us. If all these measures are so bad, why is it that the member for Ottawa Centre has been communicating in his riding about all of the measures that we are putting in place and why would he promote those measures if the New Democrats are so against them?

• (1635)

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, let me deal with the hairstyle question first because it is obviously the most important one. If precedence is important, then I think he has to give some credit to the member who is sitting just in front of him. Let us deal with this and honour those who have gone before us in breaking that style into common and very stylish usage.

If the Conservatives are going to compare themselves to the Liberal record before, it is just not really a high bar to set. We need better standards than that because we know through the 90s that the way that the great deficit slayer Paul Martin did that was by cutting transfers massively to the provinces and territories while handing out tens of billions of dollars to the wealthiest corporations and allowing billions more to go into offshore accounts. What that did was haemorrhage the abilities of the provinces and territories to pay for things like roads, schools and bridges. That was the choice that the Liberals made.

That was then, this is now. This is an important point that has not yet come up. What we are dealing with now is if we look at foreign direct investment coming out of Canada right now, out of the top five nations that Canadian corporations and the wealthiest Canadians are sending their direct investment to, three are tax shelter countries, such as Barbados and the Cayman Islands. The Conservatives have not done anything about this. We are not talking about a small amount of money, we are talking about \$57 billion to \$65 billion going out the door every year to be invested in Barbados. I am sure it is a nice place, but the reason wealthy Canadians and those corporations are doing it is to avoid paying taxes here.

I would have thought that my friend from the Yukon and others would have been raising this point and hammering it away. However, there has been nothing about tax evasion here. Rather, there are cuts to the CRA, which would go after those same tax evaders. We think that should be changed.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Skeena—Bulkley Valley, our finance critic, for his very enlightening and informative speech.

I would like to take him in a slightly different direction. The Conservatives' speeches are often carbon copies of each other and we rarely hear anything new. We already know what they will say. What they never mention are the less positive effects of their measures.

In this case, they are taking all the credit for increasing the universal child care benefit, for example, which is in their budget and in this budget bill. However, they never mention that, in order to be able to pay for the increase to the UCCB, they are eliminating other tax credits. Money does not grow on trees. The government eliminated the child tax credit, which the Conservatives never mention. They give the impression that they are giving gifts that have no consequences.

I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on this kind of rhetoric and on the negative effect this could have over the medium term on public funds and also on Canadians' confidence in the government's financial management skills.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I thank my esteemed colleague from Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques.

I am concerned about the Conservatives' very negative choices, because they will affect future generations and the future of this country over the short and long terms. That party is having serious political problems, as we saw in Alberta, for example. The Minister of Finance has said that it is not his problem, but rather a problem for future generations to worry about. That is not reasonable and it is not conservative.

With respect to the Conservatives' speeches, I agree that they are often carbon copies of each other. They always use the same points and the same language. It is always nonsense. It is not a very original party, but that is their choice.

This is about our economy and the sustainability of our economy. We are currently facing a few very serious challenges and we need a government that is just as serious, that believes in clean energy and that wants to invest in all Canadians, rather than helping only the rich.

The Leader of the Opposition has some good solutions that are supported by several economists. Like many other people, I have high expectations for the upcoming election, for Canadians will have a very clear choice between the Conservatives' policy and the NDP's policy, which is more progressive, more equitable and more effective.

• (1640)

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before we go to resuming debate, it is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands, Foreign Affairs; the hon. member for Trinity—Spadina, The Economy.

Government Orders

[Translation]

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise today on behalf of the people of Bourassa, whom I represent, and to present the position of the Liberal Party on omnibus Bill C-59, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on April 21, 2015 and other measures.

This bill says a lot about the Conservative government's current state. It is obvious that we are headed towards an election. This government has always had a single priority: remaining in power. Therefore, it is not surprising that budget 2015 and the bill before us are all about electioneering. Unfortunately for Canadians, when electioneering becomes the sole priority, the government loses all its vision. There is nothing in the budget for economic growth, jobs, the environment or first nations.

The major challenges that we are up against today are completely ignored. Why? There is an election this year, and the sole purpose of the Conservatives' budget is to please its political base. The priorities are now giving gifts to the wealthy and partisan advertising.

The only thing that almost made me smile yesterday after my team, the Canadiens, lost, was the knowledge that we will no longer have to watch the Conservatives' partisan ads at the expense of Canadian taxpayers. The measures in this bill, which we are supposed to be debating today, have already been advertised to all Canadian homes, as though Parliament had nothing to say about the matter. That is essentially how it works under the current government. The Prime Minister governs, and once he has ruled, we, as representatives of Canadians, have nothing left to say. We are familiar with this. Even the members on the other side of the House are muzzled.

I rise today in the House to debate this bill, but I also rise in direct protest of this undemocratic way of running the country's affairs. Fortunately there is an election this fall. It is high time for change. This government is preparing for an election instead of governing, so it is no surprise that its bill is completely out of touch with Canadians' priorities. Although the bill does contain some small measures that we support, its main elements are policies that will simply not benefit Canadian society. That is why we will not support this bill.

I would like to list some of the measures in this bill that are utterly unacceptable. Let us start with income splitting. This is a clear example of how out of touch with reality the Conservatives are because, as we know, only families whose two incomes are in different tax brackets will benefit. That excludes single-parent families. Even a family that the Conservatives would consider typical, a four-person family—according to their 2014 budget—would not get a cent from that. I am talking about people with incomes ranging from \$48,000 to \$72,000. Such a couple cannot benefit from income splitting at all. We might wonder why the Conservatives are bound and determined to implement this unfair measure that will not do anything for the economy. Put simply, this is an election promise. It was a mistake in 2011, and it is still a mistake now. Still, they insist on bringing in income splitting. Ever since they made that promise, publications and testimonies discrediting the measure have been piling up.

● (1645)

If the government would get its head out of the sand, it would have heard when the C.D. Howe Institute was the first to sound the alarm way back in October 2011. That organization said that 85% of Canadian families would receive nothing, and that among two-parent families, nearly half would receive absolutely nothing or just a few scraps.

In January 2014 the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives was the next one to say that 86% of families would not receive anything and that 60% of families with the lowest incomes, that is under \$56,000, would receive only \$50, on average, based on the Conservatives' proposed income splitting.

In June 2014 the Broadbent Institute said that nine out of ten families would not get anything. This measure, which targets families with children under the age of 18, has completely missed the mark. Most of them will receive absolutely nothing.

This year, on March 17, the Parliamentary Budget Officer was the next in line to say that the Conservatives' plan for income splitting will cost \$2.2 billion in 2015. He estimates that the average benefit will go to families with incomes above \$180,000, and that this measure will encourage the person with the lower income, the secondary income, to leave the labour market to try to take advantage of it, which could cost up to 7,000 full-time jobs. Once again, the Conservatives' income splitting measure will cost \$2.2 billion.

It is no surprise that, even among the Conservative ranks, some members oppose this measure. I hope they will say so publicly, here today in the House. Yes, some will be held to account, but I also want to talk about one Conservative in particular. The former finance minister, the late Jim Flaherty, had been sounding the alarm from the beginning. On February 12, 2014, he said, and I quote:

I think income-splitting needs a long, hard analytical look...to see who it affects and to what degree, because I'm not sure that overall, it benefits our society.

He added:

It benefits some parts of the Canadian population a lot and other parts of the Canadian population virtually not at all.

The Conservative government insisted on introducing income splitting anyway.

Income splitting has gotten a lot of coverage in the national media as well. In an article in the *Financial Post*, on February 14, 2014, entitled "Forget income splitting, Canada needs to cut tax rates", the Fraser Institute said that Jim Flaherty was right about income splitting and that this measure does almost nothing to stimulate the economy or improve Canada's competitiveness.

The Canadian Taxpayers Federation said:

[This program has] been denounced by every credible economic think tank, representing every shade of the political spectrum. Even the federal finance department has weighed in—that analysis is so damning that nearly everything but the commas was redacted before it was released to the public.

Government Orders

The only person who believes in and cares about income splitting is the Prime Minister. It should be noted that he stands to get \$2,000 from this measure, but single-parent families will not get a penny from it. We know full well that even within the Conservative caucus, not everyone is comfortable with this patently unfair measure.

• (1650)

With a middle class that is having difficulty making ends meet, a collapsing job market and zero economic growth, we could surely find a better way to spend the \$2 billion. The Liberal Party is proposing to give back to the middle class and stimulate economic growth.

To conclude with income splitting, I also want to talk about the misinformation being spread by the Conservatives to the effect that the Liberal Party of Canada is against income splitting for seniors. That is false. We are against the \$2 billion income splitting measure in this bill.

Another measure in this omnibus bill concerns the TFSA, or the tax-free savings account. We have to talk about this. I will come back to the fact that this is an omnibus bill, which is really ridiculous.

I would like to clearly state that the Liberal Party supports TFSAs. In their current form, they are an excellent savings vehicle. However, the government has decided to double the TFSA limit in this bill, and that is not right.

Some incorrect statistics are being quoted about TFSAs. Let us clarify. According to the Department of Finance, 18% of Canadians contribute to a TFSA and 40% of those people make the maximum contribution of \$5,500. That means that only 7% of Canadians make the maximum contribution of \$5,500 to a TFSA.

The government likes to bandy those numbers about and often says that families that earn \$60,000 will benefit from the TFSA. Let us clarify. Before TFSAs were introduced, families were struggling to save money. When that measure was introduced, they took all of their savings from previous years and contributed the maximum amount to a TFSA.

The Conservative government always likes to boast that families that earn \$60,000 or more can contribute the maximum amount to a TFSA. However, let us be clear. How can a family with a gross income of \$60,000 a year that files a tax return manage to save \$20,000 per family or \$10,000 per person? I do not know any Canadian who earns \$60,000 and can save \$10,000 a year. That is completely unacceptable.

Still on the topic of the TFSA, the Parliamentary Budget Officer's job is to keep us informed, and he thinks that one-third of the cost of the TFSA will be borne by the provinces. We now understand why the provinces hate this proposal.

Since TFSAs are not taken into account in the calculation of income-tested benefits, old age security cheques will start showing up in the mailboxes of seniors who do not need it. What did the Conservatives do? They have no problem taking away these payments from the seniors aged 65 to 67 who need it most. That is the reality.

We now know why the Conservative government chose to push the retirement age to 67. It wanted to save some money at the expense of seniors aged 65 to 67 who are most in need of help. Why? In order to finance gifts for the wealthy or those who are already well off. A society is judged on the basis of how it treats its most vulnerable. That is worth mentioning.

Let us talk about other measures. The universal child care benefit, the UCCB, is a good idea to give back to families and enable them to take care of their children. It is expensive to raise children. Putting money in the pockets of parents helps them make their own choices about how best to raise their kids.

• (1655)

The thing is, not all Canadian families have the same needs. The families of the Prime Minister and the leader of the Liberal Party of Canada do not need this benefit, this enhanced version of the universal child care benefit, the UCCB, that provides \$100 here and \$60 there. That money should be going to middle-class families and those working hard to join it. Giving money back to those who really need it should be the priority.

That brings us to the plan that the Liberal Party leader announced on Monday. It is clear. The plan says that we will give money back to the middle class and stimulate growth through very simple, generous, ambitious and, above all, tax-free measures. The Conservatives think that Canadian taxpayers are not smart enough to understand some of the measures they have come up with. The UCCB is taxable. The Conservatives dole out \$100 here and there, but it is not really \$100 because the following year, people have to include that amount in their tax return and pay tax on it. That is unacceptable. Why play with tax measures like that? It is fundamentally a very complex law, and the measures they are proposing add to that complexity.

We say no. We need to simplify it as much as possible. For instance, if a family has a child under the age of six and an income of \$30,000, we will give that family the non-taxable amount of \$6,400. That amount is net and crystal clear. If, however, that child is between the ages of 6 and 17, we will give that family a Canada child benefit worth \$5,400. It is clear. Those amounts are based on income, and there are other benefits that families with higher incomes will receive.

Those are two simple measures. First of all, there is a general 7% tax cut for the middle class. This measure will really benefit all Canadians. The second measure is the Canada child benefit. I do not think that the Prime Minister's family or the Liberal leader's family need to receive the universal child care benefit, as I said. Let us give it to the people who really need it the most. That is what our measure does.

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This is a clear and ambitious plan, as I said. All of that is in the bill, and the government introduced an omnibus bill. I should be talking about that in my speech. There are some measures in the bill that we agree with. However, since it is an omnibus bill, we will be voting against it. It contains some important measures, but for us, the most important thing to remember is that everything I talked about is for the rich. The Liberal Party has presented an ambitious and generous plan for all families, because we need to give money back to middle-class families and stimulate economic growth, which will be good for Canada as a whole.

● (1700)

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Bourassa for his presentation.

I agreed with what he said in the first few seconds of his speech when he characterized the government's budget as strictly an election budget. I thought to myself that we may have found a rallying point. A few seconds later, I realized that, in fact, his introduction served only to give himself a turn at electioneering, but on behalf of the Liberals this time.

I did not really hear him talk about measures that seemed especially important, that are in the budget and that would help Canadians not only get a cheque at the end of the month, but also enjoy a well-paying job and a decent living.

This can be achieved with the help of small and medium-sized enterprises, which are the engine of the Canadian economy. The NDP moved a motion to reduce the tax rate for SMEs. My Liberal colleague voted against that motion. Our proposal is found in part or in essence in the budget, but over a much broader period of time.

What is the Liberals' position on this tax cut for SMEs?

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg: Mr. Speaker, it is my turn to thank my colleague from Trois-Rivières for his question.

As he said in the first part of his question, this is an election budget. I am pleased to hear that the NDP agrees. We should also mention that not only is this an election budget, but it also only helps the rich and the wealthy.

However, he alluded to our plan. The straight answer to his question is that there is nothing in this budget to stimulate economic growth. To that end, we are proposing measures that will give money back to the middle class. A number of retail companies have recently closed their doors because people have no money to spend.

Therefore, we are going to stimulate the economy in such a way as to ensure we have sustainable growth in Canada.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague for his excellent speech. It is truly edifying to listen to my colleague, the member for Bourassa, talk about the economy.

I would like to share some comments with the House.

Middle-class families often have children about to enter university. They need money to pay for tuition. We note that many middle-class Canadians have a great deal of debt. If they were to find themselves with some disposable income, would it be more attractive for them to invest in an education savings plan? As we

know, the return is quite high. I believe that the federal government contributes 20¢ on every dollar contributed, up to a maximum federal contribution of \$500. Furthermore, the Government of Quebec kicks in some money. Therefore, the return is quite impressive.

Is this one of the best investments to make with disposable income for a middle-class family that hopes to pay for its children's tuition, for example?

● (1705)

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Lac-Saint-Louis for his question.

I agree with him that education is very expensive. These days, we meet many families—and I imagine he does in his riding too—who do not know how they are going to pay for their children's university education. It is therefore important to make those investments, but again, people need to have money to do that. Here is the plan that we are proposing to allow these people to have money in their pockets so that they can set some aside for their children's education.

Very briefly, let us look at a typical family, one that earns \$45,000 and has a child who is 16 and a child who is four, for example. This family is already thinking about university. Our measure will give that family \$4,000 more than this Conservative government is proposing. We are going to give them \$9,850 because they have children. That will allow them to set some money aside and invest in these plans and help pay for their children's education.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my neighbour in the House of Commons. I must confess that I really like the Haitian accent. It is so beautiful.

However, I have a really serious question for my colleague about Parliament's abusive use of omnibus budget bills.

Does the Liberal Party's position involve doing away with such abuse? I think that all the opposition parties have to commit to doing away with this sort of abuse before the next election.

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg: Mr. Speaker, it is true that we are neighbours and that we have had some excellent conversations here in the House and in the halls. I thank the member for her well-put question. I congratulate her for making the effort to speak French.

I must tell my colleague that we are against omnibus bills. A few years ago the current government claimed that it was against these bills, which at the time might have had 20 or 30 pages. Now we have a bill with more than 175 pages. It is not unusual for the Conservatives to introduce a bill that is more than 200 pages long, with everything bulked in together.

If we want to do a good job as parliamentarians, it is important for us to have bills that are more focused so that we can vote on as few elements as possible when we are debating bills.

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Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my colleague, who spoke a lot about the Liberals' suggestions to help young mothers with young children. I would like to share a statistic from the Childcare Resources and Research Unit, which stated that in 2012, just 22.5% of children under the age of six had access to quality, regulated child care services. More than 73% of mothers of these children are in the workforce. The Liberals' proposal will simply not be enough, in light of the lack of quality, regulated child care spaces for children and given that child care can cost more than \$1,500 a month per child. Their proposal does not acknowledge the existing problem.

Is the member prepared to acknowledge these facts and to look at the NDP's new proposal to provide meaningful assistance to women who need child care spaces so that they too can go to work and improve their quality of life?

• (1710)

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

Before I respond specifically to the daycare and child care aspect she mentioned, I would like to respond to her comment that the Liberal Party of Canada's proposal will not be enough. We presented a \$22 billion plan. Consistency is important. The NDP keeps asking where we will find the money, and now they are saying that the amount is not enough. I just said that we are going to give \$6,400 to families for each child under the age of 6.

When it comes to child care, we did that. With Ken Dryden, we put forward measures that both the NDP and the Conservatives rejected. Now the NDP is back with its \$15 proposal. The New Democrats are offering that \$15 proposal regardless of a person's income, regardless of whether they earn over \$200,000 or just \$15,000. We have to be fair and equitable. We have given Canadians a plan that is fair, generous, equitable and tax-free.

[*English*]

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to speak to budget 2015 and Bill C-59, an act that would implement various measures contained within the budget. The budget contains many measures that I know Canadians are looking forward to seeing put in place.

Before I go on, I should inform the House that I plan to split my time with my hon. colleague from Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette.

I would like to congratulate the Minister of Finance on his first budget and, especially, for all of the hard work that he has put into it. It has long been my view that governments should spend when spending is necessary and save taxpayers' money when saving is possible. This budget controls spending within a balanced budget and provides important tax breaks and cost-saving measures for taxpayers. For this, I congratulate the minister on his very important work.

I would like to acknowledge the work that was carried out by the previous minister of finance, my good friend, Mr. Jim Flaherty. Mr. Flaherty paved the way for this budget during his time as the minister of finance. He oversaw important stimulus funding during the recession and reeled in spending following the recession. His

success as minister of finance has allowed Canada to be in the strong economic position that it is in today.

In terms of the budget itself, I am pleased to see that it is balanced. A balanced budget allows governments to cut taxes and pay down debt. It should be noted that before the 2008 recession, this government had already paid down \$37 billion of federal debt. This has allowed Canada to emerge from the recession as a global economic leader with the lowest net debt to GDP ratio in the G7.

Canadians expect the government to work within its means, as they have to. That is why having this balanced budget is so important. The budget is balanced while at the same time maintaining record transfers to the provinces for health and education, and keeping the overall federal tax burden at its lowest level in more than 50 years.

This is no easy feat, but maintaining balanced budgets when possible is what is expected of any government. That is why I am pleased to see that the government has introduced legislation to ensure that all future budgets, except during times of recession, are balanced.

I recently hosted a community teleforum for residents in my riding of Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, which allowed constituents to vote on several poll questions and call in to express support for or concern about actions of the government. There were several callers who expressed their appreciation that the government had balanced the books. Furthermore, I asked participants to vote on a poll question related to the new balanced budget legislation. The result was an immense amount of support for this legislation.

Having discussed the efforts that the government has taken to balance the budget, I would now like to highlight several measures contained within this implementation act that would greatly benefit residents of Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound and, indeed, all Canadians.

The first measure is the reduction in the small business tax rate from 11% to 9% by the year 2019. This measure will affect 100% of the small businesses in my riding of Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound and will support the local economies of the many small communities in the area. It is estimated that this measure will reduce taxes for small businesses by \$2.7 billion over the 2015-16 to 2019-20 fiscal years. This is an extremely positive measure that is very widely supported.

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Another measure that I am supportive of is the increase in the lifetime capital gains exemption from \$800,000 to \$1 million for owners of farms and fishing businesses. Several farmers in my riding over the past couple of years have expressed support for this measure and we are very happy to see that it is in there. They realize that it will keep more money in the pockets of farmers who are trying to pass on their farms to the next generation. Without this, when they transfer capital, it will otherwise be lost in taxes. This is a huge benefit. In all my work and time on the agriculture committee, and the minister was there today, we are always looking at different ways that allow young farmers to get into the business, and this is a big one.

• (1715)

The lifetime capital gains exemption was increased in budget 2007 from \$500,000 to \$750,000, and then increased in 2013 to \$800,000 and now up to \$1 million. That is double over the course of those years. Since 2007, it has been more than doubled, and that is great news for all farmers.

Furthermore, increasing the tax-free savings account annual contribution limit to \$10,000 is a very positive measure for many residents in Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound. I have already had several constituents contact me asking when they can begin investing more in their TFSA's. I have been pleased to inform them that this measure is effective for the 2015 taxation year. Despite what some people have said about this measure, the TFSA helps many seniors and low and middle-income Canadians save their money. In fact, more than half of tax-free savings account holders earn less than \$42,000 per year, and nearly 700,000 seniors who earn less than \$22,000 have a TFSA. Therefore, this measure supports a wide range of Canadians.

Along with the TFSA, seniors rely on their registered retirement income funds, or RRIFs as they are commonly known. Many seniors welcomed the announcement that budget 2015 would reduce the minimum withdrawal factors for their RRIFs. Currently, seniors are required to withdraw 7.38% of their RRIFs in the year they turn 71. Although I cannot remember the year, we actually raised that age from 69 to 71. The percentage then increases each year until age 94, when it is capped at 20%.

The new RRIF factors would range from 5.28% at age 71 to 18.79% at age 94. This would allow seniors to have greater flexibility when drawing on their retirement savings and it would also reduce their risk of outliving their savings. It is important to point out that seniors raised that money during their working years, and we have enabled them to use it to enhance their retirement, but more on their terms versus the government's.

Finally, the bill would also implement several important measures to support our veterans and their families. This would be done by providing a new retirement income security benefit to moderately to severely disabled veterans, expanding access to the permanent impairment allowance for disabled veterans, and creating a new tax-free family caregiver relief benefit to recognize caregivers of veterans. These important measures would ensure that our brave men and women would have the support they need and most certainly deserve.

In conclusion, I would like to highlight the success of this and previous budgets since 2006.

Since 2006, a typical two-earner Canadian family of four will receive tax relief and increased benefits of up to \$6,600. This is due to the fact that the government has consistently been lowering taxes and introducing support measures. I believe we are up to around 140 different taxes that this government has cut. I stand to be corrected on that number, but I believe I am pretty close. That is a lot.

When we hear from constituents, some will say that a certain tax cut does not benefit them. One thing I remind constituents is that not every tax cut benefits every Canadian. For example, seniors will not benefit from what we have done for families with young children, the same way young people will not benefit from things put in place for seniors. Overall, every Canadian will benefit from at least one of our cuts.

• (1720)

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully, particularly to the beginning of my colleague's speech. He said something about how budgets should be crafted, which I thought was interesting. I then listened to talk about what was in the budget.

Here is the problem with what has been put forward by my colleague. He forgot to mention that the Conservatives took the approach of a fire sale to balance the budget. They cut public services, veterans, meat inspection. As a result of that, 19,000 jobs are gone. The Conservatives then had a fire sale on General Motors, which they had to be pushed and shoved to respond to it in 2008 when they denied there was a recession. The member forgot to mention that. Then they have put a cap income splitting that will only benefit 15%. I know the member's riding well. A lot of people are hurting and suffering. They will not benefit from income splitting.

I would like the member to address the fact that this budget will leave many people behind and the fact that the Conservatives have approached this balance by selling off assets, raiding employment insurance and are not helping everyday people.

Mr. Larry Miller: Mr. Speaker, my friend across the way is wrong in quite a few areas. He touched on food inspection at the start. I am a former farmer, although I still have my land being farmed. I take offence to that comment because we have the safest food in the world. We have a great system to ensure it stays safe. The job is being done. We have to give credit where it is due.

As to his comments at the end, people in every part of the country struggle from time to time, but he is wrong on the income splitting. This is wanted, it is needed and it will be widely appreciated once it is in place.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will give the hon. member a hypothetical scenario and ask him what he would do.

Let us say he was the head of a middle-class family with young or adolescent children and he wanted to save some money for them to go to university. Maybe he was given some extra money or perhaps his debt was finally paid off, although we know Canadian families are very much in debt these days. Maybe he had some extra cash around, perhaps owing to the Liberal child benefit when it is implemented. Would the hon. member put that money in his TFSA or would he put the money in an RESP, which would earn probably a 25% per year return?

Mr. Larry Miller: Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day, the easy answer is that people want choices. If people want to choose to put it in an RESP, or in a TSFA or to keep it in a shoebox at home, that is their prerogative.

However, Canadians do not want the Liberals' child care plan, especially not the NDP's child care plan. They want the choice. They want the money back in their pockets, like our government has done, and they will decide how to distribute it.

I speak with a bit of knowledge on this because two of my sons have young kids. They are in daycare. In fact, my wife is babysitting two of them today. That is how we help out our family and my kids.

• (1725)

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Consular, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member talked about the expensive plan the NDP had, which is the state-run daycare it wants to put in place. We know full well that would cost billions of dollars and impact about 5% of the kids.

I would like him to talk a little more about the importance of a balanced budget. I think he mentioned that we brought in \$6,600 in benefits and decreased taxes through all kinds of things, TSFAs, GST reductions, tax credits over the years, income splitting, apprenticeship training programs, student grants and those kinds of things.

We are at the point now where we have a balanced budget, and I am very proud of that. However, could he talk a bit about the importance of a balanced budget? Both parties on the other side are talking about increasing taxes. Every family in the country would be hit with that. When the opposition parties think of fairness, they think of taxing every family equally.

Would the hon. member talk a bit about balanced budgets and our program around that?

Mr. Larry Miller: Finally a good question, Mr. Speaker, from my colleague from Saskatchewan.

He is absolutely right. If I had a list of all the tax cuts and benefits this government has made, you would probably cut me off, Mr. Speaker, because I would not have time to read them all.

The member comes from a farming background. He knows what it is like to owe money, to borrow money to enhance his farming operation, but he also knows at the end of the day he has to pay that back. We cannot keep running deficits and building up debt, whether it is a small business loan, a bank loan or a student loan. We have to pay the mortgage off some day.

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in my short period of time, I would like to

cut to the chase very quickly and talk about two letters I received from two of my constituents who are directly affected by this budget. These are average, rural Manitobans who are not rich by any stretch.

First, I received a letter from Ms. Mackenzie Danard, a mother from Swan River, Manitoba. She wrote me to say, "This helps a lot for single parents", because she is one of them. She said, "Thank you for helping us raise our children". So much for the idea that this a budget for the rich. It is not.

I also received a letter from Ms. Wendy McDonald from Newdale, Manitoba. Ms. Macdonald was in Ottawa just last week and she wrote me to say: "The reason we were able to afford our trip to Ottawa was due to our income tax refund, which was larger than expected due to income splitting law! ...our family chooses to put the child care benefit money we receive directly into RESP for our 2 children, and I will be one of the Canadians that will benefit from the increased allowance on TFSA accounts because saving is important to me and allows me to be fiscally responsible in my own household."

It was shameful for the leader of the Liberal Party to say yesterday, "benefiting every single family is not what is fair". For these two families, this is fair.

I want to make a point about the NDP members especially. They dislike ambition, they dislike merit and they dislike hard work. We are the party truly representing working people and this budget is designed for people who work hard and play by the rules.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette will have eight minutes remaining in time for his remarks when the House next returns to debate on this question.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1730)

[English]

CANADA SHIPPING ACT, 2001

The House resumed from May 6 consideration of the motion that Bill C-638, An Act to amend the Canada Shipping Act, 2001 (wreck), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): It being 5:30 p.m. the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at second reading stage of Bill C-638.

Call in the members.

• (1810)

(The House divided on the motion, which was negated on the following division:)

*Private Members' Business**(Division No. 403)***YEAS**

Members

Allen (Welland)	Angus
Ashton	Atamanenko
Aubin	Bélangier
Bellavance	Bennett
Benskin	Bevington
Blanchette	Blanchette-Lamothe
Boivin	Borg
Boutin-Sweet	Brisson
Brousseau	Byrne
Caron	Casey
Cash	Charlton
Chicoine	Chisholm
Choquette	Christopherson
Côté	Crowder
Cullen	Cuzner
Day	Dewar
Dion	Dionne Labelle
Doré Lefebvre	Dubé
Dubourg	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Dusseau
Easter	Eyking
Foote	Freeman
Fry	Garneau
Genest	Genest-Jourdain
Giguère	Godin
Goodale	Gravelle
Grogulé	Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Harris (St. John's East)	Hsu
Hughes	Hyer
Jones	Julian
Kellway	Lamoureux
Lapointe	Latendresse
Laverdière	LeBlanc (Beauséjour)
Leslie	Liu
MacAulay	Mai
Marston	Masse
Mathysen	May
McCallum	McGuinty
MacKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	Michaud
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)	Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Mulcair	Murray
Nash	Nicholls
Nunez-Melo	Pacetti
Papillon	Péclet
Pilon	Plamondon
Quach	Rafferty
Ravignat	Regan
Saganash	Sandhu
Scarpaleggia	Scott
Sellah	Sgro
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)	
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	
Sitsabaiesan	St-Denis
Stewart	Stoffer
Sullivan	Trudeau
Valeriot	Vaughan
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)— 113	

NAYS

Members

Ablonczy	Adler
Aglukkaq	Albas
Albrecht	Alexander
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Ambler	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Armstrong	Ashfield
Aspin	Barlow
Bateman	Benoit
Bergen	Bernier
Bezan	Blaney
Block	Boughen
Braid	Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Butt	Calandra

Calkins	Cannan
Carmichael	Carrie
Chisu	Chong
Clarke	Clement
Crockatt	Daniel
Davidson	Dechert
Devolin	Dreeschen
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Dykstra
Eglinski	Falk
Fantino	Fast
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)	Fletcher
Galipeau	Gill
Glover	Goguen
Goldring	Goodyear
Gosal	Gourde
Grewal	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hawn	Hayes
Hiebert	Hillyer
Hoback	Holder
James	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kent	Kerr
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lake	Lauzon
Lebel	Leaf
Leitch	Lemieux
Leung	Lizon
Lobb	Lukiwski
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Maguire	Mayer
McColeman	McLeod
Menegakis	Miller
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Norlock
Obhrai	O'Connor
O'Neill Gordon	Opitz
O'Toole	Payne
Perkins	Poillievre
Preston	Raitt
Rajotte	Rathgeber
Reid	Rempel
Richards	Rickford
Ritz	Saxton
Schellenberger	Seeback
Shea	Shipley
Smith	Sopuck
Sorenson	Stanton
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Tilson
Toet	Trost
Trottier	Truppe
Valcourt	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Wallace
Warawa	Warkentin
Weston (Saint John)	Wilks
Williamson	Woodworth
Yelich	Young (Oakville)
Young (Vancouver South)	Yurdiga
Zimmer — 145	

PAIRED

Nil

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion defeated.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

ECONOMIC ACTION PLAN 2015 ACT, NO. 1

BILL C-59—NOTICE OF TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to advise that an agreement could not be reached under the provisions of Standing Order 78(1) or 78(2) with respect to the second reading stage of Bill C-59, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on April 21, 2015 and other measures.

Under the provisions of Standing Order 78(3), I give notice that a minister of the Crown will propose at the next sitting a motion to allot a specific number of days or hours for the consideration and disposal of proceedings at the said stage.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

NATIONAL ACTION PLAN TO ADDRESS VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

The House resumed from April 28 consideration of the motion.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak on Motion No. 444 because we absolutely need a national action plan to end violence against women and we need a public inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women and girls immediately. Our party, the Liberal Party, has been pushing very hard for both of these fundamental issues.

I am profoundly saddened that such a motion is even needed in this millennium, in the year 2015, and that such a motion is needed to make the current government act. The motion is indeed needed because the level of violence that women and girls experience in Canada has changed little over the past two decades; that is, the current response to violence against women and girls failed to significantly lower the levels of violence they experience. I thank the member for Churchill for bringing this forward.

Civil society, including the YWCA and the Canadian Network of Women's Shelters & Transition Houses, has been clear. In order to build a Canada where women and girls are not subjected daily to violence simply because of their gender, our governments must take a new approach.

Canada needs a coherent, coordinated, well-resourced national action plan on violence against women. This will require the leadership of the federal government, along with the co-operation of provincial, territorial, and municipal governments, as well as on- and off-reserve first nation and aboriginal governments.

The process of constructing a national action plan will be key in determining the plan's success. There are many individuals, organizations, communities, and researchers working diligently to

Private Members' Business

end violence against women. In my riding of Etobicoke North, I want to recognize the extraordinary life-saving work of Ernestine's Women's Shelter, a touchstone in our community, and all of those who work and volunteer for the organization.

The government must draw upon the diversity and depth of knowledge and experience offered by these communities, organizations, and individuals, and the final national action plan must clearly reflect the findings of those communities, organizations, and individuals.

Canadians should know that the rates of self-reported spousal violence in 2009 are the same as in 2004. We know from our daily lives that gender-based violence remains rampant. The facts support this conclusion: half of women in Canada—half—have suffered physical or sexual violence.

I do want to briefly touch upon sexual violence.

According to a 2013 Statistics Canada report that relied upon police-reported data, women aged 15 to 24 experience the highest rates of sexual violence in the country. Women reported 460,000 incidents of sexual assault to social service providers in 2009, but less than 10% were reported to the police.

I have asked the Minister of Status of Women to put the issue of sexual assault at Canadian post-secondary institutions on her next federal/provincial/territorial meeting agenda, as an estimated nearly one in five women are likely to be sexually assaulted as students.

In our country, on any given night, 4,600 women and their 3,600 children are forced to sleep in emergency shelters as a result of violence. On a single day, 379 women and 215 children were turned away from shelters in Canada, usually because they were stretched to capacity.

Exactly when did we, as a society, become accustomed to violence? Why do some men still respond angrily when the issue of gender-based violence is raised? Why does the government respond to a long-standing serious crisis in our country in a fragmented and piecemeal fashion?

Violence against women and girls is abhorrent. It is a human rights violation, with devastating and serious impacts that may last generations.

Each year in Canada, violence and abuse drive over 100,000 women and children out of their homes and into shelters. Women in Canada continue to outnumber men nine to one as victims of assault by a spouse or partner.

● (1815)

Girls between the ages of 12 and 15 are at the greatest risk of sexual assault by a family member. The human costs of violence are incalculable.

There are also economic costs. According to a study by the Department of Justice, violence against women costs Canadian society \$7.4 billion each year, including \$21 million in hospitalizations, visits to doctors and emergency rooms, as well as \$180 million in related mental health costs.

Private Members' Business

On August, 2013, the Minister of Health spoke at the meeting of the Canadian Medical Association, or CMA, where she announced she would make ending family violence the theme of her tenure. She repeated a similar message at the most recent meeting of the CMA in April 2014. I know her work in this area, but Canadians are still waiting for a national action plan to end violence.

Under international law every country has an obligation to address violence against women. The United Nations has called on all countries to have a national action plan by 2015. Other countries have developed such a model, such as the U.K. and Australia.

Currently, Canada has no comprehensive national plan or strategy to deal with violence against women. Initiatives at the federal level lack co-ordination, rely too heavily on the criminal justice system, and fail to acknowledge the gender dimension and root causes of violence against women.

Although Status of Women Canada lists ending violence against women as a priority area of their funding program, the rates of violence have yet to change. Does this not lead to questions about the effectiveness of the funding models at Status of Women Canada?

This results in underfunded and inadequate services that do not reflect women's lived realities, or effectively prevent violence and reduce impact. National action plans provide a framework for strengthening the systems that respond to violence against women. They establish national standards and call for collaboration between all levels of government, civil society, survivors and service responders. They put women's knowledge, experiences and needs at the centre.

A national action plan in Canada would help ensure: consistency across and within jurisdictions in policies and legislation; shared understanding of the root causes of violence against women; consistent approaches to prevention of and responses to violence; collective pursuit of the most appropriate solutions; and co-ordinated, clear and effective services, and systems for survivors that respect and respond to diversity.

Other needs include: new commitments and clear targets; effective prevention mechanisms; universal coverage of response mechanisms for survivors; review of all justice mechanisms, including policing, prosecution and offender management practices; efforts to strengthen social policies that affect women's vulnerability to violence; support for reliable data collection; and I could go on.

The time has come that we no longer talk about reducing violence against women, but actually end emotional, financial, physical, psychological and sexual violence. To do this there needs to be a concerted and sustained effort to develop a national action plan to end violence against women and girls, with real consultation with those women who are fleeing violence, with shelters and support services, with the provinces and territories. We need a national public inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women and girls immediately.

It is time for all of us to stand up and say that violence against women is not okay and that the time for action is now, so that no women will ever again face violence at the hands of a man.

• (1820)

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in this debate this evening on this very important motion, Motion No. 444, to create a national action plan to address violence against women.

I would like to thank my colleague from Churchill who has been tireless in her advocacy for this national plan and who is standing up strongly for an inquiry into the missing and murdered indigenous women. I would like to salute her and thank her for all of her hard work.

It is really shameful that we even need to have this debate. Clearly, we need a national action plan to address violence against women and girls in this country. It should not be necessary because for so many years this is something that has been urged for, both domestically and internationally. Even the UN has been calling for Canada to adopt this plan.

The rates of violence against women and girls in Canada is persistently and shockingly high, especially for doubly-disadvantaged, indigenous, racialized, LGBTIQ women, and those with disabilities. These calls for a national action plan come from all feminist women's organizations across the country. The government, clearly, needs to respond in creating this plan. It is fundamentally important for women in this country.

Let me just quote a credible, long-time activist organization, one that provides services for women in Canada, which is the YWCA. Ann Decter, who is the director of advocacy and public policy, wrote, "Canada needs a national action plan on violence against women that will set national standards for prevention, support services, legal services and access to justice and crucial social policies, such as access to safe, affordable housing. A National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women needs to be part of the plan. M-444 provides for all of this, and as such, has our full support."

Therefore, what is called for is clear. Women's organizations are speaking with one voice on this and it is long overdue that our government take action.

I want to give a couple of recent examples of what is happening in my city of Toronto.

On May 8, we had the murder of Suraiya Gangaram who was 31 and a single mom of three daughters. Her alleged murderer had threatened to kill her last year. He was out on bail and required to stay away from her. Nevertheless, he killed her and then threw himself in front of a train, but lived and, of course, will stand trial for this murder. However, she is now deceased and her three daughters are left without anyone to care for them.

Private Members' Business

Just last year we had another horrible, tragic case of 43-year old Zahra Abdilla who was murdered as were her two sons. They were killed in their home in Toronto. What was particularly tragic was that Mrs. Abdilla had been in a shelter for two weeks. She had been fighting to get custody of her sons, but could not afford a lawyer and had no options. There was no second-stage housing for her to go to with her sons, so she returned to her abusive husband and their home. She was killed and her husband subsequently committed suicide.

These are just a couple of the many examples of murder, but there are all kinds of other horrible situations of sexual violence and abuse.

• (1825)

In my own community of Parkdale—High Park, about a decade ago, a woman, Rosie McGroarty, was bludgeoned to death by her partner. It was a particularly gruesome case. I will not go into details, but it was again a situation that brought home the terrible reality of the kind of violence that far too many women are facing.

These are extreme examples, but the reality is that half of all women have experienced an incident of physical or sexual violence since the age of 16, and of course, an issue that has been all too prevalent in this House has been the call for an inquiry into the more than 1,200 missing and murdered indigenous women in this country and a call for the government, finally, to take action.

Instead, the government has cut many women's programs. We have certainly seen a failure to act in terms of funding for housing, affordable housing, second stage housing. The government cut and abolished the court challenges program. It slashed the budget of the Status of Women Agency by 70%. It took the word "equality" out of the Status of Women Agency's mandate.

It eroded pay equity legislation, blocked the NDP bill on trans rights. In case after case, whether it is failing to create even one child care space in this country, failing to have a national housing strategy, the government has failed women in this country.

I want to salute the many community members across this country who are trying desperately to fill in the gaps and are taking action. I want to salute, for example, in my own community the Redwood Women's Shelter, which is a safe haven for women who are leaving an abusive relationship, which is one of the most difficult things for a woman to do, especially if she has children. However, Redwood and its wonderful staff and volunteers provides emotional, practical and social support for women and their children while they are in that safe haven. It has a very high success rate: 80% of the women who are fortunate enough to find support at Redwood Shelter do not go back to their abusive relationship.

I want to salute the Parkdale anti-violence education group. I have worked with them to create a scholarship in the name of Rosie McGroarty, the woman who was very brutally murdered in our community. I especially want to salute Parkdale Community Legal Services and its community outreach person, Peggy-Gail Dehal-Ramson, who has been a real leader in working with women who have faced violence and are trying to get their lives back on track. She has provided really inspiring community development work with so many women in our community.

These community organizations exist across the country along with a small army of volunteers. Women, primarily, but some women and men who want to try to eliminate this terrible situation of persistent violence against women and girls need government leadership.

In closing, I want to be very clear what it is that we want. We want the Government of Canada to finally commit to the creation of a national action plan to address violence against women. We want it to do this in consultation and partnership with the provinces, territories, first nations, Inuit and Métis, governments and communities. We want broad consultation in all regions to include these front line service providers, housing advocates, legal advocates, law enforcement personnel, survivors and marginalized women advocates. This is long overdue.

I salute my colleague for bringing this motion forward and I challenge all members in this House to adopt this motion and finally take definitive action to help women and girls across this country.

• (1830)

Mrs. Susan Truppe (Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to participate in this debate on the motion before the House today, put forward by the member for Churchill. It deals with the very important issue of ending violence against women and girls. Our government takes the issue of violence against women and girls very seriously, and we have taken a multi-faceted approach to addressing it. Allow me to take a few moments to discuss some of the actions that we have taken.

We have made communities safer for all Canadians by enacting over 30 measures into law since 2006. For example, amendments to the Criminal Code made under the Safe Streets and Communities Act that came into force in 2012 promote safety and security. They also assist in holding criminals fully accountable for their actions through increased penalties for violent crimes, including child sexual offences, and restrictions on the use of conditional sentences and house arrest for serious and violent crimes.

Another example is Bill C-13, the Protecting Canadians from Online Crime Act, which came into force in March. It provides for a new Criminal Code offence, the non-consensual distribution of intimate images, which prohibits the sharing or distribution of nude or sexual images without the consent of the person depicted.

Private Members' Business

We have supported the needs of victims with Bill C-32, the Victims Bill of Rights Act, which received royal assent on April 23. This bill provides rights for victims of crime, many of which will benefit women who have experienced violence. For example, the bill gives victims the right to have their security and privacy considered, the right to be protected from intimidation and retaliation, the right to request the protection of their identity if they are a complainant or witness in a criminal justice proceeding, and the right to request testimonial aids.

Another recent example is Bill S-7, the zero tolerance for barbaric cultural practices act. This bill would address forms of family violence that are predominately perpetrated against women and girls. It contains proposed amendments to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, creating a new form of inadmissibility to Canada for those practising polygamy. It includes proposed amendments to the Civil Marriage Act to codify the requirement for free and enlightened consent to marriage and to introduce a new national absolute minimum age for marriage of 16. The bill would also introduce proposed new offences in the Criminal Code related to forced or underage marriages. It would extend the offence of removing a child from Canada to include removal for the purpose of a forced or underage marriage abroad, introduce a new forced or underage marriage peace bond to prevent these marriages from taking place, and limit the application of the defence of provocation so that it would not be available in honour killings and some spousal homicides.

These examples highlight the leadership role of our government in responding to violence against women and girls by establishing a strong legislative framework to protect victims and hold perpetrators to account. These legislative actions are a critical element of the multi-faceted approach that we have put in place to reduce and prevent violence against women and girls.

I would now like to describe some of the actions that we have taken beyond legislation. The Government of Canada has allocated more than \$140 million since 2006 to give victims a more effective voice in the criminal justice system through initiatives delivered by Justice Canada. Last September, we launched the latest phase of the stop hating online campaign to combat cyberbullying. This is a national awareness campaign to protect our children and youth from cyberbullying. On February 20, the Government of Canada announced a 10-year \$100-million investment to prevent, detect and combat family violence and child abuse as part of our government's commitment to stand up for victims.

On April 1, the Government of Canada began the implementation of its action plan to address family violence and violent crimes against aboriginal women and girls. We also continued collaborating with aboriginal leaders, aboriginal communities and other levels of government to get the most out of our respective action plans.

Our government also believes in giving communities the tools to help end violence against women and girls. That is why we have increased funding to Status of Women Canada, including the women's program, to record levels. In fact, we have invested over \$162 million in more than 780 projects through Status of Women Canada since 2007. This includes over \$71 million in projects to specifically address violence against women and girls. These efforts include a number of different calls for proposals for projects in rural

and remote communities and in post-secondary campus communities.

Another call for proposals is helping communities respond to cyber and sexual violence. More than \$6 million has been invested in these projects through Status of Women Canada so far.

• (1835)

My view is that we must continue taking actions like the ones I have described today, and therefore I will not be supporting this motion. However, we must continue working together because we know that no single individual, organization or government working alone can address the problem of gender-based violence.

We have made this issue such an important priority because we know that helping women and girls live violence-free lives is the right thing to do. However, we also know something else. We know that enabling women and girls to live free of violence removes a barrier to achieving their full potential for themselves, their families and their communities. Doing that will move us closer to equality in our country, which is something we all wish to see.

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Churchill for bringing this motion to the floor. I am pleased to speak in support of Motion No. 444 to look at a national action plan to end violence against women in our society. I would think that all Canadians want to see an end to violence because we know what the impact is upon all women, whether it is violence in the home, sexual harassment in the workplace or sexual assault. No matter what the case may be, it does pose many barriers for women to be able to progress and move forward and live a life without fear, stress and restraint. Those things are very important.

In 2015, it is unimaginable that any woman has to endure sexual assault or sexual misconduct in the workplace. It is unbelievable that any woman has to endure violence within the home and feel there is no avenue for escape, and feel that there are no other options available to her. We live in Canada. We live in a society where we look after those who are important to us, those people whom we represent.

In 2015, we should not have women marching in the streets asking for initiatives to end violence against women. However, unfortunately, that is where we are and that is the society that we are living in. It is very saddening that we even have to bring this motion to the floor of the House of Commons for debate, to call upon members of Parliament from across Canada to support a strategy like this. It is a strategy that should already be in place. We should be looking to end violence against women and not just to develop a strategy at this stage.

Private Members' Business

Unfortunately, this motion is needed. It is needed so that the level of violence against women and girls in Canada can be eliminated, so that what we have seen over the last decades will be no more. That is what all women and children out there want to see. They want to see a civil society where they are free to grow, learn and examine every opportunity that is open to them, and where they are not subjected daily to violence because of their gender.

In a country like Canada, we have the resources to not only develop a national action plan on violence against women, but we have the resources to ensure that the plan works, to ensure that resources are available to all communities, towns, cities and people who need it. However, it cannot happen without leadership. I listened to the member opposite on the government side talk about the initiatives that her government has brought forward to help women in society and the changes the Conservatives have made within the justice system to ensure greater penalties to those who commit the crimes of violence against women and girls.

No one is disputing that. What we are asking for is more, because we know that more can and should be done. There are a lot of communities around Canada where women are violently abused within their homes and have no place to seek refuge. There is no shelter. There are no programs that cater to the violence that they endure. The women do not often see a way out.

● (1840)

Last night, I sat in a session viewing the film *Highway of Tears* that talked about the many missing women and murdered aboriginal women in Canada.

One woman who spoke at the launching of the film talked about 21 years of enduring violence from the person she had married, her spouse. Twenty-one years feeling there was no refuge, that there was nowhere to go and 21 years of enduring violence and feeling she had no way out. Is that what we want for the next decade in this country? I do not think so.

What we really want is a coherent, coordinated plan that works, that brings resources to the people who need it. We need women to feel safe and secure in their homes, safe and secure to raise their children and to live their lives. There are so many women who do not have that option and we often fail to recognize that.

When we talk about an inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women in this country, it is not talk. There are 1,021 women missing or murdered in this country. Some of them on the Highway of Tears that I have spoken about, some of them in other regions of Canada and some of them from my home. It is not acceptable for the Government of Canada to say it will not do an inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women. The message we are sending is that it is not that important. That is wrong.

How do we ever end violence against women if we are not prepared to get to the root of where these problems come from? Whether it is in aboriginal communities or non-aboriginal communities, what message do we send to the perpetrators of violence against women when we say we do not want an inquiry into over 1,000 Canadian aboriginal, indigenous, Inuit, Métis, first nations women who have died or gone missing?

The message is not a good one that we send. We do not end violence against women by ignoring these issues and assaults. We end violence against women by acting upon it. We are not going to end violence against women just because we increase the sentences of those who commit the crime. That is one very small part of it.

What about the reoffenders? What about the guy I met in a correctional centre who was serving his sixth sentence for violent assault against his wife? It was his sixth time in the lock-up for violently assaulting his wife. It is okay if we add three or four months more onto his sentence, but have we really ended violence against that woman?

These are the questions that we have to ask ourselves when we look at issues like this. This is not a statistic. It is real and it is happening. I am not the only person who can stand in the House of Commons today and tell the many stories of violence against women that should be prevented, that should be ended, and the need that we have to do that. There are so many other members of Parliament who can do the same.

While I thank my colleague from Churchill for bringing this motion forward and standing up for this issue, I also want to encourage all members of Parliament to support this and do everything they can as a parliamentarian to enact this strategy and ensure it has the resources that work. We must really put our efforts into ending violence against women in Canada.

● (1845)

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my absolute privilege to stand in support of the motion by my colleague, the member for Churchill, the official opposition critic for aboriginal peoples. She continues to be a staunch advocate in whatever portfolio she is in. I know she represents many Métis and first nations in her constituency, and she does them proud, not simply in speaking for them but in being a voice here and sharing their stories and desires.

This motion put forward by my colleague, remarkably, does not simply ask for a coordinated national action plan to address violence against women but asks that it be done in direct collaboration with the provinces, the territories, civil society, first nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples and their representatives. This is something we do not see happening under the current government. It is time we brought everyone together who has some power in this country. We need every order of government to come together, including indigenous peoples, to address this inequity, and inequity it is.

Private Members' Business

When we listen to the speeches that have been given on this important motion, we hear about the vulnerability of the women of this country—elderly women being the poorest of the poor, indigenous women being the poorest of the poor—simply because they are born into an indigenous community. My province and my city have, sadly, experienced a very high proportion of this violence. Between 1980 and 2012, Statistics Canada reports that over 740 of the almost 6,500 female homicides in Canada occurred in Alberta. Almost one-half of those were aboriginal women. This does not include the many aboriginal women and girls who remain missing.

The Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton, of which I am proud to say I was one of the co-founders, advises that 700 to 900 clients a year come to them. Shockingly, these range from the age of three years and up. This is a matter that affects Canadian women of every age. The centre advises that one in three girls will experience sexual violence in her lifetime. This has to stop.

The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters advised me that despite the pressing need, including on aboriginal reserves, there has been no increase in funding for shelters for women who are victims of violence since 2007. As we are here today, only two of those communities have shelters, despite the violence they face.

It is a national problem. Women's shelters have been under-supported everywhere. In Alberta, as I said, there are only two second-stage shelters for abused women and their children to adjust to a more secure life. The majority of women seeking safe shelter do not fall within the government definition of the chronically homeless, so they do not have access to the shelters that many men do, and there has been no new money committed for housing. The shelter enhancement fund remains, unbelievably, \$130,000 a year for all of these women suffering this abuse.

I intend to focus the remainder of my remarks in support of Motion No. 444 on addressing the critical situation faced by aboriginal women in our society who are seeking violence-free lives. I again commend my colleague, the member for Churchill, who has spoken not only for action to address violence against all women but has stood time after time in this place begging the government to listen to the first nations people of this country and initiate a national inquiry, which is long overdue.

Nationally, aboriginal women make up only 4% of our population yet are 16% of those murdered and 11% of those missing. The RCMP has advised that these statistics likely miss many cases. However, it is critical, in understanding the need to take the action set forth in her motion, to recognize that we are not just speaking about mere statistics. We must realize that these more than 1,100 missing and murdered aboriginal women are someone's mother, someone's sister, someone's daughter, and someone's friend and neighbour.

● (1850)

Missing since February of this year in my province is Misty Potts, a 37-year-old mother from the Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation. She has her master's in environmental sciences and is an outspoken advocate against environmental degradation and the impact on aboriginal people, yet she is a victim of violence.

Missing is Shelly Dene, from Fort McMurray and Fort McKay, since August 2013. She is a mother and a student.

Cindy Gladue, 36 years old, was a homicide victim. She was a mother of three, and it took first nations people taking to the streets of Edmonton for the government finally to agree to appeal the acquittal in that case.

Because of the rising number of cases of missing and murdered aboriginal women, every aboriginal woman is left feeling vulnerable and at risk.

Katherine Swampy, an aboriginal woman from Alberta, bravely ran for office in Alberta for the New Democrats. This is the story she shared with us. She said that the comment she received in social media that hurt her the most was a Facebook message that said:

I support Katherine Swampy and I support the NDP. It's just too bad she has a higher chance of turning up missing than she does of winning this constituency.

It is a sad state of affairs in our country. She said that really struck a nerve, because a childhood friend had been murdered in Calgary just months before.

Her concern is well founded. The Action Coalition on Human Trafficking, an Alberta-based group addressing human trafficking that has been engaged in a project funded, interestingly, by Public Safety Canada, in 2013 and 2014, identified that aboriginal girls and women are easy prey for human traffickers due to poverty, drug addiction, and mental health problems. It reported that 15% of sex trafficked cases are aboriginal women. It is very, very sad.

The current government says that we do not need special action, but even the public safety department is saying that there is a concern about aboriginal women, so we should be acting on those findings and taking action.

This national inquiry my colleague has called for is supported by the former Treaty 6 Grand Chief Mackinaw; the current Treaty 6 Grand Chief Bernice Martial; the Canadian Human Rights Commission; the Native Women's Association of Canada; the Assembly of First Nations; all 48 Treaty 8 chiefs, by resolution; the Inter-American Commission, which is an affiliate of the Organization of American States; and all of the Canadian premiers. I am pleased to say that the Alberta premier-elect has reversed what Jim Prentice had said. She says that she is joining all the premiers in supporting the call for an inquiry.

What more do we need to show the current Conservative government that this inquiry needs to proceed?

I personally can attest to the many frigid winter evenings that aboriginal elders, leaders, grandmothers, mothers, sisters, and cousins have marched in support of the long-desired and long-awaited national inquiry into missing and murdered aboriginal women. I have been privileged to join them.

Private Members' Business

The government complains that most of this violence is happening within families. Well, the aboriginal families understand that they need to do their part, and I am proud to say that I am wearing a piece of moose hide, which was gifted to me by the friendship centres today. It is part of an action the aboriginal men of Canada are taking called "I am a Kind Man" to encourage all first nation men and boys to honour, respect, and protect women and children.

As Tanya Kappo, an Alberta first nation woman, mother, and lawyer has commented, a national inquiry would examine the underlying causes of missing and murdered aboriginal women. It would provide the opportunity to examine the roles played by our justice and police systems and the role of the residential school legacy so as to prevent and reduce these vulnerabilities.

As Ms. Kappo shared two years ago at my public forum, she worked hard to raise her children and to become educated as a lawyer, yet when she left the forum that night, she too would be vulnerable to attack.

What more must be done by aboriginal girls and women in this country for us to finally address this travesty?

In closing, I encourage every member of this place to take the opportunity to view *Walking With Our Sisters*, the more than 1,100 pairs of moccasin vamps that show us clearly all of those lost souls.

• (1855)

Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to take part in the debate on Motion No. 444, presented by the hon. member for Churchill. In my remarks I will be addressing the components of the motion that touch directly on the mandate of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada. First, I will address the proposal for a national public inquiry into missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls. Second, I will address the proposal for strategies that address the specific needs and vulnerabilities of different communities, with specific attention to aboriginal women.

Let me begin by emphasizing our government's continuing deep concern about missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls in Canada. We regard all acts of violence against aboriginal women and girls as abhorrent and intolerable.

As the House will appreciate, reducing violence requires a collective effort by all sectors of society involved, including government at all levels, aboriginal organizations, the judiciary, the police, and aboriginal communities themselves. We saw just such a gathering on February 27, 2015, when representatives of the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, aboriginal leaders, and affected families met in Ottawa for the national round table on missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. The objective of this round table, coordinated by the Assembly of First Nations, was to work toward better prevention, safety, policing, and justice measures to address, in a concerted and collaborative way, violence against aboriginal women and girls across the country.

Allow me to reiterate that crucial point. We are all involved, and we all have a role to play in finding a solution to these heinous acts of violence that cause individuals, families, and communities such terrible grief.

Aboriginal organizations and family members have told us that what is needed now on this issue is action rather than inquiries, and that is exactly what this government is providing. Several families and witnesses who appeared before the Special Committee on Violence Against Indigenous Women, of which I was a member, expressed the wish that the committee's report include recommendations that would make a real difference in the lives of aboriginal women and girls. In fact, there have already been over 40 studies related to the issue of violence against aboriginal women and girls, and every one of those studies urged action.

As the House is aware, the RCMP national operational overview, released on May 16, 2014, provided critical information on the nature and extent of this issue. The report reaffirmed earlier findings on key vulnerability factors for aboriginal women and girls and common factors among perpetrators. It is the most comprehensive account of missing and murdered aboriginal women in Canada to date and was compiled with the assistance of Statistics Canada and 300 policing agencies across the country.

The action plan to address family violence and violent crimes against aboriginal women and girls, which our government released on September 15, 2014, builds on the knowledge gathered through our previous investments and the many studies and reports on this issue, including the RCMP's national operational overview. This action plan, therefore, has an extremely solid and well-considered foundation. It thoroughly reflects our government's conviction that strong, concerted action is needed on this issue now. Moreover, it responds to all 16 of the recommendations identified in the report of the Special Committee on Violence Against Indigenous Women.

In developing the action plan, the Minister of Status of Women met with leaders of several aboriginal organizations and communities as well as with a number of individual victims and families. These discussions identified the following priority areas: preventing violence by supporting community level solutions, supporting aboriginal victims with appropriate services, and protecting aboriginal women and girls by investing in shelters and continuing to improve Canada's law enforcement and justice systems. The action plan includes a new investment of \$25 million to support our work on these three priorities with aboriginal communities and stakeholders and provinces and territories. In total, the range of measures focused on this issue is nearly \$200 million.

• (1900)

The investment in shelters through Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada's family violence prevention program is an important component of the action plan. This program supports 41 centres throughout the country. These shelters offer women and their children a safe and welcoming environment in times of crisis. Most provide culturally sensitive counselling and programs, such as family violence prevention, parenting and life skills training, traditional healing programs and mental health support.

Private Members' Business

As of April 1, the budget for the family violence prevention program increased to \$31.7 million per year, with an additional \$1.3 million available for family violence prevention activities both on and off reserve. In addition, the program allocates funding to the National Aboriginal Circle Against Family Violence to provide a national coordinating role by supporting shelters and their staff through training forums, gatherings, research and collaboration with key partners.

Specific measures set out in the action plan to prevent violence include the development of more community safety plans on and off reserve across Canada. This initiative allows communities to take ownership of the issues and develop culturally sensitive, local solutions. The action plan also supports projects to break intergenerational cycles of violence and abuse by raising awareness and building healthy relationships.

As I noted earlier, reducing violence is a task that requires the contributions of many committed partners. In that regard, our government's efforts complement equally important work being done by the provinces and territories, police and the justice system, as well as aboriginal families, communities and organizations, to address violence against aboriginal women and girls.

We will continue to work closely with these partners, carrying out concrete measures that will bring about a real difference to aboriginal families and communities. Only concerted action, rather than more studies or public inquiries, will enable us to tackle this intolerable situation.

To conclude my remarks, I would like to focus on the second component of the motion relevant to the mandate of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, mainly the proposal for strategies that address the specific needs and vulnerabilities of different communities, including specific attention to aboriginal women.

I am pleased to remind the House of the range of programs our government has available to help meet the needs of aboriginal women. These include pre-employment support, such as literacy and life skills training. These initiatives will enhance the employability of eligible first nations women.

Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada also recognizes the needs of aboriginal women who are aspiring entrepreneurs. The department has in fact exceeded the initial commitment of \$1 million in funding for aboriginal women in economic development, announced in 2010, in support of the implementation of the federal framework for aboriginal economic development. To date, we have committed to fund 21 projects totalling more than \$2.6 million in direct support of aboriginal women in their entrepreneurial careers.

In addition, through the urban aboriginal strategy, the department assists aboriginal women off-reserve to develop the skills they need to join the labour market. Of course, there are aboriginal skills and employment training strategies, the skills and partnership fund and the first nations job fund, all of which aim to increase the participation of aboriginal people, including women and girls, in the job market.

Our government is dedicated to supporting brighter, safe, secure futures for aboriginal women and girls throughout the country. I can assure every member of the House that we will continue to pursue relentlessly, with all our partners, the imperative objective of reducing violence against aboriginal women and girls.

● (1905)

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am exceptionally proud to stand here and be part of the movement to bring a national action plan to address violence against women in Canada. I would like to thank my sisters and brothers in the NDP who have joined me in championing this critical issue.

Since the beginning of my time as an MP, in every region of the country I have heard from women who have experienced violence. These women are survivors and they are strong. I am honoured that they took it upon themselves to share their stories with me because they hoped that I and that we could make a difference. I want to thank all the people who placed their trust in me and our team to bring their voices forward in the House. I hope every parliamentarian will recognize that it is in his or her power right now to make a difference for women who have survived violence, women who live with violence, and women who dream of growing up and living in a world free of violence.

Women are strong as hell. All studies, statistics and common sense prove that when women are secure and thriving, so too are their families, their communities and our societies. When women are empowered to advocate for themselves and take up space in politics and business and activism, we see all people everywhere reap the benefits. This is the Canada in which I want to live.

Therefore, with the support of many, I have placed before the House a proposal to create a national action plan to end violence against women. The YWCA, the Canadian Network of Women's Shelters & Transition Houses, DAWN Canada, the Native Women's Association of Canada and the Families of Sisters in Spirit along with quite a few other major national anti-violence organizations have done tireless work to coordinate consensus and awareness around a national action plan, and I want to thank them for their work.

I have travelled across our country to talk to women and to hear from organizations on the ground about what a national action plan could mean to them. Everywhere I went, I heard similar stories about underfunding, lack of coordination and the frustration of not being able to see change at the systemic level.

In Victoria, B.C., we heard from Victoria Pruden at the Bridges for Women Society. She said:

We at Bridges for Women Society wholeheartedly support the call for a national plan of action on violence against women. Every day we see not only the human cost of violence to women and children, but the economic costs of violence and trauma to Canadians...we need a national action plan NOW.

Adjournment Proceedings

Jenny Wright, the executive director of Marguerite's Place in Newfoundland, who works on the other end of the country bringing justice and safety to women, particularly sex workers, shared a similar message. She said:

Years of funding cuts and closures, and silencing of women's organizations are in themselves a pervasive form of violence against women. Federal policy must act to strengthen women's organizations and to secure sustainable funding, so they do not continue to be casualties of the fluctuations in our economy, political agendas, and our laws.

I am deeply grateful to the movement of like-minded women, to the movement of feminists who are pushing for this change. I would remind the members of the House that a national action plan has been enacted with great success elsewhere in the world, in countries like Australia and the United States. The vote on this motion could be the first among many positive steps toward healing and empowerment.

I have been east, west, north, south. I have been in urban centres and rural communities. I have been to first nations and Métis communities. What is clear is that we must listen to women. We must listen to their stories of intersectional oppression, to indigenous women, disabled women, women of colour, refugee women, queer women and trans women. They are all facing major systemic challenges, which leave them increasingly vulnerable to violence. There is much work we can do to help. All we need to do is listen to their words.

The need for action of this kind is one of the most urgent issues facing our country. I hope we can see past our partisan aspirations to take real action on this front. Let us not waste more time, and let us stand up in support of a national action plan to end violence against women.

• (1910)

The Deputy Speaker: 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 Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 93 the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, May 27, 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.

• (1915)

[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight in adjournment proceedings to pursue a question I asked in the House during question period on March 25. Some time has passed since then.

The question I asked pertained not just to Canadian involvement in Ukraine. All members here want to see us do what we can to restore freedom, security, and peace to the region, and there is tremendous concern across Canada about Putin's aggression. There is no question about that.

However, my question actually goes to the matter of the engagement of Parliament when we make decisions about foreign affairs, particularly decisions that increasingly bring us within the range of hostility of another country with which we have, for other purposes, the relationship of allies. I am speaking of Russia.

Through all manner of trade arrangements and other multilateral agreements, we have relations with Russia. We are not at war with Russia, and although I believe Canadians would want to press Putin to withdraw from Ukraine, there is a lot here that we have in common.

My question on March 25 for the Prime Minister was in relation to our support for Ukraine. The extent of Canada's involvement is not clear and public on the website of DFATD. We do not necessarily know, except through the media, about the provision of RADAR-SAT-2 data to Ukraine, which has been reported as occurring over the objections of the Department of National Defence and of the Department of Foreign Affairs.

I also asked point-blank that I had heard there is a memorandum of understanding between Canada and Ukraine, and I asked the Prime Minister to confirm if such a memorandum exists and to share with parliamentarians when that memorandum of understanding would be tabled with the House.

The response I received from the Minister of Foreign Affairs spoke to those things about which we all agree and all know, which is that Canada is standing with the people of Ukraine and will continue to do so. However, the response was—and this is not a shock in this place—a response that was not responsive.

Since the time I asked that question, I have also learned that Ukraine is not satisfied with the quality of the RADARSAT-2 data it is receiving through the Department of National Defence. Additional requests have been made of Canada to actually place a RADARSAT-2 station in Ukraine so that the Ukrainian government will be able to more quickly access the RADARSAT-2 data. This is highly technical material. It takes trained DND personnel to massage the data to be able to tell Ukraine what it says and what it means.

I would pursue this matter again with the parliamentary secretary, to the extent that he is able to share it with us. Again, this is an area where we will all be in agreement, but unlike the situation in Iraq and Syria, for which we had a debate in the House and talked about what is being planned, we are finding out in dribs and drabs what Canada is doing to assist Ukraine, increasingly in a military context.

Adjournment Proceedings

We know we have Canadian military there to help in the training. My question again is this: is there a memorandum of understanding between Canada and Ukraine? Will the House be able to review this agreement? Will we have a debate on it? Is it true that we are now contemplating putting a satellite system into Ukraine? If by any chance it was struck during conflict, it would actually compromise our access to RADARSAT-2 data for all the other things Canada needs that data for. Whether it is for weather or information about Canada, we need that data to be secure.

• (1920)

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Consular, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague opposite has brought up a whole host of issues. Certainly I am glad to be here tonight to talk about our broad support for Ukraine. Hopefully she will get some information here that will help her to understand that.

We are a leading supporter of Ukraine sovereignty and territorial integrity. We continue to strongly condemn the actions taken by Russia, including its illegal annexation of Crimea and its efforts to destabilize southern and eastern Ukraine. We have repeatedly called on Russia to withdraw its forces and immediately de-escalate the situation.

On February 13, 2015, we joined other G7 leaders in welcoming what was called the “Package of Measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements” adopted on February 12, 2015, and urged all sides to adhere strictly to the provisions of the package and to carry out its measures without delay. Russia’s provocative military activity remains a serious concern to the international community and cannot go unanswered.

We have been at the forefront of the international community’s response to this crisis and have provided deep and wide-ranging support to Ukraine, including humanitarian and development assistance, financial aid, and non-lethal military aid.

To support Ukraine’s security and stability, Canada has provided \$16 million in non-lethal security equipment to Ukraine’s armed forces, including winter clothing, a mobile field hospital, explosive ordinance disposal equipment, and other goods.

In addition, we are deploying approximately 200 Canadian Armed Forces personnel to Ukraine until March 31 of 2017 to develop and deliver training and capacity-building programs for Ukrainian forces personnel. We have also imposed a broad range of sanctions against more than 270 Russian and Ukrainian individuals and entities.

In terms of assistance to Ukraine, Canada is providing \$400 million in low-interest loans to help Ukraine stabilize its economy. As well, over \$202 million has been announced in bilateral development assistance projects. Humanitarian assistance has been provided to help an estimated five million people who have been affected by the violence in Ukraine.

In the face of Russian aggression, Canada has contributed to NATO assurance measures and \$1 million to NATO trust funds, as well as \$3 million to NATO’s centres of excellence to assist allies in Eastern Europe.

Within the broad range of support that Canada is providing, we are also sharing RADARSAT-2 satellite products with Ukrainian authorities. The member opposite had asked about that. At a time when the international community is closely monitoring Russia’s implementation of the Minsk commitments, this technology allows Ukraine to have much better situational awareness.

Ukraine’s political stability is imperative, and Canada continues to strongly support the OSCE’s special monitoring mission. We have just announced an additional \$2 million contribution to it, as well as an extension to the term of Canadian monitors.

Canada’s assistance to Ukraine is multi-faceted. We remain committed to supporting Ukraine as it resists Russian aggression while undertaking the reforms necessary to ensure Ukraine’s future as a democratic, stable, and prosperous country.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate my friend, the hon. parliamentary secretary, sharing what he did. I do think the Parliament of Canada needs to know more about the nature of our commitments to Ukraine in terms of RADARSAT-2 data.

I am still very curious and I do not yet have an answer. I am certainly grateful to the hon. parliamentary secretary for sharing as much as he did, but if he is not certain if such a memorandum of understanding exists, I would appreciate it if he would take it upon himself to ask the minister.

Canadians know that the Parliament of Canada is the place where we review our commitments, whether militarily or internationally. We discuss and we debate in this place, and it really is important that all members of Parliament be fully informed about the extent of our commitments overseas, particularly in those cases where we are going to be in broad agreement.

A memorandum of understanding, should it exist in the context of our constitutional monarchy and our Westminster parliamentary democracy, should not be executed solely by the executive on its own. We would want to know what we are committed to, even if we are in agreement. As a matter of respect for the supremacy of Parliament, that memorandum of understanding should be made available to members.

Again I thank my hon. colleague, the parliamentary secretary, for whom I have nothing but deep respect.

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Speaker, the member can be reassured that we made a commitment to continue to be at the forefront of the international community’s support for Ukraine’s long-term stability, security, and prosperity.

We view the situation in Ukraine with the gravest concern. We remain committed to a political and diplomatic solution to the conflict. As the situation evolves, Canada will also continue to cooperate closely with its G7 partners, NATO allies, and other like-minded countries.

Canada is committed to supporting the humanitarian, the political, and the economic well-being of the Ukrainian people through this difficult period. We expect the Government of Ukraine to demonstrate true commitment to reform by implementing key priority reforms in the coming year.

Adjournment Proceedings

●(1925)

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Trinity—Spadina, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I last rose back on March 10. It was so long ago that the Minister of Finance actually used to answer the questions asked of him. It has been a while, though. It is now as difficult to get an answer from him as it is to find a Tory in Alberta. It is a frustrating experience at times.

The question centred on the economy in Alberta. It was at the beginning of the crisis with the drop in oil prices, which has had a devastating impact on the local economy, and there are challenges that many of us are now being made aware of. I had a visit yesterday from the Canadian Home Builders' Association and a representative from Calgary, who gave me an extraordinarily detailed profile of what has happened to the housing market.

The housing market has gone soft in Calgary. Prices have stagnated and sales have virtually come to a standstill. This is having a huge impact on the financial security of a lot of middle-class families, who are now wondering if their major investment is going to grow with the economy or fall behind. They are very worried and are looking for action from the government, which they helped to elect, in standing up to protect housing prices in Calgary. In particular, they are looking to the CMHC.

I would remind the government that the first "C" stands for "Canada". There is a national housing agenda and program that the government is responsible for. People are looking for the CMHC to do a couple of things. The first is to restore stability to the market.

The question that I asked at the time flowed from an International Monetary Fund report that highlighted problems in Canada's mortgage market, problems in the housing market, and, particularly, problems in Calgary. It talked about the fact that we have a fractured market, diminishing oversight, and a department that has seen cutbacks in the last year that are removing staff, removing capacity, and removing regulatory ability to stabilize the housing market. What we are seeing is that even though CMHC is generating a surplus and providing revenue to the government, the government is walking away from programming in this area.

We are seeing the government walk away from stabilizing the private housing market and walking away from sustaining housing affordability and viability. At the same time, it is also walking away from affordable housing responsibilities by allowing operating agreements to expire and allowing dollars that low-income Canadians are paying into the system to flow out of the housing portfolio and fund things like tax cuts for affluent Canadians. Literally, low-income Canadians are subsidizing high-income Canadians as part of this government policy. All the while, we are seeing the housing market start to disappear.

The question for the government is this: when is it going to re-engage on the housing file? When is it going to stop pretending that the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation is not a national institution with national responsibilities? Particularly in Calgary, when is it going to listen to the Canadian Home Builders' Association and do things like remove the federal sales tax from development charges, which means that people are literally paying a tax upon a tax?

When is the government going to do things to stabilize the housing market by utilizing CMHC? When is it going to take action to protect housing affordability and, in particular, protect the investments that Canadians have made in their homes?

Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me reassure the hon. member for Trinity-Spadina that we have taken action and we will continue to monitor all parts of the economy, including areas that may pose a particular risk.

It is thanks to the prudent fiscal management and the sound leadership of our Prime Minister that Canada has weathered the storm of the great recession. Our economy has created over 1.2 million net new jobs since the depths of the recession, one of the strongest job creation records in the G7. The overwhelming majority of those jobs are full-time in the private sector and in high-wage industries.

According to the International Labour Organization's global wage report, Canada has the best pay gains in the G7. The Centre for American Progress says that Canada has experienced continuing middle-income growth, while for many countries it has halted.

Unlike the NDP and the Liberals, we will not raise taxes on Canadian families, drive the country further into deficit, and pile on more debt. That is why our government took a prudent approach and made a number of adjustments to residential mortgage insurance, and we will consider others, as warranted.

Our government does not see the need for a major shift at this time. Our long-term objective is to gradually reduce the government's exposure to residential mortgages. We will continue to monitor the real estate market, as necessary.

However, let me remind the House that the NDP and the Liberals voted against every measure our government introduced to make houses more affordable for Canadians while limiting taxpayer exposure.

Our government has acted to adjust the rules for government-backed insured mortgages. These adjustments include: requiring a minimum down payment of 5% for owner-occupied properties and 20% on other properties; reducing the maximum amortization period to 25 years from 35 years for mortgages with loan-to-value ratios of more than 80%; and lowering the maximum amount Canadians can borrow in refinancing a mortgage to 80% from 95% of the value of their homes.

Similarly, we strengthened the housing finance system by amending the oversight of Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, CMHC, to ensure the corporation's commercial activities are managed in a manner that promotes the stability of the financial system. We will continue to act when necessary to support the long-term stability of Canada's housing markets and encourage savings through home ownership.

Business of Supply

There is no doubt that housing has been top of mind for many Canadian families. That is why our government is helping make life more affordable for families with our family tax benefits. Under our plan, every family with children will stand to benefit. In fact, an average family of four will receive \$6,600 this year alone. That is money back in the pockets of Canadians to help them with their priorities, like buying a new home, for example.

We also doubled the TFSA, the most important savings tool for Canadians since the RRSP. Over 11 million Canadians have already opened up tax free savings accounts.

There are many more items, but I would like to highlight that our government knows a stable and well-functioning housing finance system is important for the health of Canada's financial system and economic stability, which benefits all Canadians. After all, the biggest investment most Canadians make in their lifetimes is the purchase of their homes and ensuring that such an investment is secure is the responsible thing to do.

• (1930)

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Mr. Speaker, every step the member just outlined has actually made it more difficult to own a home in Calgary. That is one of the things the Canadian Home Builders' Association in Calgary is complaining about. The borrowing requirements become so laborious for homeowners, in particular, first-time homebuyers, that the government has made the housing crisis not just one of affordable housing but housing affordability. To remove regulatory power and oversight from CHMC as a stated goal is insane.

I have one last question for the member. In the budget, CMHC announced \$150 million for relief of penalties when public housing is refinanced in this country. The specific question that has not been answered by anybody in the department is this.

When people refinance their mortgages, do they have to surrender the subsidy agreements that are tied to the mortgage agreements, yes or no? When people refinance and subscribe to the fund that is there to pay off the penalty for renegotiating, do they have to surrender the subsidy agreements tied to the mortgage agreements, yes or no?

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member opposite that consumer protection is one of the top priorities of this government. It is unfortunate because he voted against every single consumer protection measure that we introduced.

The government has adopted a responsible and measured approach to ensure Canada's housing market remains strong and stable. We have acted to adjust the rules for government backed insured mortgages. We withdrew government insurance from backstopping home equity lines of credit. We have strengthened the housing finance system by amending the oversight of CMHC. We will continue to closely monitor the housing market and we will stand ready to implement further measures should they be warranted.

Our government believes these efforts will contribute to the long-term stability of the housing market and will benefit all Canadians. Shamefully, this member voted against each measure our government introduced to help Canadians buy their first homes.

• (1935)

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), the motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been withdrawn, and the House will now resolve itself into committee of the whole for the purpose of considering all votes under Indian Affairs and Northern Development in the main estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2016.

[English]

I do now leave the chair to go into committee of the whole.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

INDIAN AFFAIRS AND NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT—MAIN ESTIMATES,
2015-2016

(Consideration in committee of the whole of all votes under Indian Affairs and Northern Development in the main estimates, Mr. Joe Comartin in the chair)

The Chair: I would like to open this committee of the whole session by making a short statement on this evening's proceedings. Tonight's debate is being held pursuant to Standing Order 81(4)(a), which provides for each of two sets of estimates selected by the Leader of the Opposition to be considered in committee of the whole for up to four hours.

Tonight will be a general debate on all of the votes related to Indian Affairs and Northern Development. The first round will begin with the official opposition, followed by the government and the Liberal Party. After that, we will follow the usual proportional rotation.

The debate is also held under the provisions of the order made earlier today, which allows parties to use each 15-minute slot for speeches or for questions and answers by one or more of their members.

In the case of speeches, members of the party to which the period is allotted may speak one after the other, though the time for speeches should not exceed 10 minutes. The Chair would appreciate it if the first member speaking in each slot would indicate how the time will be used, particularly if it is to be shared.

[Translation]

The order states that when the time is to be used for questions and answers, the Chair will expect that the minister's response will reflect approximately the time taken by the question. Furthermore, no quorum calls, dilatory motions, or requests for unanimous consent shall be received by the Chair. As is the case in any proceeding in committee of the whole, members need not be in their own seats to be recognized. Although members may speak more than once, the Chair will generally try to ensure that all members wishing to speak are heard before inviting members to speak again while respecting the proportional party rotations for speakers.

Business of Supply

[English]

I want to indicate that in committee of the whole, ministers and members should be referred to by their title or riding name and, of course, all remarks should be addressed through the Chair. I ask for everyone's co-operation in upholding all established standards of decorum, parliamentary language and behaviour.

At the conclusion of tonight's debate, the committee will rise, the estimates related to Indian Affairs and Northern Development will be deemed reported and the House will adjourn immediately until tomorrow.

[Translation]

We may now begin tonight's session. The House in committee of the whole, pursuant to Standing Order 81(4)(a), the first appointed day, consideration in committee of the whole of all votes under Indian Affairs and Northern Development in the main estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2016.

The hon. member for Churchill.

[English]

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Chair, indigenous peoples and Canadians are watching. We in the official opposition want answers. I will be spending my 15 minutes directing questions to the minister.

In the main estimates, the department is asking for \$869 million for aboriginal rights and interests. However, the PBO's integrated monitoring database shows that the department only spent 13% of its allocated funding for this line in the first three-quarters of the last financial year.

What is the most recent financial data the minister has on this line item? What are the numbers?

• (1940)

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Chair, the answer is quite simple.

The PBO refers to funding that has occurred over a period of time, which is not the complete year. The way that the funds are dispersed means that a good chunk of them are dispersed in the fourth quarter.

When that figure is added to what has already been spent, the hon. member will find out, when she looks at the public accounts next year, that the full amount has been invested under that program and sub-programs.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Chair, Canadians want answers. That was not an answer.

In the main estimates, the department is asking for \$36 million for capital expenditures. However, the PBO's integrated monitoring database shows that the department only spent 22% of its capital funding in the first three quarters of the last fiscal year.

What is the most recent financial data that the minister has on this line item? Does he expect funding from last year to be carried over into the estimates currently before the House?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, the answer is the same.

In the fourth quarter, these funds will be dispersed. When the whole year has expired, she will find in the next public accounts that, indeed, the capital funds that were earmarked for these programs will have been dispersed.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Chair, a memo obtained by Canadian Press last November showed that over a six-year period, Aboriginal Affairs moved significant amounts of funding meant for critical infrastructure to cover shortfalls elsewhere.

What is the total amount of infrastructure funding that has been reallocated to other programs since 2007?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, from 2008 to 2013, a total of \$468 million was reallocated within the department. The reason for this is very simple. Capital funds were reallocated to priorities. When we have pressure on what our government considers to be priority areas for first nations, such as education and social services, a decision is made by the government to prioritize these essential services to first nations.

That explains why we have reallocated those funds.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Chair, the answer is that AANDC has reallocated approximately \$505 million in infrastructure dollars to social, education and other programs. Instead of showing leadership and investing in the way that first nations need, the government has chosen to redirect the funds.

According to the department, what is the current infrastructure gap?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, that question is very general. What is the infrastructure gap of what?

If the hon. member wants to talk about infrastructure, I can tell the committee that since 2006, we have provided about \$3 billion to assist first nations in planning, construction, operating and maintaining water, and waste water infrastructure in first nations communities. We have made targeted investments in more than 220 major projects and we have funded the maintenance of over 1,200 water and waste water treatment projects.

Since 2006, our government's investment for on-reserve housing has resulted in the construction of close to 12,000 new homes and the renovation of nearly 22,000 other existing homes in first nations communities. We have invested—

• (1945)

The Chair: Order, please. We will go back to the member for Churchill.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Chair, the answer was very simple. AANDC, his own department, said that the infrastructure gap was \$8.2 billion.

Let us move on to the 2% funding cap.

Can the minister please share what he understands the impact of the debilitating 2% funding cap to be on first nations, particularly in regard to housing, child welfare, education, health, and other human services and basic infrastructure?

Business of Supply

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, this cap the member refers to is rather an escalator, and that does not do justice to the facts.

If we look at the public accounts for the current expenditures of the department, over and above this 2% escalator that has accompanied each and every budget for this department since 2006, we have invested a total of over \$4 billion in new funding for the department for initiatives to support priorities such as aboriginal economic development, first nations education, first nations child and family services, and on-reserve infrastructure.

When this additional funding is added to ongoing annual funding, the department will have spent a total of more than \$76 billion since 2006.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Chair, let us go back to the question, which is about the 2% cap.

Does the minister have any concrete plans to address the cumulative impacts of the debilitating 2% cap on funding for first nations, yes or no?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, the fact of the matter is, as I just stated, over and above the 2% escalator, every year the budget of the department is increased by targeted, strategic funding to pursue the objectives of creating jobs and economic opportunities for first nations membership all across Canada, and for that matter all aboriginal people.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Chair, can the minister commit now to a full renewal of the urban aboriginal strategy for the National Association of Friendship Centres?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, I thought the hon. member was going to congratulate us for the reform of the urban strategy, which will see more funds going to groups in urban Canada, who along with other stakeholders at the municipal and provincial level pulled together to execute projects that aim at facilitating and encouraging aboriginals throughout the country to enter the labour market.

The reform we have put forward is resulting in a more effective and efficient delivery of the program that will benefit aboriginals living in urban Canada, I think, more effectively.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Chair, I heard that there is no commitment to a full renewal of the urban aboriginal strategy from the minister.

Let us move to Bill C-51.

[*Translation*]

As Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, do you have reason to believe that an aboriginal group might represent a threat to the security of Canada?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Absolutely not, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Chair, as the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, do you believe that indigenous groups should have been consulted or have you consulted with any indigenous groups or organizations on the content of Bill C-51?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, that goes back to the NDP's well-known position that every piece of legislation studied by

Canada's Parliament should be subject to approval by the first nations. We know that is the official position of the New Democratic Party.

However, at the Conservative Party, we believe that Canadian laws should be respected, including the Canadian Constitution, which clearly establishes, with rulings by the Supreme Court, the government's duty to consult when considering to undertake measures that might affect aboriginal rights or treaty rights.

• (1950)

[*English*]

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Chair, do I need to remind the minister that the Conservatives have an obligation, according to the Constitution, to consult with first nations when it comes to legislation? It is something they clearly have not done.

Under the provisions of Bill C-51, do you know if your department will be able to proactively share—

The Chair: The member for Churchill has done this repeatedly now. The questions have to be directed to the Chair, not to the member directly.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Chair, will the minister or his department be able to proactively share information that is collected on indigenous activists with security and intelligence agencies?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, the last time I checked, I was not responsible for public safety.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Chair, I would ask the minister to look at the case of Cindy Blackstock in the role of his department in terms of surveillance, something I do not think is a laughing matter at all. An RCMP report characterized the Idle No More movement as bacteria. Does the minister agree with that characterization?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, let me be clear. No member of this government, neither I nor any member of the Conservative caucus, has ever endorsed or uttered that characterization of the movement by a sole employee of the RCMP, who I understand the RCMP has apologized for. I think it has appropriately apologized as it should have. This is not a view of that movement which is shared by this government. Going forward, we should instead work positively to improve the lot of members of first nations all across Canada.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Chair, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety said that it was absolutely abhorrent that anyone would ask the government to apologize for this kind of discriminatory language. Does the minister agree with the parliamentary secretary?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, can I do more than just reiterate that the Government of Canada does not share the view of that sole employee of the RCMP who has chosen to characterize the movement the way he has. This is not the view of our government and I repeat, we think that the RCMP has appropriately apologized for the statement of that member of the RCMP and that we should move forward positively to address the real issues affecting first nations across Canada.

Business of Supply

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Chair, I would remind the minister that this is a real issue and this was about a report that the RCMP had. It was not a single member and it is important to have clarifications from the minister in the House during question period as well.

Let us turn to the issue of missing and murdered indigenous women.

[*Translation*]

Does the minister agree that we must address, without delay, the problem of violence against first nations, Inuit, and Métis women?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, that is a serious and important issue. That is why last September, my colleague, the Minister of Status of Women announced on behalf of the government a plan of action to address this phenomenon that has been plaguing our country for far too long now.

Our government has put measures in place. I would remind my committee colleagues that in February, the provinces, territories, and national organizations agreed on a framework for action, which everyone endorsed, in order to adopt measures to address this issue.

[*English*]

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Chair, why did the minister refer to unreleased statistics in a private meeting with Alberta chiefs and is he now sorry for these comments?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, the member opposite has been raising the issue of violence against aboriginal women in the House for some time, yet each and every time we have put forward any single measure to improve the well-being of aboriginal women and girls, she has voted against it. Whether it be the matrimonial property rights, whether it be human rights that we have extended to members of first nations all across Canada, the NDP stood against this. The member has the gall tonight to stand and criticize us on a matter like she did. I think this is just flabbergasting.

● (1955)

The Chair: Resuming debate with the government side, the hon. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Chair, first of all, I would like to thank you for this opportunity to appear before the committee of the whole to discuss the main estimates for the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development for the fiscal year 2015-16.

Since 2006, our government has been honouring its commitment to foster the emergence of first nations and northern communities that are strong, healthy and self-sufficient. I am pleased to announce that our approach is producing results. By working with our aboriginal and northern partners across our great country, making carefully targeted investments, introducing legislation that enables first nations to overcome the constraints of the Indian Act, settling claims and signing self-government agreements, we are building on the progress we have made over the past nine years to stimulate the full participation of aboriginal peoples in the economy.

We know that increased aboriginal participation in the economy is the key to improving the well-being and quality of life of aboriginal

people in Canada. We also know that aboriginal people are the fastest-growing population in Canada, and we simply cannot ignore this immense human resource potential. What is more, I firmly believe that a good job is better than any social program, which is why we are so determined to promote job creation.

That is why the purpose of every measure, every decision and every dollar that our government invests to assist aboriginal people and northerners is to help us reach our ultimate goal of creating jobs and economic opportunities for aboriginal and northern communities. We are getting results. Just this morning, I sent out the first report on the strategic partnership initiative, which the government first announced in 2010 and in which it invested another \$61 million as part of economic action plan 2014. Since 2010, this initiative has made it possible to help over 400 aboriginal communities and organizations across the country create economic development opportunities. It has resulted in over 100 partnerships and nearly \$100 million in additional funding from other sources.

We are also helping first nations to create tremendous economic opportunities in their communities through the First Nations Land Management Act, which enables first nations to manage their own land rather than be limited by the constraints of the Indian Act. The first nations that are participating in this regime have experienced significant economic growth. In fact, a recent KPMG survey on the advantages of this regime for participating first nations showed that investments in reserves were estimated at \$270 million and that thousands of jobs had been created on reserves. That is why, in economic action plan 2015, we allocated an additional \$30.3 million over five years to encourage other first nations to join this initiative.

● (2000)

[*English*]

In the north, our vision is embodied in our government's northern strategy and our actions are bringing this vision to life. It is a fact that no one can dispute that no other government in the history of this country has ever done more for northern Canada and northerners.

We are working toward an effective, predictable northern regulatory regime that will attract new investors and foster new economic opportunities for the north. Through the Northwest Territories' devolution and now in Nunavut, we are working with northerners toward greater control of their own land and resources. We are on track to ensure that the Canadian High Arctic Research Station located in Cambridge Bay is operational by July 2017, creating a world-class hub for science and technology in Canada's north.

As everyone can see, in nine years, we have made notable progress, and these are only a few examples.

Business of Supply

The means through which this progress, both north and south of 60, can be sustained year over year is, among other things, the funding allocated to Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada through the main estimates. However, my department is not the only way our government is contributing to progress for aboriginal people and northerners. There is also a host of other departments, including the private sector, the provinces and territorial governments. We are but a link in the chain.

The 2015-16 main estimates for my department forecast budgetary and non-budgetary expenditures of approximately \$8.3 billion. That is a net increase of \$178 million, or 2.2%, above last year's main estimates. This funding will support initiatives that improve social well-being and provide opportunities for economic prosperity in aboriginal and northern communities, vital initiatives such as safe drinking water, access to services and support for claims negotiations.

Healthy, sustainable communities require robust infrastructure and reliable water and waste water systems. That is why we provided \$323.4 million over two years in last year's economic plan to implement the first nations water and waste water action plan. In the 2015-16 main estimates, \$137.3 million has been allocated for the action plan so it can continue to fund these vital investments in water infrastructure projects in first nations communities.

Since 2006, we have spent roughly \$3 billion to help communities manage their water and waste water infrastructure, and related public health activities. The recent passage of the Safe Drinking Water for First Nations Act enabled us to work with first nations to develop federal regulations that would help protect the health and safety of residents on first nations land through much-needed enforceable standards.

The main estimates also show a net increase of \$68.7 million to support the negotiation, settlement and implementation of comprehensive claims and self-government agreements across Canada. That is in line with our government's belief that in addition to resolving outstanding specific and special claims, negotiating and implementing comprehensive claims and self-government agreements contribute to stronger, healthier, more self-sufficient communities.

● (2005)

Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Chair, it is unfortunate that the member got cut off because I believe the actions of our government have shown that we are taking steps to improve the social well-being and economic opportunities for aboriginal people and northerners, and they have been substantial.

Could the minister expand on what he said in his remarks about the results we were seeing? Since I have been appointed to this role, I have had the pleasure of travelling across the country and seeing first hand how our government's focus on increasing aboriginal participation in the economy is the key to improving the well-being and quality of life of aboriginal people in Canada.

Could the minister describe, for the benefit of the committee, our government's approach to improving these economic opportunities on reserve?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, first, let me thank and congratulate the parliamentary secretary for the excellent work he does on the aboriginal file. I have never seen such dedication before. He is contributing a lot to the agenda of our government, which really is to try to improve the situation of all aboriginals across Canada from coast to coast to coast.

The recipe for improving the situation is very simple because of the situation we all know is there. We need to invest in education, skills training and promote business development and economic opportunities for first nations. This is the mainstay of our actions and we see improved results. These estimates continue in that same direction to create those opportunities for aboriginals all across Canada.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Chair, one of the items we saw in the recent budget was a commitment to the First Nations Land Management Act. The first duty I had when I was appointed parliamentary secretary was to accompany the minister to an announcement of additional member first nations, which were clambering to join this First Nations Land Management Act. It would remove them from 34 sections of the Indian Act and would give them more economic freedom to move at the speed of business. There were \$30.3 million more added to the last budget.

Could the minister expand on this excellent act and why he thinks this benefits participating first nations?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, as I said in my speech, one of the areas where we have seen significant success is under the First Nations Land Management Act. Operational first nations that are currently under this regime have reported an increase of 4,000 jobs as a result of new businesses created on reserve land, including tourism, entertainment, transportation, warehousing and commercial retail.

In addition, what is more important is that they have attracted approximately \$270 million in internal and external investments. Business with operational first nations has increased by as much as 73%. In economic action plan 2015 we will invest more money, more taxpayer dollars, because that will allow 25 more first nations to join the regime, on top of the 94 first nations across the country that have taken advantage of this opportunity.

● (2010)

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Chair, I was hoping the minister could talk a bit about the amendments to the First Nations Fiscal Management Act, which are part of Bill C-59, the budget implementation act that was introduced this week.

Business of Supply

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, I am really proud of this one. Although I am a very young member of Parliament, I was the minister of state for Indian Affairs and Northern Development when we created these capital corporations in the late 1980s. Last summer, I was proud to be present to celebrate with the first nations from B. C., Manitoba, Nova Scotia and Ontario when the First Nations Finance Authority issued its inaugural bond for \$90 million.

We have seen enormous progress, and the amendments in the budget implementation act are important because they will accelerate the process, eliminate red tape and will ensure that more first nations can join this great regime that produces great results.

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I will start by picking up on some questions about the 2% cap.

According to the federal government's own statistics, the aboriginal population increased by 20.1% from 2006 to 2011. Yet, over those same years, the growth for the budget of Aboriginal Affairs was still capped at 2%.

Will the minister be willing to lift the cap?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, as I indicated in response to an earlier question, what members call a cap is really an escalator to take account of inflation and population growth. We must not be misled by the fact that at each budget, our department's allocation goes up by 2%. It goes up by much more than 2%. Between 2006-07 and 2015-16, the government will have invested a total of over \$4 billion in new funding for the department for initiatives to support priorities, such as aboriginal economic development, first nation education, first nation child and family services, and on-reserve infrastructure.

It is a misnomer to talk about a cap. There is no cap.

Ms. Yvonne Jones: Mr. Chair, but if it is supposed to increase by population, we would have seen more than a 2% growth. In fact, many of the individual programs that are required beyond the cap will need to be accompanied by cuts in other areas.

Have we not seen that happen before?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, it is a fact that there are pressures under certain programs, but these pressures are really an answer to the priority which this government puts on certain programs, for example, education.

Yes, there have been reallocations from infrastructure to education programs and there have been reallocations from infrastructure to social programs. These are programs that are in line with our determination to ensure that aboriginal people can participate in our economy.

Ms. Yvonne Jones: Mr. Chair, in 2013, an internal briefing documented titled "Cost Drivers and Pressures" showed that the department was forced to shift more than \$500 million of funding allocated to first nations' infrastructure to plug other funding shortfalls.

Why not lift the cap and put the adequate amount of money in? Why keep shifting money from one important program to cover the holes in another program?

● (2015)

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, I know that the New Democratic Party and the Liberal Party, for that matter, are not really concerned about a budget being balanced. Some believe that budgets balance themselves, others just do not care, but we care. At the end of the day, taxpayers are the ones who hold the bag and have to pay, the working families of Canada.

Because of our determination to balance the budget in order to get all the benefits that this would bring to Canada, we do not just borrow more money to fund certain programs, we believe the budget currently answers—

The Assistant Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Labrador.

Ms. Yvonne Jones: Mr. Chair, it is about making choices and the government opposite made choices to not put additional funding in the budget for first nation people, but instead to move money around.

When it comes to missing and murdered indigenous women in our country, why is he not supporting an inquiry into the more than 1,000 missing and murdered aboriginal women?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, people who do not know what to do about a problem study it. This government has said that this issue has been studied many times, by many groups all over the country and a study or an inquiry would produce absolutely no action in solving or addressing the issue. Instead, we have said, just as many families of missing and murdered aboriginal women have told us, that it is time for action. We announced this in September, through our action plan, to address the issue.

Ms. Yvonne Jones: Mr. Chair, it is not about a study; it is about getting to the root cause of violence against aboriginal women in our country.

I ask the minister: by not doing this inquiry, is the government sending a message that violence against indigenous women is okay?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Absolutely not, Mr. Chair. That is ridiculous.

The fact of the matter is that we are probably the first government ever to have actually implemented an action plan to address the issue.

As a matter of fact, the three pillars of the action plan put forward by the Minister of Status of Women in September are the very foundation of the framework that provinces, national organizations, and territories endorsed at the round table. They all agreed with us that these were the actions that had to be taken. As well, not only have we agreed collectively to a framework, but we have also agreed to meet next year to monitor progress and see where we can even improve the situation, which we will do.

Ms. Yvonne Jones: Mr. Chair, an action plan with no action is just words.

Business of Supply

Owing to predictable flooding of their community, Kashechewan residents were evacuated this spring for the fourth consecutive year and for the sixth year over the last 10 years. The community spent \$21 million on the evacuation last year and millions more on repairs.

Why is the minister insisting on spending tens of millions of dollars each year on evacuations for this one community alone, rather than implementing a workable, long-term solution that the community is willing to finance?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, our priority always is to ensure the safety of all community members in Kashechewan, and that is why we have made investments to hire an emergency preparedness coordinator to help James Bay first nations, including Kashechewan, prepare for and manage potential flooding.

However, for the information of the member, within weeks of my appointment in 2013 in this department, I went to Kashechewan. I sat with the chief and councillors and elders of that community. We offered to do a study to see how we could address that issue. We discussed the relocation of the community, and they told me in plain, clear language that no, they did not want to be relocated.

If the member is arguing that the government should force communities to relocate against their will, she can tell me and she can take that position.

● (2020)

Ms. Yvonne Jones: Mr. Chair, as many as 350 residents are still living in hotels and apartments because of last year's flood.

Does the minister not understand that these are real people whose lives are being torn apart year after year because there has been no real action taken to mitigate or prevent this serious problem?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, we do sympathize with and understand the predicament of those people who could not be returned.

We are very concerned about this. That is the reason, for example, that the department has invested over \$6 million to ensure that the children of the members of that first nation could attend their own school in Kapuskasing.

The department and our officials are working on a regular basis with the leadership of the first nation to try to find solutions. We will keep working with the first nations and try to identify a way to ensure that the members of that first nation can live safely in a community that is sustainable and that is eventually self-sufficient, and I think we are committed to continuing that good work with them.

Ms. Yvonne Jones: Mr. Chair, I am turning to Nutrition North and northern programs now.

I would like to ask the minister first if he believes that north of 60 programming should be available to all Inuit in the north, including Nunatsiavut, Nunavik, and NunatuKavut.

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, nutrition north has to be understood for what it is. There was a food mail program earlier that was being used by northerners to subsidize transporting Ski-Doo parts and tires to the north.

Our government made the decision that the priority for investing taxpayers' dollars in that part of the country should be to improve northerners' access to nutritious food, which is what the program is about. The recent Auditor General's report made a series of recommendations, which we have indicated we will implement.

Ms. Yvonne Jones: Mr. Chair, people in the north are really looking for affordable food. They are looking for access to nutritional food. So far this program has failed to deliver. We have heard stories of people in Rankin Inlet scrounging for food in the dump.

Aboriginal Affairs is giving more than \$500,000 to an Ottawa-based private consulting firm to work here in Ottawa to develop new subsidy models. Where is this money coming from? Is it coming from the nutrition north program, and is this leaving less money for families that actually need it?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, the member referred to a report that people were getting food at the dump. Like all Canadians, we were concerned over these reports. We believe that all northerners should have access to healthy, nutritious food. That is why our government changed the old food program that the Liberals had put in place to one that is focused on delivering nutritious food.

She says there were no results. That is false. The fact is that the cost of a food basket for a family of four has dropped on average by \$137 a month. As well, the volume of perishable food shipped to northern communities has increased by approximately 25%, so—

● (2025)

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Order, please. This will be the last question. We have less than two minutes remaining.

The hon. member for Labrador.

Ms. Yvonne Jones: Mr. Chair, if this was not a problem, people would have food. They would not be scrounging in the dump. If this was serious for the government, it would not be trying to cover it up.

Why is Aboriginal Affairs paying a consulting firm in Ottawa to find a solution for the north? Why not look to the north to find the solution that northerners need to ensure that they get good, nutritional, affordable food?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, just for the information of the member, the contract is Vote 1, operating. It is not Vote 10, which goes directly for the subsidy. It is not the same issue.

As to the concerns of the hon. member, she will be pleased to know that the nutrition north advisory board is composed of northerners. These are the people who are advising us and providing us with recommendations as to how we can improve the program and make it work even better.

Business of Supply

Once we implement all of the recommendations of the Auditor General and complete the work I have asked the advisory board to undertake, I am sure we can continue improving that program so that nutritious food can be more affordable for more people in the north.

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Consular, CPC): Mr. Chair, it is great to be here this evening. I am going to speak for about 10 minutes and then have a few minutes of questions.

I am very thankful to have the opportunity this evening to participate in this debate. I would like to take a little bit of time to talk a bit about our government's commitment to Canada's north. My remarks this evening will focus specifically on the work that we have done to improve northern governance and regulatory regimes.

The north is a very special and iconic place for Canadians. It is majestic in its vast geography. It is magnificent in its wildlife. It is the home of many aboriginal people. It is very rich in its natural resource potential.

Our government has a vision for the north, outlined in our northern strategy, and we are taking action to ensure that this vision comes to life for the benefit of all Canadians. We recognize the tremendous opportunities, as well as the many challenges, that exist in the north today. That is why, unlike past Liberal governments, ensuring that the true north remains strong and free continues to be a top priority of our Conservative government.

We are well aware that the overly complex regulatory environment in the north has been identified as a major source of frustration for people interested in investing in the northern territories. Northern regulatory processes have often resulted in delayed regulatory decisions, which have discouraged potential new investors and undermined the economic viability of major projects. Simply put, this hinders economic development in the north.

To be globally competitive, northern regulatory regimes need to provide a few things. They need to provide timely, efficient, and effective project reviews. At the same time, the processes also need to ensure strengthened environmental protection and respect aboriginal consultation obligations.

That is why our government launched the action plan to improve northern regulatory regimes. The plan builds on our government's efforts to create a strong and prosperous north that realizes its resource potential. It is a key step forward in implementing the northern strategy.

The action plan seeks to promote the creation of jobs, growth, and long-term prosperity by making northern regulatory frameworks strong, effective, efficient, and predictable. It will do this by making reviews of projects more predictable and timely, by reducing duplication for project reviews, by safeguarding environmental heritage, by strengthening environmental protection, and by achieving meaningful aboriginal consultation.

We have been working to meet these goals by introducing or amending legislation specific to each territory. For example, in the Northwest Territories, we passed the Northwest Territories Devolution Act, which resulted in amendments to several pieces of federal legislation in order to strengthen the regulatory process.

As part of the action plan to improve northern regulatory regimes, our government passed the Northern Jobs and Growth Act, which received royal assent in June 2103. This act removed barriers to investment in the north and contributed to our government's jobs and growth agenda.

Another pillar of our regulatory improvement strategy is the Yukon and Nunavut regulatory improvement act, otherwise known as Bill S-6. Its passage would complete the legislative component of the action plan and would ensure regulatory efficiency and consistency right across the north. Bill S-6 was introduced as part of our government's comprehensive plan to promote jobs, growth, and prosperity in the north. This proposed legislation aims to further unlock the economic potential of the north by ensuring certainty, predictability, and timeliness for investors. This is essential to ensure that the territories remain an attractive place in which to live, work, and invest.

At this point, I would like to draw my colleagues' attention to a historic milestone that was reached last year on April 1, 2014. This is, of course, the day that saw the Northwest Territories devolution come into force. Devolution saw Ottawa transfer its decision-making powers and administrative duties related to land and resource management back to where they belong, to the Government of the Northwest Territories. The Northwest Territories is the second territory to assume land and resource responsibilities after Yukon.

Devolution has driven economic development by transferring responsibility for the management of onshore lands out of Ottawa and back to the north, where it belongs. It also gives the Northwest Territories the power to collect and share in resource revenues generated in the territory. In short, decision-making about land use has finally been put in the hands of northerners.

Devolution provides northerners with greater control over their lands and resources and with the power to improve processes in the north. Our government strongly believes that devolution will provide an opportunity for northerners, including aboriginal people, to help shape the future of the territories and share in the economic benefits that will flow.

Our government is working to extend the benefits of devolution beyond the Northwest Territories and Yukon to Nunavut as well. We know that reaching devolution in Nunavut is an essential step to reaching these goals and an important step in the political and economic development of the territory.

● (2030)

That is why, last October, the Government of Canada appointed Mr. Brian Dominique as chief federal negotiator for Nunavut devolution. This marks the start of tripartite negotiations with the Government of Nunavut and Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated and demonstrates our government's commitment to its northern strategy.

This is a big improvement on the previous processes. Before we embarked on the action plan, regulatory processes across the north were complex, costly, unpredictable, and time consuming, and these changes have changed that.

Business of Supply

Amendments to legislation such as the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act, the Northwest Territories Waters Act, and the Territorial Lands Act have created a more consistent regulatory process. These amendments included measures that streamlined the regulatory process by placing time limits on environmental assessments and reviews, consolidated federal decision-making, and introduced measures to enhance environmental stewardship. Similar amendments to legislation in Yukon and Nunavut will likewise improve regulatory regimes and promote consistency and efficiency across the north.

Measures such as these are essential for the people of the Northwest Territories and Nunavut to realize the full benefits of devolution. Regulatory improvement will increase investor confidence by providing a clear and predictable review and assessment process that will allow the Northwest Territories to remain competitive in a rapidly changing global marketplace.

In conjunction with advancing devolution, the development of an approved land use plan for Nunavut is a key priority for regulatory improvement related to resource development in Nunavut. Our government remains committed to devolution and regulatory improvement that will allow Nunavut to fully realize its potential.

Unlike past governments, we have made the north a top priority, placing it higher on the agenda than it has been in many decades. This government has a clear vision for the north as a healthy, prosperous region within a strong, sovereign Canada.

I would like to end by thanking all of our partners who have contributed to our significant achievements under the northern strategy. I look forward to continuing to advance this government's plan for jobs, growth, and prosperity throughout the north.

Our government strongly believes that the territories should have the ability to make the key decisions about projects occurring on their land. To that end, as I mentioned, in April 2014 our government finalized the transfer of authority over lands and resource decisions in the Northwest Territories to the Government of the Northwest Territories.

I know that our government is working on a similar devolution agreement in Nunavut. I wonder if the parliamentary secretary could update the House on the status of the Nunavut devolution.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Chair, I would like to thank the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs for his remarks.

Land and resource management responsibility was transferred to the Yukon territorial government in 2003 and to the Government of Northwest Territories on April 1, 2014. Nunavut is the last jurisdiction in the country without responsibility for public land and resources.

Nunavut devolution will bring the authority to make decisions about land and resources in Nunavut out of Ottawa and back to Iqaluit, where it belongs. Our government understands that this will bring considerable economic benefits to the territory, and it is committed to moving ahead with devolution in Nunavut. That is why, last October, our government appointed Mr. Brian Dominique as chief federal negotiator. This marks the start of negotiations

between the federal government, the Government of Nunavut, and Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated and demonstrates this government's commitment to our northern strategy and to the people of Canada's north.

● (2035)

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Chair, I know that one of the bills the minister has worked the hardest on is Bill S-6, which is known as the Yukon and Nunavut regulatory improvement act. I also realize that this legislation has been somewhat controversial among Yukon first nations who believe that one of the clauses of the bill, which allows for the delegation of federal powers to the territorial government, they would argue is not consistent with the spirit and intent of the Umbrella Final Agreement.

I wonder if the parliamentary secretary could elaborate a bit on our government's position with respect to this delegation of authority under Bill S-6 and perhaps explain why he would believe that this is an important piece of the bill.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Chair, first, I assure my colleague that the legislation ensures that any delegation will be consistent with existing land claims and self-government agreements. Moreover, the federal minister must provide written notification to first nations for any proposed delegation of authority.

It is also important to note that the Umbrella Final Agreement permits delegation, specifically section 12.19.2.15, which clarifies that development assessment legislation may provide for "any other matter required to implement the development assessment process". It is our government's view that delegating federal powers to the territory is consistent with the provisions of the Umbrella Final Agreement.

More broadly speaking, it is also our government's view that delegating powers to the territorial governments is aligned with our northern strategy and with our objective to delegate or devolve federal responsibilities to where they belong, which is in the territories.

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Chair, there are some Yukon first nations that have expressed opposition to the proposed clauses in Bill S-6 that actually deal with allowing the minister to provide policy direction to the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board. They oppose the ability of any other party to give policy direction to the independent board. After speaking with other colleagues, I have come to understand that when used in certain other jurisdictions, this power has only ever been used to protect the rights of first nations.

I am wondering if the parliamentary secretary could clarify for all members of the committee of the whole whether this provision protects the rights of first nations or if it in fact infringes upon them.

Business of Supply

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Chair, first and foremost, the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board is an advisory board that conducts reviews and makes recommendations. Policy direction would ensure a common understanding between the government and the board and would help to reduce uncertainty and delays in environmental assessment decision-making in the event that there was disagreement or uncertainty.

My colleague, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, is correct. This power already exists in the Northwest Territories with the Mackenzie Valley Land and Water Board. In the four instances when it has been used, it was used to ensure that the board upheld interim agreements between the government and first nations.

To further assure members that this provision does not infringe upon first nations, policy direction is subject to the application of section 4 of the YESA Act, which ensures that the minister cannot contradict first nations final agreements.

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Chair, one of the things we have heard consistently from northerners is that they were frustrated by the regulatory process. They thought that it was far too slow and that often there were no timelines on that regulatory process they could understand or follow through on clearly. They were concerned about the complexity, often, of the regulatory process and the kinds of resources it took for them to participate in it. They thought it was inconsistent and was very frustrating for them and for northerners in many different areas. Some of the issues actually centred around assessment boards; they were having a hard time getting predictable results from them.

One part of the Northwest Territories Devolution Act, which was passed last year, provided for the streamlining of the regulatory process of the Northwest Territories. Part of this involved the restructuring of assessment boards into a single board, which would incorporate the interests of all parties.

I understand that the move to restructure the land and water boards in the Northwest Territories has been met with opposition from aboriginal leaders in the territories, and because of this, restructuring has been delayed, pending the government's appeal of an injunction.

I would like to ask the parliamentary secretary if he can remind us of why the elimination of regional boards and the creation of a larger land and water board is a good idea.

• (2040)

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Chair, the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act included in the Northwest Territories Devolution Act implements obligations under land claim agreements between Canada and the Gwich'in, the Sahtu Dene and Métis, and the Tlicho respectively. It creates a single co-manage regime for land and waters in the Mackenzie Valley.

The existing land claim agreements allow for a single land and water board to be established in the Mackenzie Valley. The new approach would lead to a consolidated regulatory regime that would help streamline the system and reduce administrative and process inefficiencies.

Reducing the number of boards from four to one would ensure consistent application of the regulatory framework in the Mackenzie

Valley while ensuring that the government maintained appropriate aboriginal representation and respected its land claims obligations. This would increase investor confidence in resource development in the Mackenzie Valley while respecting the government's obligations listed in the land claims agreements.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain (Manicouagan, NDP): Mr. Chair, how much money has the department set aside for this fiscal year in order to fight cases before the courts involving the rights of aboriginal peoples?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, that is an interesting question. We are defendants in nearly 95% of some 420 legal proceedings taken against the government by various aboriginal or other groups, and I did not specifically budget for the costs incurred by the department for this type of expense.

The Department of Justice provides the majority of the legal services we require.

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: Mr. Chair, when did you become aware that your department was monitoring Cindy Blackstock's conversations and social media accounts?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, I did not understand the question.

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: Mr. Chair, I will move on to the next question.

When did you learn that Pam Palmater was under surveillance by your department?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, I heard about that allegation, at the time, from Cindy Blackstock herself, in her statements to various media outlets. This case was handled by the Canadian Human Rights Commission. We also know that it was not a campaign, as the member is alleging.

The Assistant Deputy Chair: I remind hon. members to direct their comments through the chair when the House is in committee of the whole.

The hon. member for Manicouagan.

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: Mr. Chair, are other aboriginal activists currently under surveillance by my colleague's department?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, I do not see what this question has to do with the main estimates. However, not to my knowledge, no.

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: Mr. Chair, does he know how many activists are under surveillance by his department?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, to my knowledge, the department is not spying on any activists, anywhere.

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: Mr. Chair, does he know how many Aboriginal Affairs employees are charged with monitoring social media and other aboriginal activities?

Business of Supply

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, my answer is the same as for the previous question.

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: Mr. Chair, how many first nations communities are under a boil water advisory?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, on May 5, 2015, in Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia, there was a total of 1,411 drinking water advisories in effect. To be sure, this is a measure to protect people's health.

• (2045)

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: Mr. Chair, may I suggest that you remind my colleague that the duration of his response should be proportional to the duration of the question?

The answer was simple, actually. Over 90 communities across Canada, excluding British Columbia. That only takes a few seconds to say.

How much money has the department spent this year to fly bottled water in to first nations communities under boil water advisories?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, the line item for that expenditure does not enable us to determine the cost. The money is transferred to first nations as part of their budget. I am unable to say how much they have spent to ship bottles of water.

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: Mr. Chair, in how many first nations communities does the drinking water system comply with the standards set out in the guidelines for Canadian drinking water quality?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, I do not have the exact number with me, but I can get him that information in writing.

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: Mr. Chair, we have excellent researchers on the NDP staff.

Between now and March 31, 2019, the department expects only 87% of first nation drinking water systems to meet prescribed standards.

How many first nation communities have waste water treatment systems that currently meet effluent quality regulations and guidelines?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, if he has the answers to all the questions, why bother asking them? Is he trying to waste the committee's time?

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: Mr. Chair, we are in the same situation as the last time I asked him some questions. He is passing the buck.

How much of the water and waste water systems budget will be dedicated to developing drinking water regulations?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, we will continue to implement our action plan to improve the quality of waste water and drinking water in first nations communities across the country.

As I said earlier, we have invested nearly \$3 billion since 2006 in waste water infrastructure. As shown in our recent budget, economic action plan 2015, we will continue pursuing our efforts and improving the situation.

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: Mr. Chair, is the minister aware of the need for new housing?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, yes.

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: Mr. Chair, a more detailed answer would have been appreciated.

What percentage of the community infrastructure improvement fund will be allocated to building law enforcement facilities on reserves, including prisons and police stations?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, I did not understand the question. The member is speaking too quickly.

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: Mr. Chair, I have another question.

When will the five-year review of the mandate and structure of the specific claims tribunal be completed?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, it is finished. It began last fall.

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: Mr. Chair, what is the government's total financial liability for land claims?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, does the hon. member want to know about specific claims or comprehensive claims?

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: Mr. Chair, I am interested in specific claims.

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, if the question is about the specific claims that have been settled since 2007, 127 have been settled for a total of \$2.2 billion.

• (2050)

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: Mr. Chair, under Infrastructure and Capacity, we find no mention of the construction of new housing. Why?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, that is because housing is a subprogram that provides funding to first nations every year. This year, \$140,911,819 will be invested in housing for first nations.

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: Mr. Chair, the report on plans and priorities mentions the upcoming expiry of the targeted funding in economic action plan 2012 for supporting the construction and renovation of schools on reserves. How many schools were built with the help of this additional funding and how many schools were renovated?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, from budget 2012, the department funded 15 school construction and repair projects. That total includes 11 new schools and four renovations.

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: Mr. Chair, how does that result compare to the current need for new schools and renovations on reserves?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, the member will be delighted to know that last November the Prime Minister confirmed that, beginning in 2015-16, \$500 million will be invested in the construction and renovation of schools over the next seven years. That is good news for first nations that need school infrastructure.

Business of Supply

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: Mr. Chair, how many members of first nations communities will receive training under the reserve land and environment management program in the current fiscal year?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, I did not understand the question. The member is babbling away so quickly that I find it hard to understand the question. Perhaps he could calm down and ask his questions more slowly, and then he would get answers.

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: Mr. Chair, I respectfully submit to you that the type of language used by the minister is quite disrespectful.

How many people will receive training under the reserve land and environment management program?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, I do not have that information.

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: Mr. Chair, can the minister specify the amounts allocated respectively to emergency mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery?

The Assistant Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

The hon. member for Manicouagan.

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: Mr. Chair, what percentage of emergency funding is intended for police services? That is a very simple question.

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, I do not answer for public safety.

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: Mr. Chair, what portion of the \$69.1 million allocated to emergency management will be spent on new activities?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, I cannot say how much of the funding will be allocated to new or existing projects.

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: Mr. Chair, does the minister realize that the fact that there are more than 1,181 missing and murdered aboriginal women is a national and social tragedy?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, that is a serious issue, and the government has already recognized it as such. That is why, last fall, the Minister of Status of Women announced an action plan to take measures to address this issue across the country.

• (2055)

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: Mr. Chair, what does the minister believe is the leading cause of this systemic violence against aboriginal women? That is a very simple question.

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, in my experience, every time someone is murdered, a crime has been committed. This government has enacted an array of legislative measures to ensure that those who commit crimes pay the price. We took those measure to keep all Canadians safe.

The Assistant Deputy Chair: The member for Manicouagan, for his final question.

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: Mr. Chair, can the minister tell me how many shelters there are on reserves?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, I do not know.

The Assistant Deputy Chair: The member for Manicouagan has time for one more question.

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: Mr. Chair, does he think that number is sufficient and can he tell me at what capacity these shelters are operating?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, They are operating at full capacity and are providing assistance to over 68% of people living on reserves across the country.

[English]

Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Chair, I have some questions for the minister or the parliamentary secretary.

First, I would like to take a bit of time to speak about the action that our government is taking to assist aboriginal people in building strong foundations for economic development.

Our government's top priorities are jobs and economic growth for all Canadians. These priorities are crucial when it comes to achieving our goal of healthier, more prosperous aboriginal communities. We recognize that aboriginal people need access to a range of tools and supports to help build strong communities that reach their full potential.

To that end, our government is working to turn opportunities into realities, like economic growth and increased job creation. I would like to take this opportunity to tell members about some of the initiatives our government has undertaken to achieve this.

A great example of the concrete steps that we are taking to enable first nations to assume greater control over their day-to-day affairs and access economic development opportunities is the first nations land management regime. By joining the first nations land management regime, a first nations-led initiative, participating first nations can opt out of 32 land-related sections of the Indian Act and enact their own laws and codes related to the development, use and possession of reserve lands. Operating under their own land codes, FNLM first nations are able to operate at the speed of business and compete for opportunities on a level playing field with non-aboriginal organizations.

There has been significant progress made under the first nations land management regime over the past few years. I am very proud of what our government has accomplished on this front.

In short, we have collaborated with willing partners to create conditions for economic development on reserve. However, none of this would be possible without the buy-in from first nations and, fortunately, many first nations have shown great interest in opting into the first nations land management regime. This is why our government has invested in the first nations land management regime, so that more first nations can take advantage of these economic opportunities that it creates.

Business of Supply

The economic action plan of 2013 invested \$9 million over two years for the expansion of the first nations land management regime to provide additional first nations with the opportunity to manage the development, conservation, use and possession of reserve lands. This investment added 36 first nations to the regime, bringing the total number of first nations to 94 across the country that are taking advantage of this opportunity.

Building on this investment, economic action plan 2015 proposes to provide \$30.3 million over five years, which is expected to lead an additional 25 first nations to joining the first nations land management regime. These measures would attract investment and create jobs. They would open a path to greater prosperity and create greater self-sufficiency for first nations communities.

Chief Robert Louie, chair of the First Nations Land Advisory Board, said:

Just recently, the international firm KPMG completed a study on the benefits of the Framework Agreement for all the participating First Nations. Investments on reserve now are estimated at \$270 million and thousands of on-reserve jobs are being created for both members and non-members. Our First Nations are forging new partnerships with businesses, investors, bankers as well as with provincial and municipal governments...We are on the verge of a new era of prosperity for our communities—

While there are many first nations across the country that have achieved success under the first nations land management regime, I will briefly raise an example of one success story.

The Henvey Inlet First Nation, located about an hour south of Sudbury, Ontario, started operating under the regime in 2010. In 2014, the first nation signed an agreement with Pattern Energy Group LP to jointly develop, own and operate the 300-megawatt Henvey Inlet wind project, the largest first nations wind project in Canada. The project has a 20-year power purchase agreement with the Ontario government.

The project is expected to create local jobs and to provide a significant source of revenue for the first nation. This opportunity would likely not have been available to the Henvey Inlet First Nation without the first nations land management regime. Our Conservative government believes this regime is essential for first nations to reap the benefits of self-sustaining economic growth and prosperity.

● (2100)

Another important tool available to first nations to increase their access to capital and spur economic development is the First Nations Fiscal Management Act. This opt-in legislation enables first nations across Canada to strengthen their property tax systems and refine their financial management regimes. It provides them with additional revenue-raising tools, strong standards for accountability and access to capital markets available to other levels of government, such as municipalities.

The First Nations Fiscal Management Act has been very successful with strong and sustained demand for first nations to participate in that regime. To date, 158 first nations have chosen to participate in the regime, with 82 now collecting property tax, 52 having received financial performance certification and 44 accepted as borrowing members.

While the results are already impressive, there is still work to be done to improve the regime. Just last week, our government

introduced amendments to the act in the budget implementation act of 2015. These proposed amendments would improve the act's overall efficiency, reduce needless red tape and help facilitate access to the regime so that more first nations can reap its benefits.

The strategic partnerships initiative is another program aimed at encouraging economic development on reserve. Launched in 2010, this initiative increases aboriginal participation in complex economic opportunities, particularly in the natural resource sectors. It encourages engagement between first nations, industry and all levels of government. It provides first nations with jobs and skills training to prepare them for the labour market. For example, our government invested \$7.3 million through the strategic partnerships initiative to support aboriginal participation in the development of northern Quebec, particularly in major mining projects in the Labrador Trough.

We are committed to working with first nations and aboriginal communities, with provinces and territories, and with the private sector to realize the nearly limitless potential of first nations communities. We are committed to helping industry to find the skilled workers that it needs and to ensuring aboriginal people have access to the education and training that they need to fill those roles.

For example, since 2013, our government has helped to provide over 5,000 first nations youth on income assistance between the ages of 18 and 24 with personalized jobs and skills training so that they can enjoy the benefits of a good job. This is part of our government's focus on jobs, growth and prosperity, a focus that continues with economic action plan 2015.

Our new budget commits \$249 million over five years to support aboriginal participation in the labour market. Of this amount, \$215 million will go to the skills and partnership fund to work with our partners in business and government to provide skills development and training for aboriginal people.

Increasing aboriginal participation in the economy is the most effective way to improve the well-being and the quality of life of aboriginal peoples in Canada. As you have just heard, Mr. Chair, this government is finding innovative ways of doing just that.

If I could now just ask some questions of the parliamentary secretary, Mr. Chair.

First of all, our government takes tremendous pride in our economic record. We certainly understand that economic development is necessary in order to improve the quality of life of all Canadians. This is no different when it comes to Canada's aboriginal people. I think that we can all agree that the road to healthy, prosperous and self-sufficient first nations involves economic development.

Business of Supply

With that being said, there are obviously some barriers to first nations economic development, many of which are actually enshrined in the Indian Act itself.

Could the parliamentary secretary describe what our government is doing to overcome these barriers and drive economic development on reserve?

• (2105)

Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Chair, I would like to thank the chair of the aboriginal affairs committee. He has recently been appointed to that role and has certainly excelled at it. We are happy to have him as a member of the committee.

Certainly this government has implemented a number of programs that support aboriginal economic development. These programs will drive economic development on reserve by ensuring that first nations have the tools they need to take advantage of all the opportunities that Canada has to offer.

Economic action plan 2015 proposes to provide \$30.3 million over five years for the expansion of the first nations land management regime to create more opportunities for economic development on reserve.

Our government will also be moving forward with amendments to the First Nations Fiscal Management Act. Under the act last year, 14 first nations participated in the \$90-million inaugural bond, which allows them to have the same access to capital as most local governments in Canada.

This is something that we are studying at the aboriginal affairs committee. We have heard about the great success of the First Nations Land Management Act, something that at its inception was not thought perhaps was going to amount to much, but now first nations have seen the success of the nations under the FNLMA and they too want to join that and take control over those 34 sections of the Indian Act so that they have more control over their own lands.

Mr. Blake Richards: Mr. Chair, the Conservative government understands that when first nations and aboriginal communities work with provincial and territorial governments and with industry, our ability to improve the quality of Canada's aboriginal peoples increases greatly. By providing first nations with skills training they can become active members of our country's economy.

The strategic partnerships initiative, which was founded in 2010, is a program established by our government to promote economic development among Canada's first nations.

I wonder if the parliamentary secretary could describe how the strategic partnerships initiative is contributing to aboriginal participation in Canada's economy.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Chair, the strategic partnerships initiative makes investments to address key priorities, such as encouraging engagement between first nations, industry and the government, as well as providing jobs and skills training to prepare first nations for the labour market. The program is designed to increase aboriginal participation in complex economic opportunities, particularly in the natural resource sectors where projects are emerging at an

unprecedented rate across the country. To date, the initiative has supported over 400 aboriginal communities and organizations.

With significant investments in major projects anticipated in the next 10 years, the strategic partnerships initiative will focus increasingly on supporting community economic readiness activities so that communities are better prepared to engage with partners and participate fully in these developments.

Mr. Blake Richards: Mr. Chair, many first nations have described the land management provisions in the Indian Act as a hurdle that prevents economic development. Our government strongly believes that first nations communities have a far greater ability to unlock the significant economic development potential of reserve lands when they are able to enact their own land management laws. This is why our government invested \$30.3 million over five years in economic action plan 2015 to support the first nations land management regime.

Could the parliamentary secretary please describe how the First Nations Land Management Act has been a successful vehicle for economic development?

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Chair, from various self-government to comprehensive land claims agreements, to the First Nations Land Management Act, our government has taken strides to provide first nations with greater autonomy.

This work has yielded great success through the first nations land management regime. Those first nations operating under the land management regime have reported an increase of 4,000 jobs as a result of new businesses created on reserve land, including tourism, entertainment, transportation, warehousing and commercial retail.

These opportunities are created because FNLMA gives first nations the ability to act at the speed of business and compete on an equal playing field with organizations off reserve. Economic action plan 2015 includes \$30.3 million over five years to help support this initiative.

• (2110)

Mr. Blake Richards: Mr. Chair, obviously, our government strongly believes that aboriginal Canadians must have the same opportunities that all Canadians have: to find, keep and enjoy the benefits of a good job. Having first nations active in the economy leads to a healthier first nations community and to a stronger Canada.

I wonder if the parliamentary secretary could please inform this committee of the whole about our government's income assistance reform program and how it has been a successful vehicle for community economic development.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Chair, our economic action plan 2013 invested \$241 million over four years in new funding to help first nations youth obtain personalized skills training and a job, because, unlike the opposition parties, our government knows that the greatest assistance we can provide as a government is access to the labour market and individualized training for first nations youth. We are going to continue to deliver on that.

Business of Supply

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Chair, I must admit that the minister must have one of the toughest jobs in cabinet. It is not because of the diversity of the issues that he needs to deal with but certainly because he has important constitutional responsibilities that he seems to be taking so lightly tonight.

My first question is very simple. Does he believe in nation to nation relationships with Métis, aboriginal peoples and Inuit in this country?

[Translation]

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Absolutely, Mr. Chair.

[English]

It is the reason why we negotiate self-government agreements and comprehensive land claims agreements with first nations across Canada. We continue our dialogue with the Métis. On the Inuit front, we already have comprehensive land claims agreements and self-government agreements that have been entered into.

Under those conditions, yes, the relation is nation to nation.

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Mr. Chair, I guess that is why he personally voted against my bill on the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which would have enshrined the basic and fundamental rights of indigenous peoples into Canadian law.

Bolivia has done it. It has integrated the UN declaration into its constitution. Why can this country not do it, too?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, it is because in 1982, Canada and all provinces amended the Constitution to entrench the fundamental aboriginal rights of aboriginal Canadians and treaty rights. Ours is one of the few countries in the world where those aboriginal rights and treaty rights are enshrined in the Constitution.

In addition, the Supreme Court of Canada has ruled on several occasions on the extent of those aboriginal and treaty rights in Canada. If we had followed the way of the hon. member, it would have been against the Constitution of Canada.

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Mr. Chair, I would like to confirm to the minister, through you, that in the Haida Nation case, the Supreme Court said that on important matters, aboriginal peoples have to give their consent. That is what my bill was supposed to do.

Can the minister tell me which article refers to veto in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, we all know that the concern of Canada with this declaration is the free, prior and informed consent. Once, this government endorsed the declaration. It stated categorically and without nuance that, indeed, this would not affect Canadian law.

We see the UN declaration as an aspirational document. The rights of aboriginal peoples are protected in Canada, not only by section 35. They enjoy the same rights as all others through the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Moreover, when we amended the Canadian Human Rights Act so that it applied to all first nations in Canada, his party voted against it.

• (2115)

[Translation]

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Mr. Chair, that is what the bill was supposed to do as well.

Does the minister believe that the rights of aboriginal peoples are incompatible with the rights of other Canadians, as he said in the House on March 13?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, I never said that in the House. That is absolutely not true.

What I said was that aboriginal rights in Canada are guaranteed in section 35 of the Constitution, as well as in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. I never said the opposite.

In fact, we prove every day that we fully respect aboriginal treaty rights with all of measures we have taken to improve these rights and ensure they are respected.

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Mr. Chair, what a claim.

Does the minister believe that the Supreme Court of Canada erred in *Tsilhqot'in* when it ruled that aboriginal title holders have a constitutional right to decide whether or not to give consent?

Since he does not appear to have read the rulings, I will remind him that in *Tsilhqot'in*, the Supreme Court refers to the notion of consent in nine paragraphs and even refers to the notion of control over resources and lands in 11 paragraphs.

Did the Supreme Court err in this ruling?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, the member should know that the Supreme Court of Canada does not err. It never makes mistakes. When the Supreme Court of Canada issues a ruling, that ruling becomes law. We fully comply with the rulings of the Supreme Court of Canada.

[English]

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Mr. Chair, as the TRC is coming to a close, will the department allocate further funding to compensate other survivors, first nations, Métis and Inuit, who attended provincial or privately-run residential and day schools and sanatoriums?

[Translation]

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, the government's position is clear.

[English]

We will fully respect our obligations under the settlement agreement that was concluded among all parties.

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Mr. Chair, will the department allocate further funding to compensate survivors of other social experiments, like the experimental Eskimos and the children of the Sixties Scoop, who have been fighting for recognition and compensation in the courts?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, with all due respect, these matters are before the court. It would be improper to comment on matters before the court.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Mr. Chair, may I ask how much the department has spent fighting these survivors in court?

[English]

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, I do not have the exact figure as to the legal costs incurred by Canada in this matter, but I can undertake to provide the hon. member with those numbers.

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Mr. Chair, does the minister truly believe that first nation kids are retiring at 18 years old to go on welfare, as he said in New Brunswick?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, in New Brunswick, I was repeating a comment that the chief made to me. He was congratulating Canada on the measures we were taking with respect to income assistance. As members may know, two years ago this government introduced a \$243 million initiative to help young members of first nations get into the labour market, with personalized skills training development, basic skills. As a result of this great initiative, which I know the NDP opposed, today we have a significant decline of young people who depend on income assistance because they are in the labour market.

• (2120)

[Translation]

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Mr. Chair, I have a specific question about the department's criteria. Many aboriginal organizations across the country depend on funding allocated on the basis of criteria that the minister uses to recognize a representative aboriginal organization.

Where are those criteria published, and who made the decision to no longer recognize, for example—I am choosing an organization at random—Quebec Native Women?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, to be precise, the organization in question never submitted an application to the department for funding under the program we are talking about. That is a fact. It used to get funding from Canadian Heritage.

For the hon. member's information, the association in question was informed that it could submit an application under the existing program and that its application would be evaluated on the basis of the existing criteria.

[English]

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Mr. Chair, earlier he refused to call the missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls a national tragedy; he just called it an important question. What are the department's top priorities in addressing the root causes of violence against indigenous women?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, the hosts of programs being implemented by this department, by the Government of Canada and other departments all work in that direction. Whether it be education, or training, or skills development, or housing or child and family services, these are all programs we believe can help address this phenomenon, which is not acceptable to anybody.

The fact is that this government, the first one, to my recollection, has adopted an action plan to deal with the issue of missing aboriginal women.

I want to point out for the hon. member that all provinces, territories and national organizations at the round table agreed that the actions we had singled out would be the framework upon which we would be acting—

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Order, please. The hon. member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou.

[Translation]

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Mr. Chair, I know that the minister often refers to the Conservatives' action plan, but he never says that the action plan was not developed in partnership with the stakeholders. That is unfortunate, and it is why this will not work this time around.

Can the minister tell us how funding for shelters on reserve differs from funding for shelters off reserve?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, I do not have information about communities off reserve, but I can tell the member that the 43 department-funded shelters provide service to some 68% of the aboriginal population on reserve. Once again this year, the main estimates clearly demonstrate that we will continue to support these shelters.

[English]

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Mr. Chair, could the minister tell us how many facilities offer second stage housing on reserve for indigenous women?

[Translation]

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, would the member please accept my apologies and repeat his question?

[English]

Mr. Romeo Saganash: The question was very simple, Mr. Chair. How many facilities offer second stage housing on reserve for indigenous women?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, I do not have that information.

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Mr. Chair, what funding, in total, does the department provide for these facilities?

• (2125)

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, I do not have that information. I do not have the cost of that facility.

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Mr. Chair, I will come back to some of the questions I asked before. When the department and the government continue to fight aboriginal rights in the courts, does the minister think this is in keeping with the honour to the Crown and the goal of reconciliation in our country?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, we are so committed to reconciliation that last July I announced a series of measures to improve the treaty-making process to ensure we could conclude a more comprehensive land claim agreement.

Business of Supply

I have appointed a special representative to consult with stakeholders, with first nations, provinces and everybody interested in order to renew the comprehensive land claim policy, which I strongly believe can be done through reconciliation.

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Mr. Chair, I would like to ask a question also on missing and murdered aboriginal women and the need for a national public inquiry on this. Does the minister think it is not possible to do the action plan and the inquiry at the same time. Does one preclude the other?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, as I indicated earlier, the position of the government is really clear, and it is one shared by many first nations and also victims of violence. We do not need more studies. We need action. That is what we have put forward and that is what we will act on going forward.

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Brampton West, CPC): Mr. Chair, I am thankful for the opportunity to speak this evening to explain some of the impressive work our government is doing to drive economic development on reserve to my colleagues. When we talk about that, one of the biggest issues is access to capital. Right now our committee is in fact conducting a study on access to capital. We have heard some very interesting and impressive testimony to deal with some of the issues that are faced by first nations communities.

When we are talking about access to capital, we are talking about funding to start a small business or to expand a business, to perhaps purchase a family home, or to leverage real property and entice investors from off reserve. This remains an enormous problem due to section 89 of the Indian Act, which prevents fee simple ownership. Therefore, it really limits the use of property as a security when trying to negotiate that type of financing. That type of financing is critical for most businesses off reserve, the ability to leverage real property. This is essential for entrepreneurs, small business and really anyone who is seeking any amount of capital to start or expand a business.

Our government understands how this can limit the potential of first nations, so we are working with willing partners to try to find a solution to the problem.

One of the solutions we heard about a bit earlier was the First Nations Land Management Act. This is a great piece of opt-in legislation. It allows a participating first nation to actually opt out of 34 land-related sections of the Indian Act. It gives a first nation the ability to manage its lands and resources. It also gives it the ability to operate at the "speed of business", a phrase we have heard many times. The inability to operate at the speed of business has been an incredible impediment to first nations communities.

Another important tool is the First Nations Fiscal Management Act. This is also opt-in legislation. This encourages first nations across Canada to establish property tax systems and strengthen fiscal management. It provides them with increased revenue raising tools, strong standards for accountability and access to capital markets available to other levels of governments. The act does this in three ways, through three aboriginal financial institutions: first, the First Nations Tax Commission; second, the Financial Management Board; and three, the First Nations Finance Authority. I will talk a bit about each.

The First Nations Tax Commission creates legal, administrative and infrastructure framework for first nations to establish property tax regimes. Property tax allows a first nations government to have a reliable stream of income that it can leverage into loans with other financial institutions to do all kinds of improvements on reserve.

The First Nations Financial Management Board certifies the financial management systems and performances of individual first nations. This ensures good governance and fiscal responsibility. It assists first nations in developing the capacity to meet their financial management requirements, provides the tools and guidance that will instill confidence in first nations financial management and reporting systems.

Finally, the First Nations Finance Authority issues bonds to borrowing first nations, secured by the revenue coming in from things like property tax and other revenues. The First Nations Finance Authority is a non-profit aboriginal government-owned and controlled institution built to provide all first nations and aboriginal governments, big or small, urban or remote, resource-rich or not, with the same finance instruments that other levels of government in Canada have at their disposal to build safe, healthy and prosperous communities. These bonds are sold on the market and provide participating first nations with an innovative way to access the capital required for economic development.

The First Nations Fiscal Management Act has been very successful, with strong and sustained demand from first nations to participate in the regime.

To build on this success, since 2007, the First Nations Financial Management Board, the First Nations Tax Commission and the First Nations Finance Authority have been working in concert with our government on a series of recommended changes to the act. These changes are designed to improve the legislation, reduce needless red tape and increase investor confidence. The overall goal is to improve the economic opportunities and well-being for first nations communities. In fact, we heard directly at committee during our study that changes were needed to make this operate more efficiently.

• (2130)

It makes me proud to say that Bill C-59, the budget implementation act, introduced on May 7, proposes 43 administrative and technical changes to the legislation. These changes would streamline participation in the regime by providing for first nations to be added by ministerial order rather than an order in council.

It would eliminate the duplication and needless red tape, and strengthen the confidence of capital markets and investors. For example, one proposed amendment would clarify that all certified first nations must remain in compliance with the certification requirements of the financial management board. This proposed legislation could have a significant and positive effect on first nations and I urge all hon. members to support it.

It is projected, and these projections are really quite exceptional, that if the act is amended as suggested, by 2020, a mere five years from now, 235 first nations will have opted into the regime, \$70 million annually will be collected in property taxes, 100 first nations will have received certification from the First Nations Financial Management Board, and \$1 billion in borrowing room will be available to borrowing members. This is the example of being able to leverage that revenue stream and turn it into funding for infrastructure projects on first nations reserves. This is an exceptional opportunity.

To date, the regime has been very successful and I welcome the opportunity for more first nations to become active participants. Demonstrating the potential advantages for first nations of this regime, in June of last year, 14 first nations from British Columbia, Manitoba, Nova Scotia and Ontario were part of the first nations finance authority's inaugural \$90 million bond. The proceeds of this bond are being used for vital things, such as building roads, water, waste water systems, public buildings, as well as refinancing existing bank loans and economic opportunities both on and off reserve.

In fact, in some of the testimony heard at committee, this would allow a first nation community to save \$140,000 a month, which is equivalent to building one house on reserve. The bond issuance was a significant achievement for first nations and the first nations finance authority.

Chief Terry Paul of the Membertou First Nation in Nova Scotia, which raised \$21 million through the bond, and the chair of the FNFA, stated:

Today, First Nations have made a significant step forward as economic equals with other governments. Over the long-term, this will have a profound and positive impact in our communities.

The first nations finance authority is currently working toward issuing its second bond, which it expects to exceed \$100 million later this year. Access to capital is the key to unlocking the economic potential of our first nation communities.

I now have some questions.

On May 7, 2015, the government took, as I stated, another important step to promote prosperity in first nations communities and introduced Bill C-59, which includes a number of amendments to the First Nations Fiscal Management Act. Earlier this year, the aboriginal affairs committee heard testimony from Manny Jules, Harold Calla and Ernie Daniels, all of whom had worked hard to identify ways that the act could be improved.

Could the parliamentary secretary share with the rest of the committee of the whole what the proposed amendments to the First Nations Fiscal Management Act intend to achieve?

• (2135)

Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Chair, I would first like to thank the member for Brampton West for his work on the aboriginal affairs committee. He has certainly been a key member of the study on access to capital, using his vast experience in law to get to the heart of the issues and really lead the way for the Conservative side of the table as we have endeavoured to find out more about this important study.

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Certainly, our government has taken significant steps to improve economic development opportunities for aboriginal communities to ensure they have the tools that they need to take advantage of all of the opportunities that Canada has to offer. As I have said before, the First Nations Fiscal Management Act, or FNFMA, has provided participating first nations with fiscal powers similar to those exercised by other governments in Canada.

The proposed amendments to the act would improve the overall efficiency, reduce needless red tape and facilitate access to the act, so that more first nations can opt in. The proposed amendments would further increase the effectiveness of the regime by facilitating first nation participation while enhancing the confidence of capital markets and investors.

We heard from Chief Manny Jules about the importance of getting these provisions passed through the House quickly and that is why I was so pleased to see these provisions in the budget implementation act. That is something we hope to pass through the House in short order.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Mr. Chair, as I said earlier, the committee is currently studying access to capital issues. One of the things we have heard over and over again is how important access to the FNMLA is for first nation communities. Of course, it allows them to opt out of 34 land-related sections in the Indian Act.

Budget 2015 actually earmarks additional funds for new entrants into FNMLA. Could the parliamentary secretary explain to us how important it is that there are additional funds for new entrants into the FNMLA?

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Chair, the member is quite correct.

Building on a previous investment of \$9 million from economic action plan 2013, economic action plan 2015 invests a further \$30.3 million over five years to encourage additional first nations to join the regime.

It is anticipated that this funding will allow an additional 25 communities to become participants in the first nations land management regime which, as the member said, allows first nations to opt out of certain sections of the Indian Act, giving them the ability to operate at the speed of business and make decisions for the benefit of their own communities in their own communities as opposed to the way that it is under the Indian Act where those decisions are often made in Ottawa.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Mr. Chair, one of the other things that I was talking about, and what we are studying at committee on the access to capital, is the first nations finance authority and how it worked over several years to create a \$90 million bond.

On June 14, the first nations finance authority issued that inaugural bond of \$90 million, and I can tell members from listening to witness testimony that they are exceptionally proud of the work that was done in order to achieve this.

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Could the parliamentary secretary explain the benefits and provide examples of communities that participated in the issuance of that bond and why that process is so important?

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Chair, 14 first nations across Canada participated in the first nations finance authority inaugural bond of \$90 million, as the member referenced. The proceeds of the bond are financing much needed infrastructure on reserve and refinancing existing costly bank loans.

The community of Membertou in Nova Scotia raised \$21 million through the bond, and by using the proceeds to refinance existing commercial loans, it is saving \$1.7 million in annual interest costs. These savings are being reinvested into the community.

St. Theresa Point First Nation, a fly-in community in northern Manitoba, was certified by the financial management board and was able to get out of third-party management. As a participant of the bond, it reduced its borrowing costs from rates approaching 20% to under 4%, placing them in sound financial shape.

Working with the network of aboriginal financial institutions, AANCD has supported the lending of over \$2 billion to more than 38,000 aboriginal entrepreneurs to finance business startups, acquisitions and expansions, and the \$2 billion threshold was reached in 2014-15.

• (2140)

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Mr. Chair, access to capital is and continues to be a very significant key in unlocking the economic potential of first nation communities. It is a means by which first nations can take charge of their own opportunities and their own future.

The first nations financial management board and the first nations finance authority have done a great deal to develop the fiscal conditions that make capital available for first nations. As a consequence, as we have seen, there is better infrastructure, greater economic opportunities and stronger investor confidence.

Could the parliamentary secretary comment on how important the study is that we are doing right now to try and find improvements for access to capital?

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Chair, it is an important study of which the member has been a key part. We have heard from aboriginal stakeholders from across the country and from aboriginal financial institutions, who are all talking about some of the challenges in accessing capital on reserve and some of the success stories.

Certainly, as we proceed with the study, we want to examine and identify the barriers to capital access, so that we can continue to overcome those as we have with the FNMLA and other important investments, such as our Bill C-59 with the first nations financial management authority.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Chair, I thank the minister for being here tonight. To move along, I will give headings in terms of where I am going. I do not want to have anyone jumping out and trying to grab papers out from underneath.

I will start with child welfare and child equity issues. How many children, 14 and under, in state care right now are aboriginal?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, as the responsibility is delegated to agencies by the provinces, I cannot give the member the

exact figure of the number of children who are in care tonight. These are figures that I am sure we could gather after the fact. However, as the member knows, this responsibility belongs to several agencies and the provinces that administer child and welfare services on reserves where there are no agencies.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Chair, actually, I got it from one of the minister's own documents. The number is 30,000 to 40,000. I think the minister does not have his facts right. The obligation to pay under the 1965 agreement is from the federal to the provincial.

Does the minister not keep track of the number of children that are in care that his government is paying for?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, the number of first nations children on reserve who are estimated to be in care is a figure that, of course, I do not check everyday. What we do as a department is transfer funds to the agencies and to the provinces for the costs they incur.

When the member talks about an obligation, I will remind the hon. member that this is a policy matter. This is a policy decision to reimburse the provinces and to fund the agencies, but it is a—

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Order, please. The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Chair, I am not asking him to check everyday. I am asking whether he bothers to keep track of the children that are under his responsibility that his own department says is 30,000 to 40,000. It is not a provincial responsibility; it is his responsibility.

Will the minister confirm that he is initiating discussions to transfer first nations child and family services programs to other groups as a result of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ruling on whether the federal government has discriminatory practices against first nations children? Have those discussions been initiated?

• (2145)

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, I can assure the hon. member that the only discussions we are having with different stakeholders across the country in regard to child and family services are to improve the services that are being provided to these children. We had discussions with groups in British Columbia and, for that matter, all provinces in order to ensure that we have a system that is more accountable and transparent, and that brings about results.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Chair, I will now turn to the issue of education. I will focus mostly on the Ontario region, so we are not jumping around.

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Will the minister tell the House what the per student funding is in the Ontario region that is provided by the federal government to local education authorities for first nations students?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, in these estimates, close to \$1.8 billion will be invested in education for first nations students on reserve and for post-secondary education. If the member wants to get a detailed breakdown of the amounts for Ontario, I am sure I could provide him with that information.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Chair, I am sorry, I think the minister misunderstood the question. I was asking about the per capita student funding. Each child carries a per capita. That is how the minister funds education. I am sure he knows that, so he should be able to give me the number.

What is the per capita funding per student in an aboriginal school on reserve in Ontario?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, I do not have that figure, but I can undertake to assemble the different amounts that are provided for education in Ontario and give the member that information while, of course, looking at the total enrolment in Ontario. However, this is not information I have in front of me right now.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Chair, I appreciate that he is going to pass that on. Would he be able to tell me, then, if a child transfers from a community like Attawapiskat to the provincial school board, what the federal government will pay to the provincial school board? These are agreements in place that Aboriginal Affairs has to deal with.

What would be the amount that is transferred from a community in an Ontario region to a provincial school board?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, the amount will vary, depending on which school board we are talking about. Usually the way it is done is that an agreement is entered into between the first nation, the school board in question, and the department, and that would establish the cost.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Chair, in James Bay, in Attawapiskat, the per capita student funding is \$8,000. The minister might want to write that down. If that child transfers to the provincial system, the federal government will pay \$16,000. That means that the children in Attawapiskat are getting 50% less than children who are being transferred into the provincial system.

Will the minister tell me how much of the first nations education funding is being cut this year in the main estimates?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, there are no cuts in the estimates. What appears to be reduced spending by some \$18 million, I believe, is because of targeted spending that is sunseting at the end of March. The hon. member will recall that in economic action plan 2015, there is a commitment to invest another \$200 million, which will allow us to bring that back to that program in the supplementary estimates.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Chair, I read in the estimates that they are cutting \$133.4 million this year. It is written in the main estimates. I could get him the page. It might help him.

I will continue with the Ontario region. Would the minister tell me what the literacy and numeracy rates are for aboriginal children in the schools that are under his authority in the Ontario region?

● (2150)

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, I want the record to indicate that the \$137 million decrease, which is indeed in the estimates, reflects the sunset of the original \$115 million provided in 2014-15, as well as \$18.4 million, that was reprofiled from 2013-14 to 2014-15.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Chair, they said the money was sunsetted because they had reached their targets for improving first nations education. I asked what, according to this department, the literacy and numeracy rates are for first nations students in Ontario who took the standardized provincial tests.

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, this is information that I do not have in front of me, but we could provide it to the hon. member.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Chair, I read it in the AANDC report. It was the first time that it ever kept those numbers.

Do members know what those numbers are? The literacy score is at 21% for boys. The numeracy rate is 18%. I do not know if the minister can name a country in the world where those rates would be lower.

Will the minister confirm that the internal audit into elementary and secondary schools on reserve has been cancelled?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, I cannot. However, if the member is so concerned about education for first nations students on reserve, it is funny that when last year's budget earmarked \$1.2 billion for statutory funding that would have provided the children living in Kashechewan and everywhere else with the same level of funding that they were getting from the province, he voted against it.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Chair, I do not know what the minister is talking about. We are talking about numeracy and literacy rates of 18% and 21% in the Ontario region, and I asked whether he could confirm that the internal audit of AANDC into elementary and secondary schools on reserve had been cancelled. Will he confirm that?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, I was talking about a budget measure in 2014 of \$1.25 billion, increasing annually at a rate of 4.5%, to ensure that we could increase the numeracy and literacy rates among first nation children on reserve, and he voted against it.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Chair, that was a fairly ridiculous response to something that he should know, because they were bragging about cutting this internal audit in their own end-of-year report. I would be surprised if the minister did not know that.

In 2013-14, how much of the \$300 million that was planned for educational facilities was actually spent?

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The answer is that they held back \$86 million and did not bother to spend it on first nations children.

According to AANDC's \$8.2 billion infrastructure gap, how much is needed for school facilities?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, most recently—and he voted against it—we committed \$500 million over seven years through our economic action plan in 2014, and the 2015 economic action plan has an education and infrastructure fund beginning this year. These funds represent the continuation of the \$175 million over three years for school infrastructure that we had announced in economic plan 2012.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Chair, as I said, it is not very helpful when they make these promises and then pull the money back and actually do not spend it, as their own reports say.

Will the minister tell us, because he is the minister in charge of the education of thousands and thousands of indigenous children in this country, what the graduating rates are for elementary school and high school first nation students on reserve?

• (2155)

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, I do not have that figure in front of me.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Chair, would he be able to tell us, from his own government studies, what the cost is to the Canadian economy for each cohort of 14- to 19-year-old students who drop out? Could he tell us that?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: No, Mr. Chair, I do not have that information in front of me.

The Assistant Deputy Chair: We have about a minute and a half left.

The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Chair, I am not trying to make this hard, but these are from his own education reports in 2012 on first nation education. It said there was a 40% dropout rate and that the cost to the Canadian economy was \$887 million for each cohort of 14- to 19-year-old students who drop out. I would think the minister would be very concerned about that, but obviously he does not bother to read his own reports.

Would the minister tell us how much AANDC allocates specifically for special education for first nation students on reserve?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, what I know is that we were concerned enough, at a time when the priority was balancing the budget in the last economic action plan in 2014, that we budgeted close to \$2 billion to improve the education system so that we would have better outcomes. If I recall, clearly the member's party voted against that budget.

The Assistant Deputy Chair: We have time for one more short question.

The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Chair, I am not going to engage in silly rhetoric with the minister. I am going to ask him, given the horrific death rates that we have among children who do not have access to

schools, if he can tell us what the national suicide rate is on reserve among young people under his watch?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, the assertion of the hon. member that these children are under the minister's watch shows a great misunderstanding by the member of the responsibility of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. These children are first and foremost the responsibility of their parents throughout Canada, and the government—

Mr. Charlie Angus: That is not your responsibility? You are a clown. That man is a clown—

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Order. That is out of order.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for—

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: You have no clue—

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Order. The hon. minister will take his seat.

The hon. member for Red Deer.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Chair, I would like to take this time to discuss advances we have made in relation to the Canadian High Arctic research station, or CHARS, which is a key element of Canada's northern strategy.

Canada's north is a fundamental part of Canada. It is part of our heritage, our future and our identity as a country. Our Conservative government recognizes the north's importance and unlike previous governments has taken action to strengthen this region. Our northern strategy outlines an overarching vision for the north for the benefit of all Canadians. It is taking concrete actions on four priority areas: exercising our Arctic sovereignty, protecting our environmental heritage, promoting social and economic development, and improving and evolving northern governance.

The mandate of the research station includes undertaking science and technology research that supports resource development, the promotion of Arctic sovereignty and environmental stewardship. By conducting research that addresses some of the pressing problems facing northerners, CHARS is also committed to the development of strong and healthy communities across the north.

Within the 2015-16 main estimates, \$47.6 million is being allocated for the construction of the Canadian High Arctic research station in Cambridge Bay, Nunavut and the implementation of the associated science and technology program. However, our government's support for CHARS is not new. In 2012, our Prime Minister announced funding of \$142.4 million over six years for the construction and start-up of the station.

The development of CHARS is yet another step forward in achieving our government's vision for a strong, sovereign and prosperous north. It will cement Canada's place as a world leader in Arctic science and technology and provide a medium of exercising sovereignty over our northern lands. Science and technology research undertaken at CHARS will allow people to better understand and protect the northern environment. It will also contribute to the development and diversification of northern economies.

The Canadian High Arctic research station is currently under construction in Cambridge Bay, Nunavut and is expected to be completed on schedule in 2017.

Recognizing the importance of traditional knowledge, the station's mandate specifies as a principle that the station will work with aboriginal peoples of Canada's north. The community of Cambridge Bay has also been actively involved in the development of the station. CHARS continues to be engaged in consultation with northerners and with input from aboriginal, academic, industry, territorial and government stakeholders.

The Canadian High Arctic research station will continue to rely upon the expertise and knowledge of all northerners, now and into the future, and will ensure the research conducted reflects northerners' rich history, traditions, expertise and knowledge. CHARS will complement and anchor the existing diverse network of facilities across the north and will comprise a suite of services for science and technology.

While the station at Cambridge Bay is expected to be operational in 2017, valuable research has already begun. Beginning on March 3, 2014, CHARS' chief scientist Dr. Martin Raillard has led the implementation of the science and technology program. In fact, the first field season of research was completed in the summer of 2014. Preparation for the second field season is well under way and proposals for the 2015-16 science and technology call for proposals are currently being reviewed.

The work to be done at the station will lead and support Arctic science and technology to develop and diversify the economy in Canada's Arctic; support the effective stewardship of Canada's Arctic lands, waters and resources; create a hub for scientific activity in Canada's vast and diverse Arctic; promote self-sufficient, vibrant and healthy northern communities; inspire and build capacity through training, education and outreach; enhance Canada's visible presence in the Arctic; and strengthen Canada's leadership on Arctic issues.

• (2200)

The new station will attract international scientists to work on science and technology issues in Canada's north and will strengthen Canada's leadership position in polar research. This station is being built by Canadians to serve Canada, and the world, and to engage northerners in the development of cutting-edge science and technology. Beyond promoting polar science, the Canadian High Arctic research station will also strengthen the Canadian economy.

CHARS will also promote jobs and training at the regional level, starting with the construction of the station, which is expected to generate up to 150 jobs, mostly locally, across the north. To date, 26 tender packages have been awarded, for a total of approximately \$70

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million; 65% of the value of this work will be undertaken by Inuit-owned or Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated registered firms.

Once CHARS is operational, the research, capacity building, and outreach activities will provide northerners with skills and expertise to better participate in the labour force, from mining and energy, to natural resources, to health and life sciences. CHARS will also develop highly qualified personnel and leadership in the north and across Canada. Once the station is complete, it is expected that approximately 50 full-time scientists and support staff will be based in Cambridge Bay.

CHARS is a strong example of this government's commitment to creating jobs, growth, and prosperity in the north and across the country.

Our government is also continuing its important work under the Arctic science and technology pillar of the northern strategy by demonstrating leadership in Arctic science.

During the northern tour visit to the Cambridge Bay site of the Canadian High Arctic research station, the Prime Minister remarked,

The North is a fundamental part of Canada's heritage, future and identity, and we must continue to assert our sovereignty over Canada's Arctic. This new station will undertake science and technology research that will support the responsible development of Canada's North, inform environmental stewardship, and enhance the quality of life of Northerners and all Canadians.

The Canadian High Arctic Research Station Act, which received royal assent in December 2014, will provide for a year-round, world-class facility for science and technology in our north. It will merge the knowledge and resources of the Canadian Polar Commission with the science and technology program at Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada. The merger will promote the development and dissemination of knowledge with respect to the polar regions as well as strengthen Canada's leadership on Arctic issues. It will also build upon and strengthen the commission's record and increase the national and international prominence of Canadian Arctic science and technology.

The creation of this new organization will support our government's respect for the Nunavut land claims agreement and our commitment to improving the quality of life of northerners.

Business of Supply

The new organization will strengthen Canada's leadership in Arctic science, research, and innovation. While the station will be the focal point for research, the new organization that will use the station as its headquarters will also help build partnerships across the north and strengthen innovation and economic growth.

Our government is committed to Canadian sovereignty over Canada's Arctic lands and to ensuring that a strong and prosperous north helps shape the future of our nation. Every Canadian can take pride in the progress our government continues to make on issues of importance to people living in the north and to the future of our country.

There are a couple of things I would like to speak to and see if I can get a response from the parliamentary secretary.

As we know, a key pillar of this government's national strategy is the Canadian High Arctic research station. CHARS will establish a new world-class federal research organization that will be responsible for advancing Canada's knowledge of the Arctic, promoting the development and dissemination of knowledge of the circumpolar region, strengthening Canada's leadership on Arctic issues, exercising stewardship and sovereignty over Canada's northern lands and waters, and ensuring a research presence in Canada's Arctic.

CHARS will provide Canada and the world with cutting-edge Arctic science and technology to support and inform decision-making in the north while contributing to the economic prosperity of all Canadians.

I wonder if perhaps our parliamentary secretary would speak to the main objectives of our Canadian High Arctic research station?

• (2205)

Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): First, Mr. Chair, I would like to thank the member for Red Deer, a strong supporter of our sovereignty, certainly a strong member of our aboriginal affairs committee, and a strong advocate for economic opportunity for aboriginal people.

To get back to his question, the Canadian High Arctic research station will provide Canada and the world with cutting-edge science and technology to support and inform decision-making in the north while contributing to the economic prosperity of all Canadians.

The specific objectives of the Canadian High Arctic research station are to promote the development and dissemination of knowledge in respect of the polar region; to develop and diversify the economy in Canada's Arctic; to support the effective stewardship of Canada's Arctic lands, waters, and resources; to create a hub for scientific activity in Canada's vast and diverse Arctic by connecting with an existing network of northern research stations; to promote self-sufficient, vibrant, and healthy northern communities; to inspire and build capacity through training, education, and outreach; and to enhance Canada's visible presence in the Arctic and strengthen Canada's leadership on Arctic issues.

This is just one part of our northern strategy, which is getting results for Canadians in the north.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Mr. Chair, our government first announced the establishment of CHARS, a world-class year-round institution, in

the 2007 Speech from the Throne. Of course, establishing CHARS as a new federal organization represents the next significant milestone in the development of our government's northern strategy initiative, and Arctic science and technology in Canada more broadly.

The CHARS will contribute to Canada's understanding of the north and will anchor a strong research presence in Canada's Arctic to serve Canada and the world. As a former science teacher, I am interested in the educational aspects of this, but I am just wondering again if the parliamentary secretary could explain to the committee what the benefits of CHARS will be.

• (2210)

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Chair, not only will CHARS benefit the scientific community in Canada, and indeed internationally, it will support the local economy and generate service contracts and employment in that region.

It is estimated that the construction phase alone will generate up to 150 jobs across the north. Of the 15 construction subcontracts tendered to date, over \$18 million have been awarded to Inuit-owned or Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. registered firms, and once CHARS is operational, the research, capacity building, and outreach activities will provide northerners with skills and experience to better participate in the labour force, whether it is in mining, energy, the management of wildlife and natural resources, or health and life sciences. CHARS will also develop highly qualified personnel and leadership in the north and across Canada.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Mr. Chair, as per its mandate, the Canadian Polar Commission focuses on the promotion and dissemination of polar research and knowledge as well as on collaboration and co-operation with Canadian and international institutions. These functions align directly with the work that is going to be undertaken by CHARS as part of our government's northern strategy. CHARS will be promoting Canadian sovereignty over our Arctic lands and will be focusing on science and technology that will improve the quality of life for northerners.

I am wondering again if the parliamentary secretary could update the House on what will happen to the existing Canadian Polar Commission once CHARS is established.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Chair, I appreciate the member's interest in CHARS, as he mentioned, as an educator. Obviously, this sort of science and technology infrastructure will benefit students like his former students for generations to come.

Business of Supply

The CHARS Act will repeal the Canadian Polar Commission Act and will incorporate the CPC mandate into that of CHARS. The integration of the Canadian Polar Commission and CHARS into a single organization is proposed to create one point of contact, representation, and leadership for polar science and technology in Canada.

The merger will build on recent advances the Canadian Polar Commission has made and will ensure that science and technology features even more prominently in Canada's north than it has in the past. The merger will increase the national and international prominence of Canadian Arctic science and technology.

As per its mandate, the Canadian Polar Commission focuses on the promotion and dissemination of polar research and knowledge as well as on collaboration and co-operation with Canadian and international institutions. These functions align directly with the work that will be undertaken by CHARS.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I would like to follow up on a question from the member for Timmins—James Bay on the main estimates, for which he supplied the minister with the answer, which was that the sunseting of targeted funding to improve first nations education revealed a decrease of \$133.4 million.

If the department is expecting to save \$133.4 million this year alone from sunseting first nations education, and it is receiving only \$40 million per year to replace those investments in budget 2015, is that not a cut?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, what is important to recall is that there is in the budget an increase in the overall budget of this department.

As for education, I explained that the estimates are not the last word. There will be further supplementary estimates during the year, and with those we will address the issue of the sunseting programs that can be renewed. These decisions, of course, are subject to the government and cabinet making those decisions.

• (2215)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Chair, budget 2015 proposes \$200 million over five years, starting in 2015-16, for the first nations student success program and the education partnerships program. In terms of the fiscal framework, is this the same \$40 million per year from budget 2014 to support implementation of the education legislation, which is currently on hold?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: No, Mr. Chair, these are funds aimed at continuing the school initiative programs that sunsetted on March 31. That is what this money is intended for.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Chair, is the minister saying, therefore, that the \$160 million over four years from budget 2014 is still in the fiscal framework to support the implementation of education reforms?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, the money attached to the implementation of Bill C-33, just like Bill C-33, is on hold. The \$200 million, which is not reflected in the estimates, because it is an economic action plan 2015 measure, will have to be accessed through supplementary estimates.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Chair, is the \$1.25 billion in core funding over three years in budget 2014 that was to close the funding gap between first nations schools and those run by the provinces still in the fiscal framework?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, that \$1.25 billion over three years, increasing annually at the rate of 4.5%, is statutory funding that would follow Bill C-33, which is still before the House. If, for example, tomorrow morning we had a special meeting of the chiefs and assembly, and they decided to support Bill C-33, the money would be there.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Chair, I take it that it is in the fiscal framework.

I would like to ask the minister how he can justify withholding money for providing equality of opportunity to first nations students when all first nations communities, educators, students, and most Canadians do not think that any student entering the school system this year should have to wait.

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, we have been very clear that funding would not replace reform. Since the decision by AFN and the Assembly of Chiefs to reject and ask the government to abandon Bill C-33, we are working with stakeholders in the region to try to find a way to reform this non-system to ensure that at the end of the day the first nations' children can enjoy a good education system that produces good outcomes and results. We are talking with several stakeholders and trying to find a way to ensure that those objectives are met.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Chair, with due respect, I believe that the first nations' educators know exactly what it takes to get success. They want their students to do better, as is evidenced by the Martin Aboriginal Education Initiative at Walpole Island.

Can the minister tell us what the current total backlog for first nations and Inuit individuals waiting for support through the post-secondary student support program is? What is the wait list backlog?

• (2220)

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, post-secondary education, as the hon. member ought to know, is administered by first nations band councils throughout Canada. AADNC, our department, transfers these funds to the first nations and they are the ones who make those decisions. Therefore, this is information that they have and we do not.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Chair, I understand that in 1997 the post-secondary student support program supported 22,938 individuals. In 2009, it supported 18,729 individuals. How many students were supported in 2014?

Business of Supply

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, the post-secondary students that we want to encourage to pursue post-secondary studies were very happy to learn that in the last budget we again renewed our contribution to Indspire to ensure that post-secondary education students benefit from bursaries. Indspire levers from other stakeholders because of the federal contribution, so this will help greatly.

Specifically as to the number of students, in the vicinity of 20,000 to 22,000 people benefited from the post-secondary education program. However, the conditions for access to this post-secondary education fund is decided by first nations and we have no control over their decision as to what amounts, for how long, and what indeed they do subsidize with those funds.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Chair, I would suggest the minister go and sit in the offices of those first nations as they pore over the backlogs and the wait lists. The fact is it is the responsibility of the Government of Canada to get these students who have been accepted into post-secondary education that much needed education.

I will switch to water now. In 2011, the national assessment of first nations water and waste water systems indicated that the infrastructure was in a crisis and identified the need for an immediate additional investment of \$1.2 billion to meet existing protocols. How much of that \$1.2 billion of additional required funding has been allocated and how much has been spent?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, just quickly on the issue of education, I would point out to the hon. member that since we have taken office we have increased funding for education by some 25%, which is an unprecedented amount in this country.

On the issue of water and waste water, from 2006 to 2014 our government has invested approximately \$3 billion to support first nations communities in managing their water and waste water infrastructure. We are delivering on our commitment to extend the first nations water and waste water action plan with a further investment of \$323 million over two years. That began in the last fiscal year and will continue in 2015-16.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Chair, unfortunately, like in so many areas, the amount that is being spent and the results that are being achieved are problematic on first nations.

In the most recent departmental performance report, March 31, 2014, only 42% of first nations drinking water systems achieved a low-risk rating. On page 54 of this year's plans and priorities, the government will declare a victory if 54%, roughly half, of first nations drinking water systems are low risk by 2019.

How can the minister justify leaving half of first nations drinking water systems at medium- or high-risk four years from now?

• (2225)

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, this is certainly a difference from the previous government of which she was a member, that obviously left all of those first nations without proper water systems.

Our action plan is a long-term plan. There are several pillars to it, and it is being funded at an unprecedented rate by this government. As indicated in the estimates this year, we will continue delivering this action plan for water and waste water, along with the development of regulations with first nations across Canada to

ensure that for the first time they enjoy standards that protect their potable water, just like other Canadians take for granted every day.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Chair, unfortunately first nations find a bill that says "thou shalt have clean drinking water" and then no funds or resources to make it happen is a cynical approach.

Budget 2014 actually reduced the previous funding levels for the first nations water and waste water action plan by \$7 million over two years. Is that correct?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, again this is a sunset that was in fact renewed. In terms of progress, I would like the hon. member to know that the latest inspection on the annual performance inspection cycle showed that the number of water systems rated as high risk has decreased by some 9 percentage points, from 206 to 127. Significant progress is being made, and we will continue in that direction with investments that are earmarked in these estimates.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Chair, I want to know if the minister understands that on March 31, 2015, there were 135 drinking water advisories in effect in 90 first nations communities across Canada, excluding British Columbia. There were 35 boil water advisories in B.C. first nations as of January this year.

Does the minister understand that we are talking about real people who are too often living in third world conditions right here in Canada? When will we see a strategy when 100% of first nations homes in 100% of the communities will have clean drinking water?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, the fact of the matter is that many first nations communities face the same challenges in providing access to safe drinking water as do other small, remote or isolated communities, such as difficulties in finding and retaining qualified water treatment plant operators. The aboriginal demographics from the 2011 national household survey showed that 70% of first nations reserves had a population of fewer than 500 people and that 285 first nations reserves had fewer than 100 inhabitants.

That is why, being reasonable, we have this long-term action plan that is in effect. The amount of funds invested in water and waste water is unprecedented. It is close to \$3 billion since we took office. As indicated in these estimates, we continue in the same direction to execute our action plan.

The Deputy Chair: Time having expired, we will resume with the hon. member for Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River.

Business of Supply

Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Chair, Canadians across the country expect access to clean, safe drinking water. Our government has been working since we were elected to ensure that this rigorous standard applies on reserve as well. We understand that access to a reliable source of clean, safe drinking water is fundamental to the health and well-being of any community. It is a basic part of the infrastructure that communities need to grow and prosper.

I am proud to stand in the House and share with my colleagues all of the important work that our government has accomplished on this front. As they will hear, a key priority of our government is to put in place the conditions that support long-term prosperity for all Canadians, aboriginal and non-aboriginal alike.

Access to safe drinking water, the effective treatment of waste water, and the protection of sources of drinking water in first nations communities is critical in ensuring the health and safety of first nations. First nations should expect access to safe, clean and reliable water, and waste water services at a level comparable to those enjoyed by other Canadians living in communities of similar size and location.

Since being elected, our government has invested heavily to support first nations communities in managing their water and waste water systems. In fact, since we took power, 243 major water and waste water projects, those valued at over \$1.5 million, were completed in 177 first nations across Canada.

In 2013-14 alone, 543 first nations and 74 tribal councils received funding to support 733 on-reserve drinking water systems. In addition to major improvements, our government continues to provide funding for operations and maintenance or smaller upgrades to first nations water systems.

In communities where it may not be necessary for first nations to operate their own water and waste water facilities, we provide funding for service agreements with local municipalities to provide water services. In 2013 and 2014, we funded 49 of these agreements.

Our government is delivering on its commitment to address water and waste water issues by extending the first nations water and waste water action plan with further investments of just over \$323 million over 2 years, beginning in 2014-15.

These investments support the concrete actions that our government has taken to support first nations communities in improving water and waste water services.

Let me share some of our most recent investments. Just last month, we announced \$3.8 million to update the Ucluelet First Nation water system. More than \$9.9 million was announced in December 2014 to upgrade water systems for the Little Shuswap Lake Indian Band and the Okanagan Indian Band. T

In November 2014, we announced \$5 million to upgrade water infrastructures for the Whispering Pines/Clinton Indian Band and Upper Nicola Indian Band. We also, recently, announced \$27.6 million in funding for the construction of a new water treatment plant and distribution centre for the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte.

These are just the most recent examples of investments that we are making. They are investments that will make a difference in the lives of those living on first nations reserves.

Along with the funding that we provide for first nations to assist in the planning, construction, upgrade and operation, and maintenance of water and waste water systems, funding is also provided to enhance the capacity and training of the on-reserve water and waste water system operators. Results in the 2011 national assessment were very clear. Trained and certified individuals operating these water and waste water systems reduce the risks and help to ensure safe drinking water in first nations communities.

That is why our government is working with first nations and their technical organizations to increase the capacity of operators. We also provide funding to first nations for the circuit rider training program, which is a specialized training program that provides first nations operators with ongoing, on-site training and mentoring on how to operate their drinking water and waste water systems.

● (2230)

In 2014-15, we invested over \$10 million into the circuit rider training program across Canada. This is direct evidence of our government's commitment to creating the conditions for stronger, healthier, more self-sufficient first nation communities. Investments in water and waste water infrastructure also open the door to economic and job opportunities that will make a real difference in the lives of people today and generations to come.

In addition to strategic investments to improve first nations' water and waste water infrastructure, our government has worked in partnership with first nations to provide legal protections for first nations' water and waste water quality on reserve.

The Safe Drinking Water for First Nations Act, which was passed in 2013, provides enforceable standards to govern water and waste water quality on reserve. This will ensure that residents on reserve have the same access to clean and safe drinking water that other Canadians do.

Before our government brought this act into force, standards and regulations existed for drinking water quality off reserve, but there was no such protection for hundreds of thousands of first nations who lived on reserve. Thanks to our government, first nations will soon enjoy the same quality of water as all other Canadians.

Business of Supply

We are currently in the process of working jointly with first nations to develop specific standards and regulations. While this will take time, it will allow our government the opportunity to bring the water and waste water infrastructure and capacity to the level required for future standards.

It is important to note that this is an initiative that was supported by first nations. When the Safe Drinking Water for First Nations Act was introduced, Chief Lawrence Paul, Millbrook First Nation, offered ringing praise for the bill. He said:

First Nations will be able to look forward to having the same protections that other Canadians have around the provision of drinking water, water quality standards and the disposal of wastewater in their communities. This is not only an important health and safety issue, but will help build confidence in our infrastructure and help create a better climate for investment.

It is clear that our government has made working with first nation partners to improve on-reserve water and waste water services a priority. Through progress on enforceable standards, through substantial investments in water and waste water systems, and by supporting capacity building and operator training, we are delivering concrete results. I am confident and comfortable that our government will continue to make progress as long as we remain on this path.

Our government is delivering on its commitment to address water and waste water issues by extending the first nation water and waste water action plan with further investments of \$323.4 million over two years, beginning in 2014-15.

In the spirit of innovation and partnerships, what other innovative solutions is the government pursuing to achieve value for money in the context of supporting first nations in managing their water and waste water infrastructure?

• (2235)

Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Chair, first, I would like to thank the member for Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, a strong member of our aboriginal affairs committee, a proud member of the Plains Cree Nation and former member of the RCMP who has great experience working in first nation communities. I was glad to hear him speak about some of the improvements that our government is making in water and waste water on reserved.

Our government believes that first nations should have access to the same quality of water and waste water as all other Canadians. It is quite simple. That is why we are creating the conditions for self-sufficient first nation communities in exploring alternative ways of financing infrastructure on reserve, and that continues to be a priority for our government.

One great example of this is the collaboration between the government and the four Island Lake communities in Manitoba to implement a multi-year action plan to improve water and waste water services. We will continue to build on these successful partnerships and ensure that first nations have the tools they need to manage their own affairs and be less dependent on the government for financing.

Mr. Rob Clarke: Mr. Chair, that reminds of a story that took place years ago, while I was stationed in northern Saskatchewan where the water treatment plant was brand new. The community had

a state-of-the-art facility, but the problem it had was that the operators would routinely not be in the community, which would result in the water treatment plant shutting down. This is just one of the reasons our government has taken these actions.

Since we were elected, our government has made health for first nations a top priority. One way that we are accomplishing this is by aiming to provide every first nation with the same quality of water and waste water that all other Canadians receive.

Could the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development tell the House how much funding our government has invested to support first nations in managing their water and waste water systems since 2006?

• (2240)

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Chair, I appreciate the hon. member sharing his experience, which is why our government is taking action in an unprecedented way.

From April 2006 to March 2014, the Government of Canada has invested approximately \$3 billion to support first nations communities in managing their waste water and water infrastructure. The Government of Canada delivered on its commitment to address water and waste water issues by extending the first nations water and waste water action plan with further investments of \$323.4 million over two years beginning in 2014-2015.

From April 2006 to March 2014, 243 major capital projects of over \$1.5 million were completed in 177 first nations communities for a total investment of \$1.1 billion.

Mr. Rob Clarke: Mr. Chair, our government recognized that throwing money at a problem was not the solution. Rather, it is a strategic investment along with systematic reform that creates transformative changes.

Could the parliamentary secretary inform the House of his long-term strategy to address safe water in first nations communities? Also, has progress been made since 2009 to 2011 on national standards for first nations water and waste water systems?

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Chair, to support water and waste water services in first nations communities, our government has developed a comprehensive long-term strategic approach based on enhanced capacity building and operator training, something the member talked about, enforceable standards and protocols, infrastructure investments and protection of public health.

Business of Supply

We are seeing the results of this strategy. For example, the results of the 2014-15 annual performance inspection cycle showed that the number of water systems rated as high risk had decreased by 9% and the number of waste water systems rated as high risk had decreased by 5% since the 2011-12 annual performance inspections were concluded.

These investments and this training that we are undertaking in first nations communities are paying dividends.

Mr. Rob Clarke: Mr. Chair, in addition to providing money for water and waste water infrastructure projects, how is the government supporting first nations in managing their own water and waste water infrastructure?

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Chair, in addition to those capital funds we talked about, each year our government provides operation and maintenance funding to ensure first nations systems continue to run safely and in optimal condition throughout their lifespan. In order to help communities build capacity to manage, operate and maintain their water and waste water facilities, the government provides funding to various partners that provide community operators with training to manage, operate and maintain their water and waste water facilities through the circuit rider training program. This program provides first nation water and waste water operators with onsite, hands-on training and mentoring for operating and maintaining their drinking water and waste water systems.

Mr. Rob Clarke: Mr. Chair, I look at my career in the RCMP. I have been stationed in over nine different communities across Saskatchewan, in aboriginal and non-aboriginal communities. I have seen the challenges faced in the non-aboriginal communities as well with regard safe drinking water. They have boil advisories in a lot of these communities as well.

However, it has been almost two years since the Safe Drinking Water For First Nations Act received royal assent. What has the government done to put regulations in place under the act so residents of first nations lands may have the same health and safety protections as other Canadians?

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Chair, on October 14, 2014, the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and the Minister of Health launched engagement with first nations and other stakeholders to develop regulations under the act. Phase one is under way in the Atlantic, Northwest Territories and Yukon regions. ANSI will work with first nations in other regions to assess their readiness for moving forward.

[Translation]

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Chair, the Auditor General's report indicates that Jordan's principle is not being applied by the federal government to resolve matters of jurisdiction.

Will the minister clarify the responsibilities of the various levels of government in order to prevent potential conflicts?

• (2245)

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, our government is taking measures to ensure that children and families get the support they need to live a healthy life in safety.

We are implementing Jordan's principle with the provinces and the first nations so that services for first nations children with multiple

disabilities requiring a number of service providers carry on in the event of a dispute between the federal and provincial governments.

Across the country, contacts and federal and provincial processes are in place, and potential cases where Jordan's principle applies are being addressed and resolved as they arise.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Chair, how much money did the department spend on its appeal, later dropped, of the Federal Court ruling in Pictou Landing Band Council and Maurina Beadle?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, the Government of Canada and the Pictou Landing Band Council agreed on the terms of the financial contribution as ordered by the Federal Court of Canada, and we continue to reimburse the nation for all the costs incurred, from before the trial, or before the court heard the case, to now.

[English]

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Chair, what is the suicide rate for first nations and Inuit youth?

[Translation]

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, the suicide rate is far too high, and that is why, through the Department of Health, we invest significant sums every year in mental health to help these Inuit children and adults who live in Canada's north.

Our strategy for the north includes measures to help the entire population living in Canada's north, and we are making significant progress.

[English]

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Chair, I am told answers and questions are to be of equal time.

First nations youth have a suicide rate, actually, of five to 7 times that of other Canadians, while Inuit youth have a suicide rate 11 times higher. Does the minister consider that acceptable?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: I indicated, Mr. Chair, that the government considers this a serious issue. That is why every year we invest in mental health measures and work along with the Inuit people and their territorial government to try to address this situation as best as it can be handled.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Chair, the land and larger land base final agreement for Pic Mobert First Nation has been collecting dust for six months on the minister's desk waiting for his signature, which will allow the first nation to grow its on-reserve economy. Negotiations are done. Why has the minister not signed the agreement yet?

Business of Supply

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: The record will show, Mr. Chair, that our government has taken unprecedented steps to remove barriers to economic development on reserve by giving first nations greater control and autonomy over their own land and resources.

Since 2006, in fact, a total of over 400,000 hectares have been added to reserves, which is an increase of more than 10% of first nations land base. In that case, the agreement, I understand, has been signed by Ontario and the first nations. I will see to it soon that we consider signing this agreement.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Chair, in reality, it is the government that is creating barriers. It is the government that is creating uncertainty and delays for these willing partners. When will the minister sign the agreement? Could he give me a date, please?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, no, I cannot give a date because I cannot speculate about the future. This is a matter which I will have to consider, along with the advice of my department officials. When I am ready to indicate whether I will sign the agreement, I will let the hon. member know.

• (2250)

Mrs. Carol Hughes: What a shameful answer, Mr. Chair. They need to move on this and the Conservative government is putting the barriers in place.

The Shoal Lake 40 First Nation had to declare a state of emergency after the ferry connecting it to the mainland was taken out of service. It now has to fly drinking water into the community. Why has the minister refused to meet with the first nation?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, this is a completely false charge. It is not a matter of refusing to meet with anybody. Our immediate priority is ensuring the health and safety of the Shoal Lake residents. That is why, very recently, our emergency management team has kept in contact with the community.

With respect to the water issue, we are ready, provided that the two first nations can settle their differences. We are ready to invest, to ensure that the members of both communities have access to water and a good waste water system but, of course, the first nations themselves must solve their differences.

[Translation]

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Chair, the main estimates show an increase of \$17.3 million for “the facilitation of Aboriginal participation in West Coast energy development”.

What activities will be covered by this funding?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, this funding will ensure the co-operation of all stakeholders in the natural resources sector in order to encourage and facilitate participation in the economic benefits of natural resource development.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Chair, what specific amount does budget 2015 allocate to improving consultations of first nations by Ottawa?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, if you will give me a second, I can check the budget for consultations.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Chair, I can give him the answer.

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, if she knows the answer, why is she asking the question?

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Chair, it is obvious that he is not familiar with his files. The minister should know that the answer is zero.

[English]

How many times has the minister met with the Matawa First Nation in northern Ontario regarding the Ring of Fire mining proposals? Has the minister met with the province of Ontario to communicate the importance of considering its vision in the development of any provincial plan?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, for the sake of correcting the record, as the member can see in the main estimates, my department is spending \$26.3 million on consultation and policy development in 2015-16. Contrary to the member's suggestion, that is the situation. There are indeed funds for consultation.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Chair, obviously, the minister does not want to answer the question about the Matawa First Nation.

How many first nations have submitted their own MRP laws and how many have been approved by the current government?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, many first nations were, indeed, pleased to see, finally, although the Liberals opposed the measure, that matrimonial property rights have been accorded to couples and people living on reserve with children.

Right now, we have six first nations that have passed their own law under the act in question.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Chair, obviously, he still does not know how many have submitted their own MRP laws, but I can tell the House that first nations communities, like Whitefish River First Nation and Kahnawake, are frustrated with the government challenging their MRP law submissions. The government admits there are discrepancies in AANDC's membership list.

Could the minister tell us when was the last time the data on band membership was collected that the government is using on which to base decisions?

• (2255)

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, I would like to come back to the issue of matrimonial property laws. Those first nations which are, as the member put it, not happy with the decision is simply because they have not done it in compliance with the act in question. As soon as they comply with the act, and if they meet the conditions under the act, their own laws would be registered and published as provided by the act.

Business of Supply

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Chair, I have a letter dated May 4, 2015. It basically says that there is likely a discrepancy between the records of AANDC and the ones of the first nation, so obviously the minister is not aware that there are discrepancies within his department on the membership list.

Does the department have benchmarks to measure progress on preventing violence against women?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, as the hon. member may know, there was a round table that was held in February among stakeholders, the national organizations, the provinces, territories, and the federal government along with representatives of the families of the victims. A framework was agreed upon which will measure the results of the initiatives that are taking place right now.

As the hon. member may also know, the RCMP has undertaken to keep its records and data up to date, and we should expect a report in the spring in that regard.

[Translation]

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Chair, how much money did the minister allocate to fight violence against women? How much of this money is intended for prevention?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, as indicated in the main estimates, in 2015-16 we plan on investing more than \$20 million to help prevent domestic violence. Naturally, we will combine this with monies provided by the economic action plan that were announced by the Minister of Status of Women in September in order to address the issue of violence against aboriginal women and girls.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Chair, how much of that will go to northern communities?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, as for knowing how much will be allocated to northern Canada, I do not have the breakdown of the sums available. I can confirm that most of those funds will be allocated to the projects for which we receive applications. Accordingly, if Inuit communities apply for projects, they will be considered on the same basis as all other aboriginal groups in Canada.

[English]

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Chair, I will go to a question that was kind of posed by my colleague from Timmins—James Bay a little bit earlier, and it is with respect to children in care.

Can the minister advise how many aboriginal children are apprehended each day in Manitoba?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, the hon. member does not seem to appreciate the fact that the law applicable to child and welfare services in Manitoba is a provincial law. It is the law of Manitoba that applies. Manitoba has delegated its authority over child and welfare services to certain agencies. Manitoba would be in a much better position to answer that question than I.

• (2300)

The Deputy Chair: Resuming debate, the hon. member for Macleod.

Mr. John Barlow (Macleod, CPC): Mr. Chair, our government is focused on creating jobs, growth and long-term prosperity for all Canadian families. That is why we are proud to work with willing

partners on initiatives leading to greater self-sufficiency and prosperity for first nations and communities.

Education is perhaps the most important element in achieving this goal. A good education provides the keys to open the doors to opportunity and success for individuals and communities alike.

Our government continues to ensure that first nations children living on reserve receive the same access to quality education as every other Canadian child and that they are given every opportunity to become full participants in Canadian society. That is why between 2006 and 2013 we increased education funding to first nations by more than 25%.

We have also made additional investments in education infrastructure, the schools and facilities students need to be successful. Since being elected, our government has invested more than \$850 million in on-reserve education infrastructure projects. These funds have enabled first nations to complete more than 572 infrastructure projects, including 41 new schools and 531 other school projects, including major renovations to existing facilities.

Through budget 2012, we invested an additional \$175 million for the construction of new schools. Moreover, just this past year the Prime Minister announced an investment of \$500 million over seven years in the new education infrastructure fund. Economic action plan 2015 reasserts this commitment and would add an additional \$200 million to this fund.

Investments from the education infrastructure fund will also be used to develop a training and education program for first nations to support operations and maintenance activities in schools.

Investments from these funds have already begun. In fact, just last week we announced that our government will be investing some of this money in the construction or major renovation of 11 schools in first nations communities across Canada. These projects represent the first phase of investments from the education infrastructure fund. That is in addition to announcements made this spring addressing school infrastructure needs in four northern Manitoba communities.

As a member of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, the issue of aboriginal education is of particular importance to me. In fact, a few months ago, I was absolutely honoured to join my friend and colleague, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, as we made a significant announcement about the construction of the new Crowfoot School on the Siksika First Nation in my riding of Macleod.

Our government has also provided funding for education infrastructure in the Whitecap Dakota First Nation in Saskatchewan. Funding provided to the first nation will serve to renovate the Whitecap Elementary School and will include the addition of two new classrooms for students from kindergarten to grade four.

Our government will also be providing support for the construction of the off-reserve Stonebridge school, also in Saskatchewan, for students in grades five to eight.

Business of Supply

With these 11 school projects—five new schools and six renovations—we are making a difference in the lives of more than 1,000 first nations students across this country from kindergarten up to grade 12. These projects will help first nations students have a first-class learning environment. This will allow them to learn the skills and lessons they need to enter the labour market. These are investments in the futures of first nations children and in the futures of their communities.

Economic action plan 2015 would build on the government's investment in the construction and renovation of schools on reserve by providing \$200 million over five years, starting in 2015-16.

Construction sites create more than just new schools. They also create jobs. They also create an opportunity for young people to learn marketable skills that will help them succeed in the careers of their choosing. During the construction of these schools, wherever possible, contractors and subcontractors will seek to create jobs and training opportunities for local community members.

● (2305)

Mr. Chair, we are not just making investments in education infrastructure. Our government believes first nations students deserve access to the same quality education as all other Canadian students. To that end, we have contributed nearly \$12 billion toward aboriginal education programs since we were elected. Certainly, this funding pays for the construction and renovation of schools, but it also covers the wages of teachers and coaches, and pays for books, computers and sports equipment. Perhaps more importantly the landmark first nations control of first nations education act represented a real and concerted effort to improve education outcomes for first nations youth on reserve. While we are disappointed the Assembly of First Nations was not prepared to accept our offer, our government remains committed to improving educational outcomes on reserve.

We remain a committed partner in first nations education reform and look forward to opportunities to work with first nations that are interested and able to pursue education reform, including through cooperative self-government agreements.

A quality post-secondary education is often the key to getting a good quality job. Our government is working to ensure first nations and Inuit students have access to an education that encourages them to stay in school, graduate and get the skills they need to succeed in the labour market. That is why our government proposes to provide \$12 million over three years to Indspire. This would provide post-secondary scholarships and bursaries to first nations students. At least \$1 million of this amount will be devoted to supporting students pursuing an education in the skilled trades. This is absolutely critical because skilled trades are desperately needed in Alberta and across Canada.

Since its launch, Indspire has provided scholarships to more than 2,200 first nations and Inuit students on an annual basis. It has also attracted significant support from a wide range of corporate donors, with new investments that will extend the availability of scholarships to thousands more first nations and Inuit youth. Our government, first nations communities and young adults all agree that first nations youth must have the same opportunities as all Canadians to find, keep and enjoy the benefits of a good-paying job. This is why, by

making key investments in 2013, our government helped to provide personalized jobs and skills training to more than 4,000 first nations youth between the ages of 18 and 24 who were on income assistance. Participants in that program have access to a wide range of services and programs aimed at increasing their job prospects and supporting them as they move on to the workforce. These services and programs include basic life skills, literacy training, skills training and career counselling

Our government wants to ensure first nations, Inuit and Métis students graduate from high school with the skills and abilities they can put to work in their communities and the Canadian economy. This is absolutely vital to the long-term well-being of communities and Canada's continued prosperity. Our government understands that truth very clearly. Unlike the opposition parties who voted against both structural reform and additional investment, our government is actively working towards this goal.

I would like to ask my esteemed colleague, the parliamentary secretary, a few questions, if I may.

As I spoke earlier in my speech, I know that our government believes that first nations youth deserve access to the same quality education as all other Canadian students. I also know that we are providing the funding to back us up on this belief. As I mentioned earlier in my speech, the parliamentary secretary was in my riding earlier this year to announce funding for a new school to replace the Crowfoot school in the Siksika First Nation. This is absolutely critical funding to replace an education facility in a rebuilding community that was devastated by the floods in 2013.

Could the parliamentary secretary inform this committee of the whole exactly how much money our government has invested in education programming for aboriginal people?

Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Chair, I would like to thank the hon. member for his contribution to the aboriginal affairs committee. He is the newest elected member on our committee, the new guy, but he certainly jumped in with both feet and has made a valuable contribution already.

I was so pleased to be on the Siksika First Nation with him and the chief and council to announce \$8.9 million in federal funds toward the new Crowfoot School, which will provide space for 300 students from kindergarten to grade 6. There is great leadership by the first nation, which is certainly matched by our minister and our government.

Business of Supply

As the member suggested, this government is committed to ensuring that first nations students receive the same quality education as all other Canadian students. Since we were elected, the government has invested approximately \$10 billion for kindergarten to grade 12 education for nearly 110,000 first nations students annually. Over the same period, our government invested approximately \$2.5 billion for post-secondary education programming for approximately 22,000 first nations and Inuit students annually.

Additionally, economic action plan 2015 proposes to invest \$200 million over five years to support the continuation of the strong schools, successful students initiative to support early literacy programming, services and partnership with provincial school systems, and \$12 million over three years to support Indspire for post-secondary scholarships and bursaries for first nations and Inuit students.

• (2310)

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Chair, I also want to mention that Chief Vincent Yellow Old Woman and the council in Siksika were extremely pleased with that funding, and they are very excited to have the Crowfoot School construction begin as soon as possible.

I know it is the practice of this government to work in collaboration with willing first nations partners. We know that these partnerships are absolutely essential to making progress on a number of first nations-related files, including education.

Could the parliamentary secretary share with this committee how our government is working with first nations and provinces to bolster education programming on reserve and, ultimately, improving education programs?

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Chair, the member is exactly right. Our government works closely with willing partners to provide first nations and Inuit students with a quality education and, ultimately, the opportunity to acquire the skills needed to enter the labour market and be full participants in a strong, prosperous Canadian economy.

Since 2008, our government has signed eight tripartite education memorandums of understanding in addition to those pre-existing arrangements in Nova Scotia and British Columbia, which establish partnerships among first nations, provincial ministries and Canada. These partnerships focus on the sharing of resources and practices to promote the smooth transition of first nations students between education systems, to strengthen results and improve student outcomes.

Economic action plan 2015 proposes to invest \$200 million over five years for the continuation of the strong schools, successful students initiative, as I mentioned earlier. We believe that by working together, we can provide better outcomes for first nations students.

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Chair, I also wanted to touch on the first nations control of first nations education act. Last year, our government introduced Bill C-33. This bill would have established a framework for first nations education. It would have created minimum standards for educators on reserve, ensured that students spent a minimum number of days in classes and ensured that first nations schools on reserve offered diplomas recognized by universities off reserve. Moreover, it would have provided a nearly

\$2 billion increase for first nations education funding. Some \$500 million of that would have been specifically earmarked for education infrastructure. This was critical.

Could the parliamentary secretary explain to our government what has been achieved on this front in the time since Bill C-33 was put on hold?

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Chair, our government continues to believe that first nations students deserve access to the same quality of education as all other students. Since we were elected, we have invested roughly \$10 billion to support elementary and secondary education on reserve.

The first nations control of first nations education act represented a real and concerted effort to improve education outcomes for first nations youth on reserve. While we are disappointed that the Assembly of First Nations was not prepared to accept this offer, our government remains committed to improving educational outcomes on reserve. We remain a committed partner in first nations education reform, and we will look for opportunities to work with first nations that are interested and able to pursue education reform, including through co-operative self-government agreements.

• (2315)

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Northwest Territories, NDP): Mr. Chair, I would like to address my questions to the minister. I will start with northern issues.

The minister, in his dialogue with first nations in Yukon, indicated that the government does not consider first nations governments. Is the minister holding to that position?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, that is completely ridiculous.

First of all, the member was not present at that meeting. Had he been there, he would have seen this minister take the umbrella agreement and point to the definition of government in the agreement. That is simply what I indicated. The umbrella agreement, if the member does not know, indicates that government means either the Government of Canada or the Government of Yukon.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Chair, in the Northwest Territories, the Tlicho and Sahtu Dene governments have already initiated court action over the Conservatives' creation of the environmental super board to replace regional boards created through the land claim agreements. Yukon first nations say they will do the same as soon as Bill S-6 is passed.

Why does the minister believe that confrontation with aboriginal people in areas where they have a very responsible relationship with their existing governments is better than co-operation?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Again, Mr. Chair, this does not hold water or facts.

The granting of this injunction was not based on a decision of merits by either the Canadian or Tlicho's legal positions. The merits of each party's argument will be dealt with at trial.

Business of Supply

We are committed to ensuring that the regulatory regime of the Northwest Territories continues to function smoothly. We will focus our efforts on ensuring that the land and water boards in the Mackenzie Valley continue to effectively and efficiently assess land and water applications before them. As this matter is before the court as we speak, I cannot comment further.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Chair, the minister's efforts in both the Northwest Territories and Yukon have led to court actions, which are going to likely result in considerable delays and uncertainty in these two territories about the development of the resources that the government seems to want to push forward as quickly as possible.

When he wants to increase investor certainty, why has he chosen to take these actions, which to most people in the North do not make any sense at all and are not required at all?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, it is funny to hear the member talk about the provisions of Bill S-6, which he now opposes. Yet, when we passed Bill C-15, which also contained regulatory measures for the Northwest Territories, he voted for it. He has to make up his mind. Either he is for it or against it.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Chair, would the minister be willing to accept the Yukon first nations invitation to work with federal and territorial officials to address the four areas of concern that they expressed to the Senate standing committee on September 25, 2014, in Ottawa and the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development on March 30, 2015, in Whitehorse?

Is he willing to sit and work with them to try to solve some of these issues?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, consistent with normal consultation procedures, the draft legislative proposal was shared with the first nations on a confidential basis and with all stakeholders prior to its introduction.

There have been comprehensive and substantive consultations with Yukon first nations in respect of all of the proposed amendments contained in the bill. Consultation on the amendments took place in May and November 2013 and again on a revised proposal in February and April 2014. A final consultation session was held in Whitehorse on May 23, 2014, to share the final form and substance of the legislative proposal.

That said, I remain always willing to talk with first nations to see how we can ensure the proper development of Yukon to the benefit of all Yukoners.

• (2320)

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Chair, a simple yes or no would have been sufficient for the first nations in the Yukon, but I see we are not getting that. The minister jumped all over the place and ended with some platitude about perhaps meeting with them.

Can the minister just simply say yes or no? Will he meet with the first nations of the Yukon to try to deal with the four outstanding issues under Bill S-6 or will he not?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, as I have indicated, the consultation process has taken place. The provisions of Bill S-6 are clear. They have the total and strong endorsement of the Government of Yukon, which speaks on behalf of Yukoners.

The first nations still voice their opposition to a few amendments, but as I indicated, I am ready to work out with them how we can implement those in a full spirit of co-operation and of respect for the umbrella agreement.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Chair, I will move on to nutrition north.

The first question I have for the minister is this: how did the department determine which communities were eligible for the new nutrition north program? What factors were considered?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, the first communities that were accepted under nutrition north were those that were using the existing food mail program, which we changed because this government was of the view that the taxpayers of Canada should not subsidize transporting tires and Ski-Doo parts to the north. Rather, we were and are of the view that we should promote the consumption of nutritious food, which is what this program does.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Chair, of course the answers should follow the general delivery of the questions. That is the procedure we have in this committee.

Why do communities like Fort Good Hope, Northwest Territories; Fort Chipewyan, Alberta; Tadoule Lake, Manitoba; and Deer Lake, Ontario get no subsidy when they are isolated, remote northern communities where people require the food subsidy?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, that member is confused. On the one hand he says that the program does not work, and then he says that we should bring it to other communities. He should make up his mind as to whether or not the program works.

The fact of the matter is that we have already indicated that we are examining the criteria for admissibility under the program in order to reflect the needs issue, which the Auditor General indicated in his report and which we have accepted as a recommendation.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Chair, the minister knows full well that the Auditor General showed that the department had committed to reviewing the community eligibility status for these communities on an annual basis, but it has not completed annual reviews. These communities remain unsatisfied.

Why has the minister's government not completed these reviews?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, as we have already indicated, the department will complete the first phase of a detailed review of all isolated northern communities to better understand the challenges they face due to isolation in accessing perishable nutritious food in the final half of 2015.

Remote communities in the three territories and seven provinces were examined, including their year-round access to approximately 30 supply centres, and recommendations on community eligibility will be developed.

Business of Supply

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Chair, what part of “annual reviews” does the minister not understand? They would allow these very important changes to be made to these programs and these communities could be allowed to get some subsidy for their food. Why is the minister talking about reviews that are going to be done in the future, when the program has been in place for four years?

● (2325)

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, the government has indicated its commitment to improving this program. Just last fall, we announced a further investment of over \$11 million into the program.

We believe as a government that northerners should maintain a direct voice in the nutrition north program, which is why we enlist the advice of local community members to help guide the direction of that program. I have asked the advisory board to consider how we can improve the program. My understanding is that it is discharging its responsibility with diligence.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Chair, last summer the Nunavut Marine Council sent a letter to the minister demanding a full scale strategic environmental assessment of Baffin Bay and Davis Strait before any seismic testing was allowed. Without such a strategic investment, local communities would not support future oil and gas development the letter said.

Why did the minister refuse this request?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, as in the Beaufort Sea, Canada has indeed a strategic interest in advancing oil and gas exploration in the eastern Arctic where no exploration rights have been issued since the seventies.

As early as 2012, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development officials made public commitments to undertake a strategic environmental assessment to inform a ministerial decision around whether, when and where oil and gas companies might be invited to bid on parcels of land for exploration rights in Baffin Bay and Davis Strait under the Canada Petroleum Resources Act. That commitment has already been made and it will take place.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Chair, this week the Nunavut Impact Review Board recommended that Resources Canada's proposed uranium mine near Baker Lake should not proceed. Will the minister accept this recommendation from the board or will he ignore the interests of the people in Nunavut and reject the board's recommendation?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, what the minister will do is receive the recommendations of the board, look at them diligently and then make a decision.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Chair, this is another question coming from Nunavut. Six years after they were purchased, the materials for Gjoa Haven 29 metre bridge to span the Swan River sit gathering rust. The materials were bought with federal funding in 2009 through the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency's community adjustment fund, but no funding was provided to actually construct the bridge.

How could this project have been approved without including construction costs, and will the minister ensure that Gjoa Haven has the funds needed to actually build the bridge?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, with all due respect to the hon. member, this is a CanNor issue. That is where he should be directing his question.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Chair, for the minister with respect, the minister's department funds CanNor. He is responsible for it as well and the government is responsible for what it does in these projects.

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, the minister responsible for CanNor is the hon. member for Nunavut. I am sure she would be pleased to answer any questions the member has in regard to CanNor.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Chair, recently regulatory boards in Nunavut got a budget increase after years of asking. However, the government has refused to support the Nunavut planning board's funding request for the final round of technical and public hearings to develop the Nunavut land use plan. Without a land use plan, we will not see the kind of development the government wants to go ahead with in Nunavut. Why has the minister turned down this request?

● (2330)

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Chair, simply, we are continuing to work with the Nunavut Planning Commission to manage Canada's funding requirements and the commission's funding needs. I am optimistic that through open communication, Canada and the commission can ensure that it receives the support it requires to implement its obligations under the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement. That is the position of the government.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Chair, I feel short-changed. I have only been here for three hours and fifty-five minutes.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak briefly this evening about first nations governance and in particular to highlight the recent significant initiatives our government has undertaken to strengthen governance in first nations communities.

In broad terms, the role of our government where aboriginal relations is concerned is to support and encourage healthy, prosperous and self-sufficient aboriginal communities. We recognize that a large part of this involves supporting first nations communities in the implementation of strong, effective and sustainable governments. This is a role we take very seriously.

Research has shown that good governance is the single greatest determinant of a community's socio-economic progress and its overall well-being. In other words, the better the governance, the better positioned the community is for its success. Strong governance in institutions helps first nations communities to take greater control over the decisions that affect their lives, take advantage of economic opportunities, improve programs and services, and enhance their social and economic well-being.

Business of Supply

The initiatives I wish to discuss this evening speak directly to these points. The first of these is the First Nations Financial Transparency Act, or FNFTA. Receiving royal assent in March 2013, the FNFTA was part of the government's 2011 Speech From the Throne commitment to support democratic, transparent and accountable first nations governments by requiring the public disclosure of the salaries and expenses of chiefs and councillors, as well as first nations audited consolidated financial statements.

We strongly believe that first nations, like all Canadians, deserve transparency and accountability from their elected officials. The FNFTA accomplishes just that. Effective July 29, 2014, under the terms of the act, first nations were required to post their audited consolidated financial statements and their schedules of remuneration and expenses of chief and councillors on the Internet.

With increased access to this basic financial information, first nations members are now in a position to make better informed decisions about the financial management of their communities and hold their leaders to account. There can be no question that increased transparency and accountability empower first nations. The disclosure of this information is merely sound management practice and is no more than is required from other levels of government in Canada. The act applies the same principles of transparency and accountability to first nations governments that already exist for other governments in Canada.

Accountable and transparent governments provide reassurance to investors, whose confidence in a community as a potential site for business investment may be shaken by an absence of reliable financial information. Conversely, clear and timely provision of this kind of data can bolster economic development opportunities, as well as the potential for growth and business partnerships. Chief Darcy Bear of the Whitecap Dakota First Nation in Saskatchewan said:

The FNFTA will mean more accountability of First Nation leaders to our people. Transparent and accountable First Nation governments support a strong environment for investment leading to greater economic development.

Chief Bear is not the only first nations member who supports this legislation. In fact, as of last week, 97% of all first nations that were required to submit information under the act have done so. This sort of buy-in from first nations is encouraging as it assures band

members and potential investors alike that the first nations leadership is responsible, transparent and accountable to band members.

Moreover, it should be noted that the act does not require any additional paperwork for most first nations governments. It simply makes sure that financial information that is already provided to Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada as part of a first nations funding agreement is made available to the community members. Nothing new is required, only transparency and accountability to first nations members.

Another initiative I would like to discuss this evening that will have a positive effect on first nations governance is the First Nations Election Act. As part of our government's long-standing commitment to support stronger, more stable and effective first nations governments, the legislation allows for the necessary political stability for first nations to make strong business investments, carry out long-term planning and build relationships, all of which will lead to more robust economic development and job creation in first nations communities.

• (2335)

It is an opt-in piece of legislation. It allows for longer terms of office for band members. It allows for accountability. It removes the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development from certain processes under the Indian Act that happen with elections right now. It is a good piece of legislation, one I was proud to help pass through the committee.

Accountability and transparency on first nations reserves is something we believe those members who live on those reserves deserve, and we are happy to help deliver that.

The Deputy Chair: It being 11:36 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), all votes are deemed reported.

The committee shall rise and I will now leave the chair.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): This House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 11:37 p.m.)

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