

VANCOUVER
JUN 13 2016
COURT OF APPEAL
REGISTRY
COURT OF APPEAL

Court of Appeal File No CA041232
Registry Vancouver

BETWEEN:

**DANIEL CHRISTOPHER SCOTT, MARK DOUGLAS CAMPBELL, GAVIN
MICHAEL DAVID FLETT, KEVIN ALBERT MATTHEW BERRY, BRADLEY
DARREN QUAST, AARON MICHAEL BEDARD**

RESPONDENTS
(Plaintiffs)

AND:

THE ATTORNEY GENERAL OF CANADA

APPELLANT
(Defendant)

AFFIDAVIT OF DANIEL JAMES SCOTT

AFFIDAVIT

I, Daniel James Scott (Jim Scott), Businessman, of 3139 - 136 Street, Surrey, British Columbia,
SWEAR AS FOLLOWS THAT:

1. I am the father of the lead Plaintiff, Daniel Christopher Scott, and the President of the Equitas Disabled Soldiers Funding Society (Equitas Society) and as such have personal knowledge of the facts and matters hereinafter deposed to, except where they are stated to be made on information, and where so stated I believe them to be true.
2. I swear this affidavit in support of the position of the Respondents to be considered at the Case Management Conference to be held on Friday June 17, 2016 that the Abeyance Agreement entered into between the parties dated the 27th day of May, 2015 is a settlement agreement which precludes the Court from acting in accordance with the request in the letter of Mr. Paul Vickery, counsel for the Appellant, Attorney General of Canada, dated May 16, 2016, that the Court is now free to render its decision in the appeal heard on December 3 and 4, 2014 on the basis of the arguments made the.
3. I have been requested by, Donald J. Sorochan, QC, counsel for the Respondents, to set out the surrounding circumstances to the settlement set forth in the Abeyance Agreement and the actions of the Appellants which the Respondents submit are a breach of those settlement terms.

4. By way of background:
 - (a) I and others approached Donald J. Sorochan, QC to represent, *pro bono*, disabled soldiers who had grievances with respect to their treatment by the government under the *New Veterans Charter*;
 - (b) Donald J. Sorochan, QC and his law firm Miller Thomson LLP agreed to the *pro bono* representation provided funding could be found for the disbursement costs;
 - (c) As a result a group of concerned Canadians formed the Equitas Disabled Soldiers Funding Society (Equitas Society) to raise the funds necessary to pay for the legal disbursement costs and to raise the awareness of the reduced disability benefits provided to our disabled Canadian soldiers as result of the 2006 New Veterans Charter;
 - (d) The Equitas Society governance structure includes an Advisory Council consisting of three former speakers of the House of Commons, the Hon. John Allen Fraser, PC, OC, OBC, CD, QC; the Hon. Peter Milliken, PC, UE, BA, MA, LL.B; the Honourable Bill Blaikie, B.A., M.Div., P.C. and Prem Singh Vinning.
 - (e) The history of these proceedings and the facts underlying them are set out in detail in the factums filed in these proceedings.
 - (f) At the request of Donald J. Sorochan, QC, I have performed liaison functions between legal counsel, the Equitas Society and members of the Canadian veterans community.
5. Attached and marked as **Exhibit "A"** to this my Affidavit is the Abeyance Agreement entered into between the parties dated the 27th day of May, 2015 and signed by the then Minister of Veterans Affairs.
6. Attached and marked as **Exhibit "B-1"** to this my Affidavit is the letter to the Court of Appeal of Mr. Paul Vickery, counsel for the Appellant, Attorney General of Canada, dated May 16, 2016 and as **Exhibit "B-2"** is the responding letter to the Court of Donald J. Sorochan, QC dated May 18, 2016.
7. Shortly after the appeal in this matter was argued before the Court of Appeal in December of 2014 I became aware of considerable public expressions of disagreement with respect to positions taken by the Appellant on the Appeal and previously on the hearing of the Appellant's Motion to Dismiss, particularly with respect arguments of the Appellant related to the Social Covenant.
8. This public disagreement was reflected in the media and in Parliament. Attached and marked as **Exhibit "C"** to this my Affidavit are extracts from the Debates of the House of Commons of Canada for the month of December, 2014.
9. In December of 2014, there were many demands or requests that the then Minister of Veterans Affairs, the Hon. Julian Fantino, be replaced as Minister, including demands in the House of Commons from opposition political parties.
10. On January 5, 2015 the Hon. Erin O'Toole was appointed to be Minister of Veterans Affairs, replacing Mr. Fantino.

11. Very soon after Minister O'Toole's appointment, he reached out to the veterans community, including Equitas and the Respondents, signalling that he had a new approach to veterans and to responding to the Respondents' litigation, which changed approach was made clear by a statement by Minister O'Toole in Parliament in his January 2015 speeches as Minister, the Hansard extracted record of which is attached and marked as **Exhibit "D"** to this my Affidavit.
12. Upon the appointment of Minister O'Toole to the Veterans Affairs portfolio, I am aware that the Respondents were approached by the counsel for the government and advised that the new Minister wanted time to assess the case and the government's position.
13. At the invitation of Minister O'Toole, the Respondents engaged in discussions to see if a resolution, or a foundation for resolution could be found and the litigation terminated.
14. The settlement discussions were between the Respondent Representative Plaintiffs, members of the Respondents legal team and representatives of Equitas (on the Respondents side) and Mr. Joel D. Watson, a lawyer with military experience who had been seconded from private practice to be Director Legal Services for Veterans Affairs Canada and Department of Justice Counsel (on the Appellant's side).
15. Numerous meetings were held in Vancouver, Edmonton and Ottawa in the spring of 2015 to advance these settlement discussions and in the latter meetings, Justice Counsel did not participate with Mr. Joel D. Watson being responsible for the settlement negotiations on behalf of the Appellant.
16. During the settlement negotiations, Minister O'Toole and Mr. Joel Watson advised the Respondents that a Bill was to be introduced in Parliament on March 30, 2015 which would include some of the items and recommendations to which the then opposition parties had already agreed in the unanimous committee report of June 2014 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, extracts from which report that relate to the Social Covenant are attached and marked as **Exhibit "E"** to this my Affidavit.
17. In the view of the Respondents, the Bill introduced by the then Government in the Spring of 2015, while promising in many aspects, did not provide a sufficient basis to settle the Respondents' legal proceedings and given budgetary constraints, reforms to accomplish the complete settlement objective were unlikely to be achievable during the life of the then Parliament.
18. As a result, settlement discussions with the then Conservative Government focused on settling the Government Appeal and in the result the Government Motion to Strike as well as obtaining Veterans Policy Commitments from the Governing Conservative Party and the Liberal and New Democratic opposition Parties.
19. The Liberal and New Democratic Parties had since the outset of the Respondents' court action sponsored or participated in public meetings addressing veterans issues and sought the participation of the Representative Plaintiffs, Plaintiffs' Counsel and representatives of Equitas in the meetings during which party representatives, without fail, expressed support for the concept of the Social Covenant as pleaded in the proceedings and criticised the Conservative Government for not doing so. These meetings continued through the election campaign.

20. In the latter part of April and early May of 2015, I became aware of the intention of Mr. Fin Donnelly, a British Columbia MP of the New Democratic Party, to introduce a resolution in Parliament on an Opposition Members Business Day calling on Parliament to express its recognition of the Social Covenant and also became aware of the intention of Minister O'Toole to include a "purpose clause" recognizing aspects of the Social Covenant in an amendment to existing veterans legislation.
21. On May 7, 2015 I, along with Respondents' counsel Mr. Sorochan, went to Ottawa to meet with Mr. O'Toole and Mr. Watson as well as Liberal and New Democratic opposition Party representatives at which time I was able to advise Mr. O'Toole through Mr. Watson of the specific language of Mr. Donnelly's motion and urge upon them that the government should vote in favour of the motion, which was to be introduced on May 11, 2015.
22. On May 11, 2015, of Mr. Fin Donnelly, MP introduced an Opposition Day Motion: "That, in the opinion of the House, a standalone covenant of moral, social, legal, and fiduciary obligation exists between the Canadian people and the government to provide equitable financial compensation and support services to past and active members of the Canadian Armed Forces who have been injured, disabled or have died as a result of military service, and to their dependants, which the government is obligated to fulfil."
23. Attached and marked as **Exhibit "F"** to this my Affidavit is the May 11, 2015 Hansard record of the debates on the Motion of Mr. Donnelly in which all parties expressed support for the motion.
24. The unanimous vote of the House of Commons in favour of the Motion of Mr. Donnelly was held on May 12, 2015 as recorded in the 2015 Hansard report of the debates for that day which is attached and marked as **Exhibit "G"** to this my Affidavit.
25. The "purpose clause" to be added to the *Canadian Forces Members and Veterans Re-establishment and Compensation Act* which Minister O'Toole included in Bill C-58 read: "The purpose of this Act is to recognize and fulfill the obligation of the people and Government of Canada to show just and due appreciation to members and veterans for their service to Canada. This obligation includes providing services, assistance and compensation to members and veterans who have been injured or have died as a result of military service and extends to their spouses or common-law partners or survivors and orphans. This Act shall be liberally interpreted so that the recognized obligation may be fulfilled."
26. Attached and marked as **Exhibit "H"** to this my Affidavit is the relevant section of Bill C-58 as moved by Minister O'Toole in Parliament on March 30, 2015 at which time it was given first reading
27. The provisions in Bill C-58 did not come to a vote in Parliament because the Bill's provisions were rolled into an omnibus budget bill, 2015, c. 36, s. 207, which was passed including the purpose clause originally introduced in Bill C-58.
28. At the time the Abeyance Agreement was signed on May 27, 2015 all of the political parties with any expectation of forming government after the 2015 election had committed to recognizing and honouring the Social Covenant as set out in the Donnelly Motion and the Bill C-58 "purpose clause"

29. The Abeyance Agreement settlement provided that the Government of Canada would abandon its appeal of the judgment of the Supreme Court of British Columbia to the extent that the judgment rejected the Appellant's Motion to Dismiss with the action itself being held in abeyance until May 15, 2016 so that reforms promised by all of the political parties in their election platforms could be assessed and a complete settlement negotiated on with the new government.
30. The 2015 Election Platform of the Liberal Party with respect to veterans issues is attached and marked as **Exhibit "I"** to this my Affidavit.
31. The 2015 Election Platform of the New Democratic Party with respect to veterans issues is attached and marked as **Exhibit "J"** to this my Affidavit.
32. Both before and after the election, in accordance with paragraph N of the Abeyance Agreement, the Respondents have designated Liaisons who have participated, and continue to participate in, stakeholder advisory groups to advise the Minister in respect to Reforms and their Representation.
33. The Mandate Letter of the Prime Minister of Canada to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence is attached and marked as **Exhibit "K"** to this my Affidavit.
34. The Mandate Letter of the Prime Minister of Canada to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada is attached and marked as **Exhibit "L"** to this my Affidavit.
35. Contrary to the provisions of the Abeyance Agreement, and specifically paragraph K of the Abeyance Agreement, there has been no continuation of Negotiations or "ongoing dialogue" since the election of the Liberal Government.
36. Since the election, upon the instructions of the representative Plaintiffs, Mr. Sorochan, as counsel for the Respondents has informed the Appellant and has repeatedly and publicly stated that the directions to Minister Hehr in his Mandate Letter from the Prime Minister, if implemented, would be sufficient for him as counsel for the Respondents to recommend settlement of the proceedings.
37. The Mandate Letter instructions have not, however been implemented and there was, and is, a lot of frustration in the veterans community, including the Representative Plaintiffs because of a statement made during the election campaign in August of 2015 by the Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau that he had a "fully costed platform" to reinstate lifelong pensions for Canada's injured veterans which to my knowledge suggested an immediacy of action to the veterans community that has not occurred.
38. On April 11, 2016, upon the urging of Mr. Sorochan, a meeting with Respondents' counsel, Representative Plaintiffs, Justice Counsel, the Minister and Ministry officials took place in Ottawa because the abeyance period would soon expire.
39. Prior to the meeting, Mr. Sorochan advised counsel for the Appellants of some of the feedback the Plaintiffs legal team, as counsel, have received from hundreds of veterans who have encountered difficulties with government veterans' programs and procedures.
40. On March 11, 2016, I was copied with an e-mail message about the meeting April 11, 2016 sent by Mr. Sorochan to one of the Justice counsel for the Appellant, which stated:

While we understand the limitations of the Minister's busy schedule, we hope that this meeting will achieve the substantive progress that we need to resolve this matter. As part of the consultation process, a number of our Plaintiffs have had several "meet and greet with the Minister" sessions. These have been appreciated. However, a lot of effort and expense is being put into this meeting and we urge that it be organized to accomplish our objective of a resolution and not a mere social exercise.

41. The expectation on the Respondents' side was that at the April 11, 2016 meeting there would be negotiations in the form of a discussion with Ministry officials on clarifications about the Mandate Letter scheduling and timing of implementation.
42. After the Minister had left the April 11, 2016 meeting (which was expected given his busy schedule), the departmental officials also unexpectedly left the meeting without participating with the Respondents group in the discussions and negotiations which the Respondents group had anticipated and was required under the Abeyance Agreement settlement.
43. Rather than any discussion or negotiating occurring at the meeting, senior Justice Counsel stated that if the matter was not resolved by the Respondents dropping the litigation, the Court of Appeal would be invited by the Appellants to render its decision based upon the arguments of December 2014 that he had advanced at that time.
44. This was an astonishing proposition to the Respondents, since many of Justice Counsel's arguments of December 2014 had been repudiated by both the former Conservative government and the present Liberal government and there had been a settlement of the appeal in the Abeyance Agreement where, in paragraph 1(a) the Appellant agreed to abandon the appeal.
45. Notwithstanding the Appellant's failure to fulfill their duty to negotiate, the Respondents provided the Appellants with a statement as to the confirmation of the government's commitment to implement all the points in the Mandate Letter and provides greater clarity and necessary details with respect to criteria for benefits, timelines or budgetary feasibility which is required for the Respondents to assess what will actually occur and when within the mandate the implementation of the reforms is reasonably anticipated by the government.
46. In response to the Respondents request for these clarifications, counsel for the Appellants advised on May 9, 2016 that "the Government of Canada is not, however, in a position to provide any timelines or specific details with respect to the remaining items in the Mandate Letter, including the re-establishment of lifelong pensions at this time" and reiterated the Appellants position that they would ask the Court of Appeal to render judgment on the December 2014 arguments of the Appellant.
47. By letter dated May 16, 2016 (Exhibit A) counsel for the Appellants did make that request of the Court of Appeal.
48. In response to the letter of May 16, 2016 (Exhibit A), counsel for the Respondents' sent a letter to the Court of Appeal dated May 18, 2016, a copy of which is attached and marked as **Exhibit "M"** to this my Affidavit.

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This is Exhibit A "referred to in
the affidavit of Jim Scott
sworn before me at Vancouver
this 12 day of JUNE 2016.
[Signature]
A Commissioner for taking Affidavits
for British Columbia

ABEYANCE AGREEMENT

This Abeyance Agreement is dated this 27 day of May, 2015

BETWEEN

DANIEL CHRISTOPHER SCOTT, MARK DOUGLAS CAMPBELL,
GAVIN MICHAEL DAVID FLETT, KEVIN ALBERT MATTHEW
BERRY, BRADLEY DARREN QUAST, AARON MICHAEL
BEDARD

(the "Plaintiffs")

AND

THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA

(the "Defendant")

(collectively, the "Parties")

RECITALS

- A. **Whereas**, on October 30, 2012, Daniel Christopher Scott; Mark Douglas Campbell; Gavin Michael David Flett; Kevin Albert Matthew Berry; Bradley Darren Quast; and Aaron Michael Bedard, suing on their own behalf and as potential representative plaintiffs on behalf of members of a proposed class of individuals with common issues pursuant to the *Class Proceedings Act*, R.S.B.C. 1996 c. 50, commenced **British Columbia Supreme Court Action No. S-127611** in the Vancouver Registry against the Government of Canada;
- B. **And whereas**, B.C. Supreme Court Action No. S-127611 has not yet been certified as a class proceeding pursuant to the *Class Proceedings Act*, R.S.B.C. 1996 c. 50;
- C. **And whereas**, on May 31, 2013, the Defendant brought an application to strike the claim brought by the Plaintiffs in B.C. Supreme Court Action No. S-127611, which application was unsuccessful pursuant to the reasons for judgment of Mr. Justice Weatherill pronounced September 6, 2013 in *Scott v Canada*, 2013 BCSC 1651;
- D. **And whereas**, on October 6, 2013, the Defendant filed a Notice of Appeal in Court of Appeal File No: **CA041232**, which appeal was heard December 3 and 4, 2014, following which hearing the Court of Appeal reserved judgment and requested the Parties to provide further submissions on specified dates with respect to issues raised by the Court;
- E. **And whereas**, the Parties mutually agreed that discussions to explore a possible resolution of the issues in the litigation would be useful and jointly requested the Court of Appeal to extend the time limits for the further submissions requested by the Court of Appeal;
- F. **And whereas**, the Court of Appeal agreed to the joint submissions of the Parties and extended the time limits for the further submissions by placing the appeal litigation in abeyance "until April 15, 2015, or until further advised by the parties", and whereas the

Parties requested a further extension to May 15, 2015 and the Court granted same until June 1, 2015;

G. **And whereas**, the Parties mutually agree that Veterans are best served by immediate, constructive and cooperative efforts to address Veterans' wellbeing in a manner that focuses on care, compassion and respect, rather than through lengthy litigation, which, by its nature, is imperfect, expensive, and stressful to the participants;

H. **And whereas**, the Parties have entered into negotiations with a view to resolving the issues in the litigation on the basis of the Government of Canada's current and intended reforms to benefits and improved processes and policies relating to the application for benefits for Canadian Veterans (**the "Negotiations"**), the provision of which may require bringing into force legislative and regulatory enactments and changes in policies and procedures (**the "Reforms"**),

I. **And whereas**, at the time of execution of this Agreement, two of the Reforms have already come into effect by regulatory enactment, and Bill C-58, containing Reforms announced to date and requiring legislative enactment, has been tabled by the Government in the House of Commons, and has also been included verbatim in the *Budget Implementation Act*, which legislation contains a purpose clause, that:

2.1 The purpose of this Act is to recognize and fulfil the obligation of the people and Government of Canada to show just and due appreciation to members and veterans for their service to Canada. This obligation includes providing services, assistance and compensation to members and veterans who have been injured or have died as a result of military service and extends to their spouses or common-law partners or survivors and orphans. This Act shall be liberally interpreted so that the recognized obligation may be fulfilled.

J. **And whereas**, on the 12th of May 2015 a motion was passed by the unanimous vote of all Members of Parliament present (266 in favour none against), including all members present of the governing party:

That, in the opinion of the House, a standalone covenant of moral, social, legal, and fiduciary obligation exists between the Canadian people and the government to provide equitable financial compensation and support services to past and active members of the Canadian Armed Forces who have been injured, disabled or have died as a result of military service, and to their dependants, which the government is obligated to fulfil;

K. **And whereas**, the Plaintiffs are appreciative of and encouraged by the actions referred to in paragraphs H, I and J and the Parties intend to continue their Negotiations and to maintain an ongoing dialogue regarding the effectiveness of any Reforms made by the Defendant or further reforms that may be identified by the Parties;

L. **And whereas**, the Parties agree to resolve the appeal in Court of Appeal File No: CA041232 by abandonment by the Defendant/Respondent of the appeal by consent of the Plaintiffs/Respondents on a without costs basis and to hold the all legal proceedings in the Supreme Court of British Columbia action in continued abeyance from the date this Agreement comes into effect until May 15, 2016 (**the "Abeyance Period"**)

M. **And whereas** before finalizing a settlement the Plaintiffs wish to consider the efficacy and impact of the Reforms made by the Defendant in the provision of benefits to Veterans and their families, whether coming as a result of the Negotiations or otherwise;

- 3 -

- N. **And whereas** in furtherance of this Agreement, and to facilitate the Reforms, the Parties intend for one or more of the Plaintiffs to assume the role of liaisons between the Parties and the Veterans community regarding the Reforms and the implementation of those Reforms by the Defendant (the "**Liaisons**"), including through participation in stakeholder advisory groups set up by the Minister of Veterans Affairs in respect of the Reforms and their implementation;
- O. **And whereas** the Parties agree that the Plaintiffs, the Liaisons, and their counsel will work cooperatively with the Government of Canada and provide input with respect to the Negotiations and Reforms, it being agreed that working together and prior consultation towards solutions best advances the common cause of serving Veterans and ensuring that Reforms are fully understood so that Veterans can use them to the best advantage of themselves and their families;
- P. **And whereas**, while the Negotiations and implementation of Reforms are ongoing, the Parties have agreed to hold in abeyance B.C. Supreme Court Action No. S-127611 and to advise the Court of this agreement.
- Q. **And whereas**, the Plaintiffs state to the Defendant that if the Reforms are implemented to the reasonable satisfaction of the Plaintiffs during the abeyance period of this Agreement, further litigation will be unnecessary and the Parties shall settle and resolve the Litigation by the Plaintiffs by discontinuing the aforementioned action without costs to any party;
- R. **And whereas**, the Government acknowledges the valuable contributions made by the Plaintiffs and their counsel, Miller Thomson LLP, to the continuing efforts to fulfill the recognized obligation that Canada owes to our Veterans and the Government and thanks the Plaintiffs and their counsel, Miller Thomson LLP, for these contributions, and commends Miller Thomson LLP for taking on this matter on a *pro bono* basis, which is in the best traditions of the legal profession;
- S. **And whereas**, the Plaintiffs acknowledge the Government's sincere, tangible, and continuing efforts to respond to the issues raised by Veterans groups general, and the Plaintiffs particularly;

IN CONSIDERATION OF THE MUTUAL PROMISES CONTAINED HEREIN, THE PARTIES AGREE AS FOLLOWS:

Suspension of the Litigation

1. The Parties agree that, concurrently with the execution of this Agreement:
 - (a) The Defendant will, with the consent of the Plaintiffs/Respondents, abandon the appeal in Court of Appeal File No: CA041232 on a without costs basis or, if necessary, seek leave to abandon the appeal with the consent of the Plaintiffs without costs to any Party;
 - (b) Jointly cause all legal proceedings in the Supreme Court of British Columbia action to be held in continued abeyance from the date this Agreement comes into effect until May 15, 2016 (the "**Abeyance Period**") and in accordance with this Agreement.

- 2. No party shall take, or require another Party to take, any steps in the Litigation during the Abeyance Period, except as provided for in this Agreement or by written agreement of the Parties.
- 3. Each Party shall instruct their counsel to take all reasonable and necessary steps to suspend the Litigation as between the Parties while this Agreement remains in effect.
- 4. Notwithstanding the foregoing, nothing in this Agreement shall prevent or restrict a party from defending, responding to, or intervening in, other proceedings to protect the claims, rights or interests of the party from competing or adverse claims made in other proceedings.
- 5. The Plaintiffs and the Liaisons agree that, with respect to the deliberations and processes of the consultations and the stakeholder advisory groups, they will only engage with the media, other Veterans, and the general public for the purpose of obtaining information required for the consultations and, as permitted by the processes of the consultations, provide only general comment on the progress made and remaining to be made in respect of the Negotiations, the Reforms, their implementation and factual background.
- 6. The Parties acknowledge and agree that they have, and will continue to be, contacted by the Media and others for comment on the lawsuit and on Veteran's Issues generally. The Parties acknowledge and agree that while it may be necessary to respond to such requests, that the details of the lawsuit will remain confidential for both current and future Negotiations. Accordingly, the Parties agree that they shall endeavour to maintain the respectful and productive dialog that they have now entered into, keep success of the reforms in mind and ensure, to the extent possible, that any such communications are reported accurately and fully.
- 7. In the event the Parties do not settle the Litigation within the Abeyance Period, the Parties are at liberty to pursue litigation options as they see fit.

Duration of this Agreement

- 8. Unless previously terminated pursuant to section 9 below, this Agreement shall terminate on May 15, 2016.
- 9. Notwithstanding paragraph 8 above, either party may terminate this Agreement, upon two weeks written notice, in the event that one of the following occur:
 - (a) the Government does not obtain passage of the substance of Bill C-58 on or before August 15, 2015 (it being acknowledged that the Bill has been rolled into the Budget Implementation Act so as to make it a confidence vote and ensure passage, and therefore that passage of the Budget Implementation Act includes the passage of Bill C-58);
 - (b) the Government does not schedule the fall meetings of the Stakeholder Advisory Groups on or before August 15, 2015;
 - (c) the Stakeholder Advisory Groups are established and do not have two or more representatives from the Plaintiffs on them; and /or
 - (d) the Regulations implementing Bill C-27 (Priority Hiring) are not promulgated on or before August 15, 2015;

Settlement of Legal Proceedings

10. If, on May 15, 2016, or at any time during the Abeyance Period, the Plaintiffs are reasonably satisfied that the Reforms have achieved sufficient improvements, the Litigation shall be settled by the Plaintiffs discontinuing the action without costs to any party.

Time

11. The Parties agree that the period of time from the date of this Agreement until the date this Agreement terminates shall not count or be used against a Party for any purpose in or connected with or related to the Litigation.

Amendments

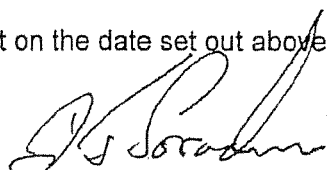
- 12. This Agreement contains the entire Agreement between the parties in regards to the suspension of the Litigation.
- 13. No amendment, waiver or variation of any of the terms and provisions of this Agreement is of any effect, unless made in writing and signed by each of the Parties or their authorized representatives.

Execution

- 14. This Agreement may be entered into by each party or its Minister or his authorized representative signing and delivering to all other Parties, by e-mail or fax, a counterpart copy of the execution page of the Agreement signed by that party.
- 15. This Agreement comes into effect on the date of the last delivery

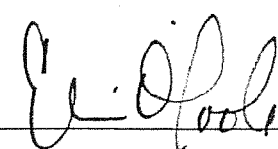
THE PARTIES hereby execute this Abeyance Agreement on the date set out above:

May 18, 2015



Donald J. Sorochnan, QC
MILLER THOMSON LLP
Solicitors for the Plaintiffs

May 27, 2015
Date



Joel Watson,
Director of Legal Services to the Office of
the Minister of Veterans Affairs



Department of Justice
Canada

Ministère de la Justice
Canada

50 O'Connor Street
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May 16, 2016

Our File Number: 1359994

BY FACSIMILE

Mr. Justice Groberman
Mr. Justice Harris
Mr. Justice Willcock

BC Court of Appeal
The Law Courts
400 - 800 Hornby Street
Vancouver, BC V6Z 2C5

This is Exhibit B-1 referred to in
the affidavit of JIM SCOTT
sworn before me at VANCOUVER
this 17 day of June 2016

A Commissioner for taking Affidavits
for British Columbia

My Lords:

Re: SCOTT et al. v. ATTORNEY GENERAL OF CANADA
Court File No: CA041232

As Your Lordships are no doubt aware, the Abeyance Agreement entered into between the parties in the above noted action expired on May 15, 2016. As the parties were unable to reach a settlement during the abeyance period, it is the Defendant's position that the British Columbia Court of Appeal is now free to render its decision in the appeal heard on December 3 and 4, 2014.

Further to this, and in accordance with the direction of the Honourable Mr. Justice Groberman, please find enclosed a table of concordance prepared by the Defendant that sets out the allegations in each paragraph of the Amended Notice of Civil Claim and the alleged causes of action to which they relate.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any questions or concerns.

Yours truly,

Paul Vickery
Senior General Counsel | Avocat général principal
National Litigation Sector | Secteur national du contentieux
Department of Justice Canada | Ministère de la Justice Canada

c.c. Don SoroChan, Counsel for the Plaintiffs

Canada



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VANCOUVER, BC + V6Z 2M1 + CANADA

T 604.687.2242
F 604.643.1200

May 18, 2016

Delivered Via Fax

British Columbia Court of Appeal
The Law Courts
400-800 Hornby Street
Vancouver, BC, V6Z 2C5

Attention: Mr Justice Groberman
Mr. Justice Harris
Mr. Justice Willcock

My Lords:

Re: **BCCA Action CA041232 - Scott and others v. The Attorney General of Canada**

This is Exhibit B-2 referred to in
the affidavit of Jim SCOTT
sworn before me at VANCOUVER
this 12 day of JULY 2016
[Signature]
A Commissioner for taking Affidavits
for British Columbia

Further to the letter of Mr. Paul Vickery, counsel for the Appellant, Attorney General of Canada, dated May 16, 2016, please be advised that it is the position of the Respondents that the assertion of Mr. Vickery "that the British Columbia Court of Appeal is now free to render its decision in the appeal heard on December 3 and 4, 2014 is not correct or appropriate. It is our position that there should be further submissions on the appeal before judgment may be given.

Mr. Vickery is correct that the Abeyance Agreement entered into between the parties in the above noted action expired on May 15, 2016. A copy of the Abeyance Agreement dated the 27th day of May, 2015 and signed by the then Minister of Veterans Affairs is enclosed. The premise for the Negotiations referred to in the Abeyance Agreement was that the government had repudiated certain arguments made by the Appellant on the appeal.

One of the repudiated arguments related to the Social Covenant. Paragraphs I and J refers to two actions of Parliament, one contained in a Bill and the other in a unanimous resolution of Parliament that reflect the repudiation of the argued positions of the Appellant on the hearings in December of 2014.

The Respondents relied upon the Appellant's repudiation of these arguments in its dealings with the Government and in its position in this Court where it was agreed to relieve the Appellant from its agreement to abandon the appeal as set forth in paragraph 1 (a) of the Abeyance Agreement. Further, the Respondents relied upon the publicly stated positions of the new Government of Canada that, it too, repudiated the arguments advanced in 2014. If new positions are to be advanced by the Liberal Government, it is submitted that it should advance the arguments in its own right rather than asking the Court to rule upon repudiated arguments of the former government.

It is the position of the Respondents that in all of these circumstances the Appellant is estopped from relying upon the repudiated arguments and that before judgment may be rendered, directions from the Court are required as to the most expeditious way to properly

put before the court the legally significant events that have occurred since December of 2014 and the scheduling further of argument required because of those events.

It is our submission that an Appeal Case Management Conference be held to further discuss these matters.

We will be providing any response that may be required to the table of concordance prepared by the Defendant within the two week period envisaged by the court when the table was originally requested.

We very much appreciate your consideration of this request.

Yours truly,

MILLER THOMSON LLP

Per:

Donald J. Sorochan, QC
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Enclosure
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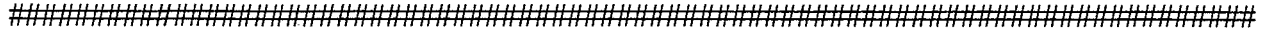
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41st PARLIAMENT, 2nd SESSION

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Wednesday, December 3, 2014



HOUSE OF COMMONS
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House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 147 | NUMBER 154 | 2nd SESSION | 41st PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT (HANSARD)

Wednesday, December 3, 2014

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

Veterans Affairs

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, the Department of Veterans Affairs is obviously facing a growing demand for services given that an entire generation of Afghanistan veterans is approaching retirement. Meanwhile, the Conservatives decided to cut the department's staff by 25%. Nearly 1,000 professionals who know our veterans have been fired by this government.

How is the Department of Veterans Affairs supposed to help a growing number of veterans with 1,000 fewer employees?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, the government is increasing services for veterans by cutting red tape.

I would like to note that today, we have lost Jean Béliveau, a great Canadian both on and off the ice. He was a giant in our national sport and in our national life.

This is Exhibit C "referred to in the affidavit of Tim Scott sworn before me at VANCOUVER this 17 day of JUNE 2016
[Signature]
A Commissioner for taking Affidavits for British Columbia

I would like to express our condolences and our admiration to his family and friends.

[English]

I just want to repeat that today we have lost Jean Béliveau, a truly great Canadian and Canadian. He was a giant in our national sport and in our national life. We all want to express our condolences and our admiration to his family and friends.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, staff at Veterans Affairs even warned the minister that these layoffs created a risk that Veterans Affairs would be unable to meet the needs of veterans, Canadian Forces members, and their families. Nine veterans service centres have been closed, and 1,000 staff have been laid off. The minister is knowingly putting our veterans at risk.

Instead of firing the staff, why does the Prime Minister not fire the minister?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, here is the reality. We have taken resources out of backroom administration, from bureaucracy. We have put it into services. There are more benefits and more money for veterans than ever before, and more points of service. That is called good administration, good government, and it is good service for the veterans of this country.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives' callous disregard for our veterans does not end there.

Conservatives are now arguing before the courts that the government's repeated promises over the years to care for injured vets were just political promises and should never have been taken seriously to begin with. I quote: "These statements were political speeches not intended as commitments or solemn commitments."

Does the Prime Minister stand by that argument, made by his own lawyer in court, that the government's promises to veterans were just political speeches?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, I am obviously not going to comment on matters before the courts. What I can say is the following: The substantive matter is a measure passed by the previous government, and supported by all parties in this House, including the NDP.

The reality is that this government has enhanced veterans services in numerous ways. We brought in the Canadian Forces income support allowance, which the NDP voted against. We brought in the veterans bill of rights, which the NDP voted against. We brought in compensation on the Agent Orange issue, which the NDP voted against. There were enhancements to the veterans independence program, which the NDP voted against. I could go on.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, unfortunately for the Prime Minister, he is proving that he actually does think that they were only political speeches. He does not think veterans in our country have a right to service.

He has said through his lawyers in court, in Canada, that these are political speeches and that those promises should never have been taken seriously.

Instead of blaming the veterans for actually taking his word, why does he not start respecting his word?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, the items I just listed are not political rhetoric. They are real services and programs for our veterans.

The rhetoric is from these guys, who when actually faced with doing something for veterans, vote against them every single time. We deliver.

* * *

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, we thought we had reached the point where we could not be shocked anymore by the Prime Minister's shoddy treatment of our veterans, but now we learn that to pad his books, he has actually underfunded our military cemeteries. He has cut 80% of the staff doing this solemn work. Thousands of grave markers needed repair and were not fixed last year.

When will the Prime Minister apologize for his disrespect of our veterans?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, I note that the government has enhanced funeral services for our veterans through successive budgets. It has also enhanced the contributions to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. Guess who stood in their places and voted against that? The member for Papineau and the Liberal Party, once again. Veterans are not fooled. They know all they get is rhetoric from the Liberal Party. They get actions and services from this government.

* * *

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, the minister suggested that the reason he had been absent on his file is because he was in Italy commemorating those killed in the Second World War. He suggested "Lest We Forget" meant something different to him.

Last year, he cut \$2.5 million from the very program responsible for preserving the memory of deceased Canadians who served us in war and peace. He fired 33 people who were responsible for maintaining these symbols of remembrance, including the memorial he visited in Italy.

Could he tell us why the hypocrisy, or has he already forgotten?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, our government will continue to ensure that we have the right people in the right locations to assist our veterans and their families. Our government has invested billions of new dollars since 2006 in veterans' benefits and services, investments for new front-line mental-

health clinics, and new access for veterans' families to family centres on seven military bases. We will continue to make improvements to support our Canadian veterans and their families.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, that must explain the vote-anything-but-Conservative movement, because they are so happy. He cannot have it both ways.

He cannot explain away savage cuts to veterans' services—lapsed billions, nine closed veterans centres—by standing up as the minister of commemorations and then turn around and slash the program responsible for the preservation of the memorials to those who fought and died for Canada.

Why did the Conservatives cut \$2.5 million last year and fire 33 people responsible for maintaining Canadian symbols of remembrance? Of course, it was for more advertising, right?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, as I stated, our government has invested billions of dollars in improving the quality of life of veterans and their families. However, it is quite ironic that in budget submissions, the main estimates of June 6, 2012, the Liberals declined to support Commonwealth War Graves Commission funding to make sure that our deceased service members' graves were well maintained. Also, education assistance programs for children of deceased veterans were not funded by the Liberals.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, it would be nice if he showed up to explain the main estimates.

Since 2008, the Conservatives have cut 949 positions or about 25% of the workforce. They let billions lapse and closed nine veterans centres, but they have still been able to increase Veterans Affairs advertising. It was \$4 million in the spring and \$5 million this fall. After chastising war service vets, running away from Jenny Migneault and failing to answer basic questions, is the real reason the minister has not yet been fired because he is really just doing the Prime Minister's bidding?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, in order to support veterans and their families with better programs and services, our government has made significant investments in mental health treatment for Canadian veterans. We have shifted bureaucratic resources to front-line service delivery. We have doubled the number of counselling sessions. We will assign Veterans Affairs employees to several military bases to speed up medical file transfers between our two departments. All of this is building on improvements that we have been making since 2006, and we will continue to do so.

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HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 147 | NUMBER 155 | 2nd SESSION | 41st PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT (HANSARD)**Thursday, December 4, 2014****Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer**

Veterans Affairs

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, 1,000 professionals responsible for helping our veterans have lost their jobs. That is one of every four employees. Nine regional offices have been closed, and the Prime Minister says that they are just bureaucrats. Such disdain for our public servants and our veterans, who are not getting the services they need.

Instead of laying off the public servants who help our veterans, will the Prime Minister consider getting rid of the minister who has done nothing for veterans?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, our government will continue to ensure that we have the right people in the right locations to assist our veterans and their families. We have invested in new front-line medical facilities for Canadian veterans and their families. We have been opening military family resource centres in seven locations across the country for medically releasing veterans and their families. We will continue to make improvements while the opposition opposes all these measures.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, members of the NDP are fighting for veterans. The Conservatives are fighting against them, even in the courts.

The Conservatives have told the courts that they never promised to look after our injured soldiers. According to the government's lawyer, no formal promises were made; it was just political rhetoric. That is unbelievable. Why are the Conservatives blaming veterans for believing Conservative promises?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, the irony of all of this is that I can rhyme off a litany of issues that the party opposite has not supported, all of which have gone to help support our veterans and the programs and services for them and their families. At this point in time it is most unfair for any of us to comment on a case now before the courts.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, the irony is that veterans will never believe Conservative promises again, because Canadians expect some contrition and shame from this minister. The case workers who were fired by the minister were front-line workers who were helping veterans.

The Conservative government has closed nine regional offices and has fired a thousand people who helped veterans. It even took a billion dollars out of veterans' hands, money that was authorized by Parliament for veterans' needs.

When will this Conservative decade of darkness for veterans end? When will the government start helping veterans instead of hurting veterans?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to state that we on this side of the House know that if veterans have the tools they need to transition to civilian life, the chances of their succeeding are increasingly improved. That is why our government has invested in new research to design more effective treatments for Canadian veterans. We are partnering with mental health organizations, the Mental Health Commission of Canada, and many others to enable us to provide the kinds of services and support that our veterans and their families need, which we are committed to provide, while the opposition votes against all of these.

* * *

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives made cuts to funding and to the staff who maintain the graves of our Canadian heroes. They did this following an audit that pointed to the deplorable state of these graves.

Today, we learned that half the money for research on veterans that the minister claimed was new funding comes from existing programs. We are talking about a very small amount. How many more reasons does the Prime Minister need to dismiss his incompetent minister?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, we have made significant investments in restoring Canadian war graves and sending hundreds of Canadian veterans back to visit the battlefields of Europe. The opposition has voted against these initiatives, and I can cite time after time when it let us down. It let veterans down, and it let our deceased soldiers down.

Our Second World War veterans who returned to Italy last week noted how beautifully maintained our Canadian grave sites are, and we are in fact proud of the work that we are doing at home and abroad.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, they are not proud of this minister, that is for sure.

Major Mark Campbell, a veteran with 33 years of service, was badly wounded in Afghanistan by an IED while rescuing a fellow soldier. Now he is fighting the Conservatives for a pension.

The government has stated in court that providing this pension would violate fundamental principles of democracy.

Could the minister please tell the House which democratic principles would be violated by providing this brave veteran and double amputee with his pension?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, we are profoundly proud of and honoured by the service that veterans have rendered to this country in the interests of freedom, democracy, and human rights.

However, in this particular case, the government does not comment on matters before the court, except to say that this matter deals with something that all parties agreed to under the previous government. It was the Liberal government that initiated much of what is in debate today.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, Conservatives claim all sorts of new funding for veterans, but it is a sham. Today, we learned that half of the so-called new programs the minister speaks of already exist, and experts say that it is a very meagre amount of money.

Conservatives claim in the House that they honour the sacred obligation, but that is a sham too, because in court they are still fighting Canadian veterans represented by the Equitas Society, claiming that no such obligation exists.

When will the Conservatives realize that "lest we forget" means both commemorating the dead and taking care of our living veterans, like Mark Campbell?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his passion on this issue, but as I indicated earlier, this matter is now before the courts. Out of respect for due process, I think that all of us should let the courts do their work.

I am at a loss for words to explain how it is that the Liberals would vote against earnings loss and supplementary retirement benefits, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, Korea transition services, disability awards and allowances, disability and death benefits, and I could go on.

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, veterans no longer trust this minister who has repeatedly tried to mislead them. A responsible minister would dispense with the underhanded legal tactics, reopen the regional offices and rehire the staff in charge of helping veterans. He would invest in mental health without delay and he would apply the recommendations of the parliamentary committee.

Since the minister is doing absolutely nothing to help veterans, when will the Conservatives do something and dismiss this irresponsible minister?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to report that, consistently, since we have been in power in government, through the leadership of our Prime Minister, veterans have been a primary issue for us. Time and again, we have put forward initiatives and support systems dealing with veterans and their families. However, the party opposite continues to vote against them. The hypocrisy is more than anybody can bear.

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister tried to have us believe that the staffing cuts would have absolutely no impact on veterans, saying that it was just administrative staff that was cut. That is not true.

The Auditor General's report clearly shows that the wait times have direct consequences on the health and quality of life of our veterans.

Cutting one in four jobs and closing nine regional offices clearly has an impact on the quality of services.

Parliament put \$1 billion aside for this purpose. Why was that money not spent?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, in our continued effort to improve veterans benefits and programs, I recommended that the Auditor General should review our mental health program. I fully accept his recommendations and no doubt, am grateful for them.

The Auditor General found that Veterans Affairs spends half a billion dollars each year on mental health strategy and also on valuable mental health supports.

While we have already taken action to improve the service delivery, we will in fact continue to follow the Auditor General's recommendation, which, by the way, also stroked some very positive things in his report.

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are failing veterans right across the board. They stand in the House and dismiss the crisis that they created when they gutted departments and fired the staff who helped veterans access the services they so desperately need.

Nine regional offices are now closed and one in four employees has been fired. The Prime Minister has the audacity to call people helping injured soldiers in those regional offices “backroom bureaucrats”.

Instead of making excuses for that failed minister, will the Prime Minister finally just show him the door?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, all I can say is that on this side of the House, we have consistently been improving the quality of life support systems and assistance to veterans and their families.

It is very difficult for me to understand, though, how the New Democrats would vote against disability and death compensation, how they would vote against the veterans ombudsman, how they would vote against the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, how they would vote against earnings loss and supplementary benefits and, also, how they would vote against children of deceased veterans education assistance. I do not get it.

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, too little too late. The Conservatives pedal their weak and petty excuses in this place, but the truth is they are going to court to fight disabled veterans injured in Afghanistan.

While lying in a hospital bed, Major Mark Campbell, who lost both his legs above the knee in a Taliban ambush, found out that the government had stripped him of his military pension. He is one of seven veterans who has gone to court to gain access to compensation that was promised.

Why is the government going to court to break those promises and the hearts of our veterans?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, it is very difficult to get through to people who are not listening. My response—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker:

Order, please. The hon. Minister of Veterans Affairs still has the floor.
The hon. minister of Veterans Affairs.

Hon. Julian Fantino:

Mr. Speaker, my concern, and it should be the concern of the NDP, is that in our country we have great respect for due process. In that regard, this matter is before the courts. It is really

Monday, December 8, 2014



HOUSE OF COMMONS
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House of Commons Debates

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OFFICIAL REPORT (HANSARD)

Monday, December 8, 2014

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, who would have thought that there were so many reasons for the Minister of Veterans Affairs to resign? He closed the service centres. The Auditor General criticized his mediocre performance with respect to veterans' mental health. The minister saved \$1.1 billion at their expense and gave bonuses to his department's managers. He even fled the country and all his responsibilities in mid-crisis.

Now we have learned that the Conservatives tried to mislead veterans by telling them that they were only cutting red tape and not services. In reality, one-third of the 900 positions cut since 2009 were in the pension and benefits team, not to mention the 372 positions cut from health and rehabilitation.

Not only has the minister abandoned veterans, now he is hiding the truth from Canadians. That is shameful. Our veterans deserve better.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, contrary to what we were told by the Prime Minister last week, the Conservatives have cut front-line services for our veterans. Public servants who manage benefits, pensions and health care have been affected the most.

Why did the Prime Minister try to mislead this chamber

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, that assertion is absolutely false. We are reducing back office expenses while increasing front-line service for veterans.

The story erroneously suggests that the internal services program area is the only program area where Veterans Affairs has actually cut back. That is not true. In fact, there are back office staff in all of the program areas.

We make no apologies whatsoever for reducing bureaucratic expenses at Veterans Affairs Canada while we focus and continue to focus on improving front-line services for veterans and their families.

* * *

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives misled Canadians about the \$200 million in spending. They failed to provide proper mental health services.

Now we learn that the Prime Minister's claim about only backroom bureaucrats being laid off was false. A third of the layoffs were of people working on pensions and disability benefits.

For vets, it has been a decade of darkness under the Conservatives. When will Conservatives stop misleading Canadians and finally live up to their obligations to our nation's veterans?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, in fact there are back office positions in almost every segment of Veterans Affairs, and those are what veterans have been saying that we should in fact reduce.

A few examples: The government stopped asking veterans to show it their receipts for snow-clearing. That reduced almost 100 positions. In the disability benefit program, 12 photocopy and processing clerks were reduced when we moved to digitized medical records.

We make no apologies whatsoever for bringing forward savings that will reduce bureaucracy.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives' claim about only targeting backroom bureaucrats has already been proven false. The government's own documents show that only 10% of the cuts were to internal services. Instead, Conservatives focused their cuts on regional veterans offices, caseworkers, and front-line staff.

To add insult to injury, while they were firing front-line workers, they were handing out generous bonuses to senior managers to do it.

Why is this minister still a minister?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, while the opposition wants to increase government bureaucracy, we are increasing front-line support services for veterans and their families, including the recently announced eight new front-line mental health clinics for our veterans. In the service delivery branch we are organizing three regional management centres into one in Montreal, reducing hundreds of managers, processing analysts, and administrative support clerks. We make no apologies for finding efficiencies in a bureaucracy and translating those into active front-line services for our veterans and their families.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives claim they are fulfilling the obligation our country has to our veterans through legislation and in the House.

However, before the courts, the Conservatives are saying that we have no such obligation and that it violates a fundamental principle of democracy—all so that they can give injured veterans as little as possible.

What democratic principle is violated when we give veterans the ongoing financial support they need?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, I will not comment on a matter that is presently before the courts. However, I will assure the member opposite, and indeed all Canadians, that since 2006 this government has worked tirelessly to upload services and programs for veterans. The fact of the matter is that the opposition has constantly voted against those measures.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister misled the House when he said that the Veterans Affairs cuts were backroom cuts only. Disability and death compensation, lump sum payments, health care, rehabilitation, career transition, and the VIP program suffered the deepest cuts. These are front-line services that help veterans recover, find jobs, and assist them at home. The Conservatives can no longer deny the link between their cuts, mental health wait times, and billions in lapsed money.

Will the minister finally come clean and fix his mess at Veterans Affairs or find someone who can?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, as I stated earlier, while the opposition wants to increase government bureaucracy, we are increasing front-line support services for veterans and their families. In fact, in the treatment benefit program, 30 positions were reduced when we streamlined health-related travel claims. We are becoming more efficient, more effective, and are able to reduce the bureaucracy by providing front-line services where they belong, for our veterans and their families.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, savage cuts to front-line services are indefensible, and all the while the minister paid his managers hundreds of thousands of dollars in bonuses as they destroyed the department's ability to help our veterans, this on top of letting over a billion dollars for veterans go unspent, excessive wait times for mental health, and ignoring the unanimous recommendations of the veterans committee.

There was once a minister willing to stand up to the Prime Minister, but unfortunately Jim Flaherty is gone now.

When will the Minister of Veterans Affairs stop the Prime Minister from making these callous cuts and misleading veterans and Canadians?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, it is pretty hard to dignify that comment. However, let me assure the hon. member that the decisions taken are always made in consideration of doing the right thing for the right reasons on behalf of our veterans. We make no apologies for reducing bureaucracy and creating efficiencies so that we can in fact translate all of those savings into front-line service delivery for our veterans directly and their families.

* * *

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister told us that cuts to Veterans Affairs Canada would affect only administrative services. That is completely untrue because administrative positions account for only 10% of the cuts.

The minister cut specialists who manage veterans' compensation, pensions, health care and rehabilitation.

Either the Prime Minister misled us, or the minister misled the Prime Minister by hiding the cuts from him.

Which of the two failed our veterans?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, in our efforts to create more efficient, effective services for veterans and their families, we have done a number of things. We have opened or announced 21 new front-line medical facilities for veterans' mental health; worked with the ministry of family and resource centres to support medically-released veterans and their families; partnered with the True Patriot Love Foundation, which gave the largest single philanthropic donation to mental health research in Canadian history; hired new staff to help transfer medical files quicker and more efficiently from National Defence to Veterans Affairs; and I could go on.

Our focus is on front-line service delivery.

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have closed nine regional veterans offices, gutted the department and fired front-line staff that helped veterans access disability, health and pension services. To make matters worse, the Conservatives doled out bonuses to senior officials for

making those devastating cuts. Unbelievably, the minister stands in this place and says that he is proud of the cuts.

Our veterans deserve better. Will the Prime Minister stop making excuses, respect our veterans and fire that minister?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, as an example of the efficiencies we have created, we have transferred service delivery to some 600 Service Canada offices, closed a few offices and relocated them to Service Canada offices in the very same building.

Over the past 21 weeks, there have been 475 visits to those offices. To put that in perspective, it equates to 22 visits a week when averaged across the entire eight locations, or three per day across the entire network. Some offices get no traffic at all.

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

Mr. Speaker, the only reason that I, as a Dutch foreign Canadian, get to stand on Canadian soil is because 5,700 Canadians and our allies are laying beneath Dutch soil.

When we send our heroes off to war, they expect to be cared for, and their families, when they come back injured, either physically or mentally, yet the government is spending thousands of dollars on lawyers defending the argument that there is no moral or social contract to care for our veteran community.

My question to the minister is very simple. Yes or no, do you or do you not believe, through you Mr. Speaker, that you have a fiduciary, legal, moral or social obligation to our veterans?

The Speaker:

I did mention last week that just because a member says "through you, Mr. Speaker" but continues to use the second person, it is still inappropriate.

I will give the hon. Minister of Veterans Affairs an opportunity to respond.

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, I do not think that caring for our veterans is an exclusive entitlement of that member or anyone else for that matter. We all care deeply about our veterans, their sacrifice, their contribution and what they mean to us as a Canadian society.

It would be imprudent for me to enter into a matter that is presently being dealt with before the courts. The beginning of all of this started in 2006, and I do not think I should infuse myself into it at this time.

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OFFICIAL REPORT (HANSARD)**Tuesday, December 9, 2014****Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer**

Veterans Affairs

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, we cannot wait to have a government with Canadian values.

The Minister of Veterans Affairs told us yesterday that he cut 1,000 specialists who help our veterans because they were just backroom bureaucrats who spent their days photocopying. That is false. Only 10% of those cuts involved administrative positions.

Why is the Prime Minister letting his minister mislead veterans? Why not fire him? He is incompetent and has lost the confidence of veterans.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, we understand the NDP's position very well: that party wants to protect the jobs of bureaucrats at Veterans Affairs and it is opposed to veterans' services.

[English]

Let me tell members, in line of this question, precisely what I am talking about. In fact, in the veterans independence program, the department cut 100 people whose only job was to process small claims from veterans, which are now allowed automatically. That is what we did. At the same time, we increased benefits under the veterans independence program. The NDP voted against that

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, tell that to the 50% of veterans who cannot even access disability benefits.

Yesterday, when asked about cuts to front-line services, the minister responded, "veterans have been saying that we should in fact reduce", but the minister cannot tell us the names of these veterans who have supposedly been coming to him, demanding cuts.

In the minister's fantasy world, he has only been cutting backroom and internal services. He also says that cuts in his department are somehow reinvested back into service: wrong, wrong and wrong.

The minister has lost the confidence of veterans. Why does the Prime Minister not fire him?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, I could give thousands of examples of where we have streamlined back office support, including, of course, eliminating photocopy and processing clerks in place of digital medical records.

There is the difference. The NDP wanted to keep bureaucrats to do nothing but process and delay payments to veterans under a program it actually voted against. On this side, we cut down the bureaucracy. We deliver service to the veterans.

* * *

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, we have a sacred obligation to our veterans who chose to put everything on the line for their country. The Prime Minister has denied this obligation in court and has slashed veterans' services.

Why is his priority a \$2 billion tax break for wealthy families like his and mine, instead of properly supporting our veterans?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, unlike that party, we provide benefits both to families and to veterans.

The hon. member makes reference to a court case that is actually a court case against a previous Liberal policy. In any case, we have repeatedly enhanced the benefits under that policy to the tune of some \$5 billion, opposed every step of the way by the Liberal Party, which voted against all of those benefits.

It can keep voting against those benefits for veterans. We will keep bringing them forward.

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has cut hundreds of front-line Veterans Affairs staff. He has cut Veterans Affairs service centres. He has cut funding for war graves. On top of that, he actually gave bonuses to managers to cut those services.

These are devastating cuts for our veterans, but a \$2 billion tax break for the most wealthy. Where are the government's priorities?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, in fact, the truth is the complete opposite of everything the member just said. We have actually increased, by many fold, the number of service centres there are now for our veterans in our country. In terms of war memorials specifically, we have increased the funding for that for the community war memorial program, voted against by the Liberal Party. We enhanced the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, also voted against by the Liberal Party.

However, as I know, what the Liberal Party and NDP want to do is ensure that they protect those bureaucratic jobs at Veterans Affairs, instead of giving the services to the veterans. That is what we are doing on this side.

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, we have a sacred obligation to our veterans who risked their lives to defend our country.

The Prime Minister chose to cut services, close service centres and even give bonuses to managers who cut programs for veterans.

The government is giving billions of dollars in credits to the wealthy while making major cuts that affect our veterans.

Where are the government's priorities?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. We have increased services for veterans and the number of service centres for them.

For example, we eliminated close to 100 positions in the veterans independence program, positions that actually slowed down payment of veterans' benefits, and we increased benefits provided to veterans through that program.

In any case, the Liberal Party voted against those benefits for our veterans. We enhanced the program and will continue to do so.

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Veterans Affairs has overseen the clawback of over \$1 billion that Parliament approved for veterans. He has cut front-line services that veterans desperately need.

He has rewarded staff with thousands of dollars for denying veterans access to mental health services.

Does the Prime Minister really believe that no one else in the Conservative caucus can do a better job than the current minister? What message is he sending to Canadians who elected the other Conservative MPs?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, our government has delivered, and today there are more services, more programs, more benefits, and more points of service for our veterans and their families.

Here are the facts. Opposition members voted against funeral and burial funding, they voted against career transition services, plus they voted against the children of deceased veterans education assistance program. On this side of the House, we stand up for our veterans, not for—

The Speaker:

The hon. member for Westmount—Ville-Marie.

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, over the past three weeks, we have learned that Veterans Affairs Canada has clawed back over \$1 billion, that it has laid off one-quarter of its staff, that veterans are waiting for months or years for mental health services, that the minister misled us regarding the funding of \$200 million that is really going to be spread over 50 years, and that the so-called cuts to administrative services are really going to affect front-line services and employees.

When will the Prime Minister remove this incompetent and insensitive minister?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for that gracious question.

We have brought, in fact, real services, meaningful programs for our veterans and will continue to do so. The reality is that they voted against the disability and death compensation, voted against the earnings loss and supplementary retirement benefits, and voted against the veterans independence program and a host of other programs and services.

On this side of the House, we deliver for our veterans.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, after 10,000 complaints last year, HRSD is getting 400 new staff to deal with the mess it created, and ministerial staffers are up 21%. Meanwhile, Veterans Affairs cut nearly 1,000 jobs, most of them front-line service delivery, the kind identified by the Auditor General as causing delays in veterans receiving the help they need. Veterans' calls are not being answered and their benefits are delayed and denied.

Why do veterans always come last with these Conservatives?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, since our government came into power, we have, in fact, increased substantially the benefits and services and programs available to veterans.

The short story, of course, is that while opposition members vote against certain issues, we are promoting veterans' programs and services flat out. We continue to do that. We are very focused and will continue to provide services and programs to our veterans on the front line, where they count, not in the backrooms.

* * *

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives cannot just leave \$1 billion on the table when our veterans do not even have access to the care and services they were promised. Nor should they close nine regional centres and fire 1,000 people who provide care and services to veterans while at the same time they give managers bonuses.

Will the Prime Minister finally realize that veterans have lost confidence in this minister, who refuses to admit his mistakes?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, in fact there are back office positions in almost every segment of Veterans Affairs Canada.

A few examples of the efficiencies that we have created include stopping asking veterans to show their receipts for all kinds of transactions that had to be processed. That saved 100 hundred positions. In the disability branch program, 12 photocopy and processing clerks were reduced when we moved to digitized records.

We make no apologies for the reductions in bureaucratic waste of taxpayers' dollars and turning those into benefits for veterans and their families.

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

Mr. Speaker, when young men and women from Canada go off to war, they and their families need to know that their government and country will care for them in the event they become physically disabled, mentally challenged, or make the ultimate sacrifice.

Yesterday, I asked the Minister of Veterans Affairs, does the government have a sacred obligation to care for them? He would not answer it.

My question is directly for the Prime Minister of Canada. Does the Prime Minister of Canada believe that the government has a judicial, legal, moral, and social obligation to care for the heroes of our country?

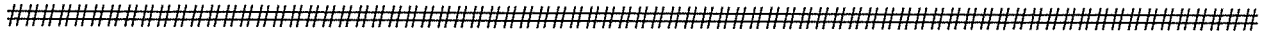
Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, our record shows that we care deeply about the welfare and well-being of our veterans and their families. Under the leadership of this Prime Minister, our government has

made substantial improvements to the new veterans charter and the supports available for veterans.

The government does not comment on matters before the courts, except to say that this matter deals exclusively with something that all parties agreed to under the previous government.

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Wednesday, December 10, 2014



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OFFICIAL REPORT (HANSARD)

Wednesday, December 10, 2014

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

Veterans Affairs

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have been bragging about laying off staff at Veterans Affairs, but now we find out that they have been pumping money into these shadowy ministerial offices to help their ministers.

Therefore, while the Conservatives cut 25% of the staff helping veterans with health care and disability compensation, they have boosted by 21% the political staff working in these unaccountable regional offices.

Quite frankly, the Minister of Veterans Affairs does not need more spin doctors; he needs a moral compass and some ethical backbone.

How can the Conservatives justify cutting support for veterans, while hiring flunkies to support such an incompetent and disgraced minister?

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, our government has delivered. Today, there are more services, more benefits and more points of service for our veterans than ever before.

Here are the facts. Those members voted against expanding funeral and burial funding. They voted against career transition services. They even voted against the children of deceased veterans education assistance program.

We will take no lessons from that party over there.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, that takes the cake.

The Conservatives are firing one-quarter of Veterans Affairs Canada employees, those who really take care of veterans when it comes to health care services, pensions and benefits. The Conservatives are insulting public servants by saying that they are just pencil-pushers.

Nevertheless, we have learned that the number of political staffers in ministers' offices has increased by over 20%. That just emphasizes how foolish the Conservatives are being. There is no money to take care of people, but there is money for political staffers.

Why are the Conservatives investing more in spin doctors than in people who take care of our veterans?

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, while the opposition wants to increase government bureaucracy, we are increasing front-line support for our veterans, including recently announcing eight new front-line mental health clinics for Canadians across the country.

Let me give a couple of examples. In the service delivery branch, we reorganized three regional management centres into one in Montreal, and reduced hundreds of managers, processing analysts and administrative support clerks. In the treatment and benefit program, 30 positions were reduced when we streamlined health related travel claims.

We will continue to stand up.

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, I do not know whether the Minister of Veterans Affairs remembers Jenifer Migneault. One of the last times he saw her, he ran away so that he would not have to answer her questions.

Ms. Migneault's husband, Claude Rainville, is still waiting for services to deal with his tinnitus, which is seriously diminishing his quality of life.

Mr. Rainville clearly told me that the Conservatives are not just firing backroom bureaucrats. They are cutting essential services.

Why is the minister trying to save money at the expense of veterans like Mr. Rainville?

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, we have brought in real services and real programs for veterans, and we will continue to do that.

The reality is that those members keep voting against every program and measure that we have brought forward. They voted against disability and death compensation. They voted against the earning and loss supplementary retirement benefit. They voted against the veterans independence program.

On this side of the House, we are taking action. We are providing services to our veterans, and the opposition needs to get on board.

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, nobody believes that stuff anymore. Conservatives are failing veterans and refusing to take responsibility, veterans like Richard Brown, injured on duty and unable to hold down full-time work due to mental injuries. He was given a single payment of just \$64,000. Jordie Yeo suffered broken bones and PTSD after being ambushed by a sniper, but initially was refused compensation altogether.

When will the minister finally admit that it is wrong and disgraceful to treat our veterans this way?

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, veterans who are injured and in rehabilitation receive a minimum of \$3,500 in financial benefits each month. Veterans who are most seriously injured can receive \$8,000 or more a month in financial benefits from the Government of Canada, and their military pension.

Our government has increased two disability awards to a new combined total of a half a million dollars tax free. Injured veterans now have access to up to \$75,800 toward university and college retraining.

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

Mr. Speaker, while the government sends our brave men and women off to war, it refuses to admit that when they come back with physical or mental challenges there is a moral and social obligation to care for them. It has lawyers in B.C. right now arguing the point, spending thousands of Canadian tax dollars, that there is no moral or social contract for our veterans.

Does the parliamentary secretary believe or does he not believe that there is a legal, fiduciary, moral and social obligation to care for the heroes of our country?

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, the member opposite knows full well the case is currently before the courts and that we are not in a position to comment on it.

What I will say is that this is effecting a policy that was brought forward by the Liberal government in 2005, which was supported by all parties in this House.

I would encourage—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker:

Order, please.

It is getting quite noisy. The hon. parliamentary secretary still has the floor. Many members are carrying on conversations. I would ask them to do so outside the chamber, so the parliamentary secretary can finish his response.

Mr. Parm Gill:

Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, we will continue to stand up for Canada's veterans, even though the opposition, both the Liberal Party and the NDP, continue to vote against every single initiative we bring forward—

The Speaker:

Order, please.

The hon. member for Random—Burin—St. George's.

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Veterans Affairs misleads Canadians when he says that his harmful cuts to veterans are in the back room.

Last year, direct spending on health care services was cut by \$82 million and spending on disability and death compensation was cut by nearly \$70 million, but spending on back office programs rose by more than \$13 million and the minister's political staff increased by over 400%.

The minister has abandoned veterans. It is a national disgrace
When will the minister resign?

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, since taking office, our government has made substantial investments to help Canada's veterans with benefits and services.

On this side of the House, we support our veterans. The reality is that we voted for the agent orange compensation program; they voted against it. We voted for the Canada remembrance program; they voted against it. We voted for the health care program and reestablishment

services; they voted against it. Their rhetoric in this place does not match their record. They should stop playing and start voting—

The Speaker:

Order, please.

The hon. member for Guelph.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, for the additional millions the minister is spending on communications and political staff instead of on veterans' benefits, one would think that his parliamentary secretary—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker:

Order, please.

Perhaps if members would remain quiet they might be able to hear the member. The hon. member for Guelph has the floor. There is so much noise that it is really taking up a lot of time. Let us give the hon. member for Guelph our undivided attention and listen to the question.

Mr. Frank Valeriote:

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

One would think his parliamentary secretary would have better answers for his failure on this file by now.

Now that his deep cuts to service delivery have been exposed, the minister is scrambling to refill these front-line positions, including in the communities where he closed regional VAC offices. However, we still see evidence that the most serious cuts have been to staff delivering benefits and that money is going from the front line to his backroom.

Why do our veterans have to beg for the services they deserve?

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, I would encourage the member opposite and that party over there to start standing to vote in favour of the initiatives our government has brought forward to support Canada's veterans.

Their record is completely opposite. Let me give some examples of the some of the initiatives they have voted against. They have voted against the veterans independence program; Community War Memorial Program; the partnership program; the community award memorial program; the earnings loss and supplementary benefit retirement program—

* * *

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, the minister has misled Canadians and closed regional offices and the Auditor General has reported that he has failed veterans, yet he stands in this place and refuses to take responsibility.

What about veterans like Daniel Scott from Surrey, who lost his spleen and has health problems that will plague him for the rest of his life? The government gave Scott a one-time payment of just \$41,000. Does the government really want to force veterans like Daniel through the courts just to get justice?

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, a veteran who is injured and in rehabilitation receives a minimum of \$3,500 in financial benefits each month. Veterans who are most seriously injured can receive \$8,000 or more per month in financial benefits from the Government of Canada and their military pension. Our government has increased the two disability awards to a new combined total of half a million dollars, tax free. Injured veterans now also have access to up to \$75,800 toward university and college retraining.

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Thursday, December 11, 2014



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OFFICIAL REPORT (HANSARD)

Thursday, December 11, 2014

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

Veterans Affairs

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, over the past eight years, \$1.1 billion that should have been used to help veterans was funnelled back into federal coffers because of the minister's incompetence and his chronic inability to process claims properly.

Two years ago, he was told that his department had seriously underestimated the number of veterans who need help. He did absolutely nothing to address the situation. In fact, he made it worse.

When will the Prime Minister get rid of the Minister of Veterans Affairs?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, our government has delivered, and today there are more services, more benefits and more points of service for our veterans than ever before.

Here are the facts. The opposition voted against expanding funeral and burial funding. It voted against career transition services. It even voted against the children of deceased veterans education assistance program.

We take no lessons from a party that speaks one thing and does another.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, ministerial responsibility is one of the cornerstones of our democracy. That person has caused the harm. He shut down nine veterans offices and allowed \$1.1 billion to lapse when veterans needed help, and he says that it is somebody else's fault.

No, he is responsible. What is he waiting for to finally, for once in his life, do the honourable thing and resign?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, we have brought in real services and real programs for our veterans, and we will continue to do so in spite of the opposition voting against every one of those items.

The reality is that those members voted against disability and death compensation. They voted against the earnings loss and supplementary retirement benefits. They voted against the veterans independence program.

I hardly think we need to take any lessons from a party that says one thing and does exactly the opposite.

..8.

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, two years ago, the Auditor General informed us that the Conservatives were underestimating veterans' needs and that demand would probably go up.

What did the minister do? He cut 1,000 jobs, and the biggest cuts were made to front-line programs for health, financial and transition services. The minister is not only incompetent; he is also mean.

Why is the Prime Minister putting up with this? When will he show this incompetent and insensitive minister the door?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, we support our veterans. The reality is that we voted for many of the benefits and services for veterans and their families.

However, let me just inventory a few of the items that the Liberal Party voted against. They are the veterans independence program, the earnings lost benefit, the supplementary retirement benefit, the financial support program, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, career transition services, the disability allowance, and many more.

Again, the hypocrisy is more than anybody can really believe.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, when it was convenient, the Prime Minister praised the new veterans charter. For example, in 2006, in speaking with veterans, he claimed to support the troops and noted, "This veterans charter is one example of our government's commitment". However, when it became clear how badly his government had mismanaged that supposed commitment, he rushed to blame the charter on a previous government.

The Prime Minister has been exposed for his mean-spirited neglect of our veterans. How can they possibly trust anything he says?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, since the advent of the new veterans charter, what this government has done consistently year after year, while the opposition has voted against it, is enhance the benefits, the services and the delivery of programs for veterans and their families.

We have been delivering for our veterans. We continue to do so, while the opposition opposes everything we do.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, while we believe the Conservatives should have long ago invested in mental health services for those who serve, they seem incapable of announcing money for military mental health without skirting into questionable ethical grounds.

Today's announcement of a new centre of excellence includes funding of a half a million dollars from military contractor General Dynamics Corporation, which receives tens of millions of dollars in contracts from the Conservative government.

In its rush for good news announcements, does the government really not see the conflict of interest created by General Dynamics Corporation contracts with DND?

Mr. James Bezan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to providing the best care possible for our men and women in uniform. It was our government that boosted the mental health budget for the armed forces by over 20%. Members who are battling mental illness have greater access to specialized care more than ever before.

The Canadian Armed Forces has established a new national Canadian Military and Veterans Mental Health Centre of Excellence and created a Chair in Military Mental Health, working in partnership with the Royal Ottawa Mental Health Centre. We are seeking even further opportunities to advance military-related mental health research. Our brave men and women in uniform deserve nothing less.

Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, 900 positions were eliminated at Veterans Affairs. That is more than a third of the unit that administers services and 372 positions in the health and rehabilitation unit. To mask their ideological cuts, the Conservatives claimed that this would not affect services.

That is what got us into the mess we are in right now: veterans are dying before they can get the care they need and others are committing suicide. This makes no sense.

What is the Prime Minister waiting for? When will he dismiss this completely incompetent minister?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, I am very proud of the work that we on this side of the House have been doing, while the opposition constantly votes against our programs and services for veterans.

We opened or announced new front-line medical facilities for veterans' mental health. We are working with family resource centres to support medically-released veterans and their families. We have shrunk the application and the paperwork to deliver more services upfront for our veterans. We have created new monthly financial benefits totalling thousands of dollars each year for seriously injured veterans.

The opposition votes against all these things.

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Veterans Affairs is totally out of touch.

For two years, he has been unable to forecast the needs of his department; yet, he has done nothing to correct the situation, despite a stern warning from the Auditor General, who told him that his data did not take into account the growing needs of soldiers with post-traumatic stress.

For the past two years, the minister has been laying off all kinds of staff and closing regional offices without knowing what the future needs would be. Now, he has to backtrack and rehire some staff.

It is high time the Prime Minister gave veterans a nice gift by dismissing this irresponsible minister.

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, all of us on this side of the House are proud of the fact that we have been, and continue to, looking after the needs of our veterans and their families. We do that through the delivery of programs and services.

Let me give the House just one example where the NDP voted against a program, and that was disability and death compensation benefits for our veterans. The New Democrats voted against that.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have failed veterans every step of the way, and they refuse to take responsibility.

A 2012 Auditor General's report warned that Conservative mismanagement was: creating a mess at Veterans Affairs; failing veterans on mental health issues and PTSD; and creating a state of confusion with front-line case managers.

The Conservatives' response was to cut front-line staff and close regional offices. It is inexcusable. When will they finally fire the minister?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, we have brought in real services and real programs for our veterans, and we will continue to do so in spite of the NDP voting against all of these things.

The reality is that the New Democrats keep voting against every program or measure that we have brought forward. They voted against disability and death compensation, earnings lost and supplementary retirement benefits and the veterans independence program.

There are no lessons to be learned on this side of the House from that party which votes against the very things we are trying to achieve for our veterans.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, at least 160 Canadians who bravely served this country died by suicide over the last decade.

The current Conservative government was warned two years ago by the Auditor General that it was unprepared for dealing with veterans' mental health. It was told again this year that the wait time for mental health services was unacceptable. That any member of the Conservative government can stand up and say that they are doing a good job without any sense of shame is an insult to the memory of anyone lost because of their inaction.

The minister has allowed us to get to this point of crisis. When will he do the right thing and resign?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, as recently announced, there are a number of initiatives that we have undertaken that will in fact address the mental health situation. This is something that we have been doing all along. There are initiatives under way that will enhance service delivery at the front line. There are new clinics and expanded clinics being put in place.

We have been responding and we will continue to do that for the mental health needs of our veterans and their families.

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Friday, December 12, 2014



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OFFICIAL REPORT (HANSARD)

Friday, December 12, 2014

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

Statements by Members

Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, while the opposition has been playing politics at the expense of our veterans, the government has been working hard.

[English]

Through eight budgets, our government has earmarked over \$5 billion in new funding to improve the benefits and services for veterans and their families.

[Translation]

Our 2014 economic action plan allocated \$2.1 billion to veterans and their families.

[English]

The veterans affairs committee introduced the enhanced new veterans charter act moving forward, which was unanimously adopted.

[Translation]

Thanks to a partnership with Service Canada, our veterans have access to more than 600 points of service across the country.

[English]

We invested \$65 million to enhance the funeral and burial program by simplifying the program for veterans' estates, and by more than doubling the current funeral services rate from \$3,600 to \$7,400.

[Translation]

I would like to wish a very merry Christmas to all our Canadian Forces members and veterans and to all the wise people of Orléans.

[English]

Please join us for breakfast tomorrow morning at the Royal Canadian Legion, the friendliest Legion in the region.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives prevented the Department of Veterans Affairs from spending more than \$1 billion that had been promised to veterans, and now we have learned that they plan on spending \$1.7 billion on a new plane.

National Defence spends its entire budget, but the Conservatives make sure that the Department of Veterans Affairs cannot do the same.

Why do the Conservatives always put veterans last?

Mr. James Bezan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, unlike the Liberals, who oversaw and neglected our armed forces through the decade of darkness, and the NDP, which would prefer to never purchase any military equipment, we support our military and give it the equipment it actually needs.

Under the previous Liberal government, our soldiers and Disaster Assistance Response Team would have to rely on other countries for strategic airlift or use SALIS Antonovs to get around the world. When we were first elected, we fixed this very embarrassing situation by purchasing four new C-17 Globemaster strategic airlift planes, 17 new C-130J Hercules tactical airlift planes, and 15 new Chinook heavy-lift helicopters.

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, Conservative priorities include a new \$1.7 billion airplane for the military while our veterans suffer the effects of Conservative gutting of front-line programs which provided financial, disability, health, and transition support. Just yesterday, we lost yet another soldier to suicide.

The Minister of Veterans Affairs continues to pathetically defend this abuse of our veterans. Veterans do not respect him. Canadians do not trust him, and this entire country is disgusted by his rough treatment of our brave veterans.

When will he resign?

Mr. James Bezan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, as I said, our thoughts and prayers are with the family of Corporal Scott Smith, and this tragedy is being investigated.

I would also like to remind the Liberals that their math is not very good. We actually bought four C-17 heavy-lift planes for \$1.7 billion. They should get their math straight.

We will continue to make the investments in both mental health research and mental health support for Canadian soldiers and veterans. We will collaborate with academia and private sector to ensure that we utilize all of the resources available to us, so we can get the best possible results in mental health for our military.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, the treatment of our veterans by Conservatives is a national disgrace. The minister has clawed back over \$1 billion from veterans. He has gutted the department, firing 1,000 front-line staff who delivered critical health services. He told those who suffered from PTSD to take a number. He closed nine specialized service centres. Canadians are appalled by this shameful Conservative neglect of veterans.

The government has a sacred obligation to veterans, and it failed. When will the Prime Minister stop defending and fire this minister?

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, our government makes absolutely no apologies for eliminating big government bureaucracy and backroom offices, and making a substantial investment when it comes to investing in front-line services and resources.

Here are a couple of examples. We eliminated nearly 100 positions after we stopped requiring veterans to submit receipts for expenses like snow clearing, yard maintenance, and home cleaning.

We will continue to eliminate red tape to serve Canada's veterans for the benefits and services that they deserve.

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Monday, January 26, 2015



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

This is Exhibit 17 referred to in
Deposition of Jim Scott
taken before me at VANCOUVER
this 12 day of JUNE 2016
[Signature]
A Commissioner for taking Affidavits
for British Columbia

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 147 | NUMBER 162 | 2nd SESSION | 41st PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT (HANSARD)

Monday, January 26, 2015

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, we hope the new Minister of Veterans Affairs will not take the same path as his predecessors. Our veterans have been left out in the cold. They have been abandoned. They have been treated as though they were a terrible burden.

These men and women fought for us, and yet they often have to wait months or even years to access the health care they are entitled to.

Will the minister commit to taking concrete action to correct his predecessors' blunders, starting by reopening the Veterans Affairs regional offices?

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to rise in this House as the Minister of Veterans Affairs. I want to thank the Associate Minister of National Defence and the two other members of this

House who served in this capacity. I am the 31st minister of veterans affairs and I am the 13th who has served in the Canadian Forces. Daniel J. Macdonald and George Hees are illustrious names. In the last three weeks, I have been listening across this country to our veterans, to their needs. We will make sure we meet those needs now and in the future.

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

Mr. Speaker, for the record, he is my 11th minister in 17.5 years, and these problems still continue. However, I do congratulate the hon. member for Durham for his new post as veterans affairs minister. I also thank him for his service to our country.

Having said that, as a veteran and as the Minister of Veterans Affairs, does he now believe—because the Prime Minister and the former minister would not answer this question—that the Government of Canada has a social, moral, legal, and fiduciary responsibility to care for those men and women it asks to put themselves in harm's way?

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, I would like to quote Sir Robert Borden to this House:

...That you need not fear that the government and the country will fail to show just appreciation of your service to [this] country....

Our support for our veterans, from Borden's time to today, is important, but we also have to meet the needs, the evolving needs, of our veterans. In Borden's day, there was no support to Sam Sharpe, in his own caucus, for mental injuries from war. I am proud to say that our government is moving mountains to ensure we address the mental injuries from service.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, I welcome the Minister of Veterans Affairs to his new role. I am glad that the Prime Minister has finally recognized how poorly the previous minister was treating veterans. A new face does not mean a change in attitude though.

The new minister already started off on the wrong foot by excluding from consultations the veterans groups with whom he disagrees. This does not offer us much hope for movement on major issues like reopening veterans offices, ending budget cuts on the back of veterans services, and recognizing the sacred obligation owed to veterans.

Why was the minister's very first act an attempt to silence Canadian veterans who have rightly called the government out for mistreating them?

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, it appears that my friend is just as angry as he was last fall, which is unfortunate because my outreach to veterans groups was about listening and reaching out. All stakeholders were called and talked to, and I found that there is tremendous diversity among our stakeholder community, those traditional organizations, those helping veterans, as well as those new groups, the peer-based counselling and support groups.

I am going to continue to reach out and listen to all of them, if we are all going to work together to help our men and women.

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41st PARLIAMENT, 2nd SESSION

EDITED HANSARD • NUMBER 163

Tuesday, January 27, 2015



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

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OFFICIAL REPORT (HANSARD)

Tuesday, January 27, 2015

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, we were all pleased to hear the minister tell us yesterday that veterans would be his priority. However, that alone will not restore trust. Clear answers and firm commitments are required. I will repeat the question I asked yesterday.

Will the government take concrete action, reach out to our veterans and reopen the department's regional offices, as our veterans are demanding? Yes or no?

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, as the member well knows, by the end of this year, veterans will have the opportunity to seek mental health support at 25 offices from coast to coast. It is about meeting the new and rising needs of our veterans and offering services for veterans who are in their 20s and 30s as well as for veterans in their 80s and 90s. We are meeting these evolving needs.

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

Mr. Speaker, every Canadian knows that there is a moral and social obligation to care for those men and women we ask to put themselves in harm's way. However, it is only the Prime Minister and the Conservatives who do not believe that there is a moral and social obligation to care for them, especially now those in Iraq.

My question, very simply, is for the Minister of Veteran's Affairs. Does the government believe that there is a moral, social, legal, and fiduciary responsibility to care for the heroes of our country who the government asked to put in harm's way?

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, I met the hon. member in 1997, when I was a lieutenant at the air base in his riding. That was in 1997. A few years later, he voted in this place for the new veterans charter. What we have to realize, between 1997 and today, is that we have to meet the new and ongoing needs of our veterans. There is a tremendous obligation, recognized as far back as Robert Borden, but we are not frozen in time. We have to meet the needs now and in the future, and we will.

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41st PARLIAMENT, 2nd SESSION

EDITED HANSARD • NUMBER 164

Wednesday, January 28, 2015

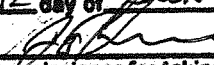


HOUSE OF COMMONS
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House of Commons Debates



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This is Exhibit "E" referred to in
the affidavit of Jim Scott
sworn before me at Vancouver
this 12 day of JUNE 2016

A Commissioner for taking Affidavits
for British Columbia

THE NEW VETERANS CHARTER: MOVING FORWARD

Report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs

Greg Kerr
Chair

JUNE 2014

41st PARLIAMENT, SECOND SESSION

STANDING COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS

CHAIR

Greg Kerr

VICE-CHAIRS

Peter Stoffer

Frank Valeriote

MEMBERS

Sylvain Chicoine

Royal Galipeau

Parm Gill

Hon. Laurie Hawn

Bryan Hayes

Wladyslaw Lizon

John Rafferty

OTHER MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT WHO PARTICIPATED

Corneliu Chisu

Ben Lobb

Manon Perreault

CLERK OF THE COMMITTEE

Jean-François Pagé

LIBRARY OF PARLIAMENT

Parliamentary Information and Research Service

Jean-Rodrigue Paré, Analyst

"It shouldn't take getting one's leg blown off to realize it, but sometimes we don't learn lessons until after the hardships have happened. ... I hated running while I was in the military, but now I want to do it. It's that insatiable appetite. I wanted to live my life, not just survive. So persevering through adversity had to be a mindset, a sentiment that can be shared no matter what path any one of us wants. ... If rehab or recovery was to be put into a number or percentage, 49% comes from all the resources that surround us. That's you, the government, our friends, our family, the cleaners, the doctors, the nurses. I have to bring that 51%. I have to bring that little bit more to make all those resources worthwhile." (Sergeant Bjarne Nielsen, amputee following an explosion in Afghanistan)¹

"There should be more presumptions in the system, and I don't mean that in a legalistic way. If I come to you as a double-leg amputee, like Mr. Fuchko, I shouldn't have to do much more than that. I should just simply say, "Look, I'm a double-leg amputee. What have you got for me?" (Mr. Brian Forbes)²

INTRODUCTION

Pursuant to section 20.1 of the *Enhanced New Veterans Charter Act*, the Committee began the statutory review of the Act by passing the following motion on 19 November 2013: "It was agreed — That the Committee hear from the Minister of Veterans Affairs on Tuesday, November 19, 2013, from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., to discuss the *Enhanced New Veterans Charter* review and the Supplementary Estimates (B)."

On the same day, the Honourable Julian Fantino, Minister of Veterans Affairs, asked the Committee members to go beyond the mandate provided for in section 20.1:

Upon taking office, I heard clearly from the Veterans Ombudsman, veterans groups, and stakeholders that a wider review of the *New Veterans Charter* was needed. I therefore asked my parliamentary secretary to ensure that a comprehensive review of the *New Veterans Charter* be taken up in short order.³

More specifically, the Minister asked the Committee to

... determine how best to state our commitment to Canadians and their families and what is the best format to do so in the *New Veterans Charter*. It is important that Canadians express through the parliamentary process exactly what is our shared duty, responsibility, mandate, obligation, commitment, or covenant to Canadian veterans.⁴

In keeping with the general terms of reference above, the Committee identified three core themes that witnesses were invited to address:

1 Sergeant Bjarne Nielsen (as an individual), *Evidence*, House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs (ACVA), 27 March 2014, 1540.

2 Mr. Brian Forbes, *Evidence*, ACVA, 1 April 2014, 1915.

3 The Hon. Julian Fantino, (Minister of Veterans Affairs), *Evidence*, ACVA, 19 November 2013, 1110.

4 *Ibid.*, 1115.

- develop a unified list of service conditions to be used interchangeably by Veterans Affairs Canada the Department of National Defence.
- ensure to the greatest extent possible that the service-related condition, identified by the Canadian Armed Forces and that led to a veteran's release on medical grounds, be recognized by Veterans Affairs Canada for adjudication purposes.
- establish a follow-up protocol for all military members who have been released for medical reasons.

RECOMMENDATION 2

That the Veterans Bill of Rights be included in the *New Veterans Charter* and in the *Pension Act*, and that a modified version of section 2 of the *Pension Act* be incorporated into the *New Veterans Charter*, and read as follows: *The provisions of this Act shall be liberally construed and interpreted to the end that the recognized solemn obligation of the people and Government of Canada to provide compensation to those members of the forces who have been disabled or have died as a result of military service, and to their dependants, may be fulfilled.*

RECOMMENDATIONS THAT ADDRESS SUPPORT FOR MILITARY MEMBERS AND VETERANS SERIOUSLY DISABLED AS A RESULT OF SERVICE

RECOMMENDATION 3

That the most seriously disabled veterans receive financial benefits for life, of which an appropriate portion should be transferable to their spouse in the event of death, that Veterans Affairs Canada consider the use of a probable earnings approach in determining the amount of the benefits, and include better access to the three grades of the permanent impairment allowance, for which eligibility criteria must be clarified.

RECOMMENDATIONS THAT ADDRESS SUPPORT FOR VETERANS WITH SERVICE-RELATED DISABILITIES WHO ARE ABLE TO MAKE A SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION

RECOMMENDATION 4

That the earnings loss benefit be non-taxable and set at 85% of net income, up to a net income threshold of \$70,000, that it be adjusted annually to the consumer price index, and that for veterans who participate in a rehabilitation program, the disability award be paid once the program is completed.

4. The maximum disability award is lower than the amount recognized by the Supreme Court in rulings on non-economic damages; this violates the principle that veterans should not be disadvantaged compared to other Canadians;
5. Family support was one of the six pillars identified by the NVC Advisory Group, yet few measures have been implemented in support of this commitment;
6. Part-time reservists do not receive the same financial support in the event of disability attributable to military service.⁹

Two other issues identified in studies by the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman also came up often during the Committee's proceedings:

- the difficulty for veterans' family members to obtain services for themselves; and
- the difficulty in obtaining approval from VAC for vocational programs.

The focus of the discussions on some shortcomings of the NVC should not overshadow the fact that most witnesses supported its principles, and that it was more in the implementation of these principles that adjustments need to be made.

DEFINING THE SOCIAL CONTRACT

When we sign on that dotted line I think the expectation is that we're going to be cared for after the fact, regardless of whether everything works out well or if someone is injured really catastrophically such as myself or others like me. I think bottom line is that we just want to make sure we're cared for and taken care of for the time ever after for the sacrifices that we did make.¹⁰

During the 1990s, operational pressure and financial constraints forced a stricter interpretation of the principle of universality of service.¹¹ For the first time since the end of the Korean War, the social contract between members of the armed forces, veterans, the Canadian population and the government, had to be revisited. Many CF members were released on medical grounds, when before they would have remained in the service during their recovery. With their careers unexpectedly shortened, many of these new veterans found themselves in difficult situations. Since the services offered by VAC were available only to those receiving disability pensions and since wait times could be long, the only reintegration services available were those provided by the Department of National Defence under the Service Income Security Insurance Plan (SISIP).

9 Guy Parent (Veterans Ombudsman, Chief Warrant Officer [retired], Office of the Veterans Ombudsman), *Evidence*, ACVA, 28 November 2013, 1105.

10 Sergeant Bjarne Nielsen (as an individual), *Evidence*, ACVA, 27 March 2014, 1615.

11 Veterans Affairs Canada – Canadian Forces Advisory Council, *The Origins and Evolution of Veterans Benefits in Canada, 1914–2004*, p. 50–51.

The nature of the programs available meant that, in the period between their release and the approval of their disability pension, veterans focused their efforts on proving that their disability was service-related, instead of focusing them on vocational rehabilitation. Furthermore, some members chose to leave the Canadian Forces only to experience symptoms of operational stress later on. Since these people had not been released for medical reasons, they were not entitled to support under the SISIP.

All of these factors have required that this social contract be redefined by taking into account the different needs of a new generation of veterans who have been involved in complex, ill-defined and more dangerous operations. In moving toward the adoption of the NVC, it was expected that the new Act would embody this redefined social contract.

Expectations were very high when the NVC was adopted, and while recognizing the value of its programs, a number of witnesses found that the Act did not live up to these expectations.¹² It was generally agreed that the NVC has many strengths, and that to prevent the marginalization of veterans, its weaknesses must be addressed.

This disappointment with the NVC's promises is not universal, but it is widespread enough that some CF members who are about to be released for medical reasons are worried.¹³ Concern was expressed that once rehabilitation efforts are completed by the most seriously injured, they will feel at risk because of the limits of the programs, both in time and in amounts.

Further, as Corporal Fuchko sees it, this perception reflects the concerns some disabled veterans also have about the consequences on their families and the inadequacy of supports available to them in the form of survivor and other benefits.¹⁴

This focus on family goes beyond a concern for services or financial benefits. According to Senator Roméo Dallaire, families today have become an intrinsic part of the conflict, kept informed of what goes on through omnipresent information technologies:

By the time we come back from those missions, we see a family who has also lived the missions. The families are now living the missions with the members. It is not a separated exercise. It is a marriage. It's a communion between the two, and so any policy that doesn't reflect that communion is a policy that will have a fundamental flaw in it, and the fundamental flaw is you can't help the member and let the families be taken care of by somebody else, by another body, and hopefully they might even have a priority in their support. That dimension, which was supposed to be intrinsic in what we were hoping the legislation would be, is not there. You have a hard time finding "family" in this legislation.¹⁵

12 Medric Cousineau (Captain [retired], as an individual), *Evidence*, ACVA, 4 March 2014, 1635.

13 Sergeant Bjarne Nielsen (as an individual), *Evidence*, ACVA, 27 March 2014, 1600; see also Cpl. Mark Fuchko (as an individual), *Evidence*, ACVA, 1 April 2014, 1530-35.

14 Cpl Mark Fuchko, *Evidence*, ACVA, 1 April 2014, 1605.

15 Roméo Dallaire (Quebec, Lib.), *Evidence*, ACVA, 3 April 2014, 1535.

Committee members agree on the need to prioritize the most seriously disabled veterans and their families. Canada's gratitude must correspond to their sacrifice and the suffering they and the members of their families will experience for the rest of their lives.

This does not mean, of course, that gratitude should not be extended to veterans whose problems are less serious. However, the primary objective should be different. A significant proportion of seriously disabled veterans are not likely to find employment that meets their original career goals. No service or financial benefit will ever compensate for that pain. The generosity of Canadians can nonetheless ease their suffering by providing programs to help veterans and their families deal with the situation to the best of their abilities. They must be confident that the generosity extended to them by the population is sincere and that they will not suffer the effects of fluctuating financial situations.

For veterans whose military service resulted in difficulties that can be overcome, the primary objective, if not the only objective, of all the programs designed for them should be to support their transition to a fulfilling work life. All the studies on determinants of health clearly show that vocational reintegration is the most important factor in successful transitions for people whose careers have been interrupted by disabilities.

Lastly, even the best principles, best intentions and best programs will not be successful if access to services and benefits is hampered by administrative considerations. Veterans and their families would have the impression that the initial generosity was only empty words and that the population's sincerity got lost in red tape and short-lived policies. Therefore, it is essential that steps be taken to ensure that the relationship between veterans, their families and the government openly and clearly demonstrate the generosity of the Canadian people. Witnesses put forward many suggestions and recommendations to this end that this report cannot do justice to. We will simply mention one idea: combining the departments of National Defence and Veterans Affairs. This idea is not new, but resurfaced during our proceedings, and a number of witnesses suggested that it should be seriously considered.¹⁶

The solemn obligation of the Government and people of Canada towards its veterans should include, at the very least, these four elements: support for families, priority for the most seriously disabled veterans, support for career transition services, and access to services. These four elements should also be included in a more comprehensive framework that would outline the philosophy behind the fundamental values that must guide the government's actions as it provides support for veterans.

16 Joseph Burke (National Service Officer, Ottawa, NAV, National Alliance, Canadian Aboriginal Veterans and Serving Members Association), Evidence, ACVA, 1 April 2014, 1720; Roméo Dallaire, Evidence, ACVA, 3 April 2014, 1555; BGen Joseph Gollner (Patron, Canadian Peacekeeping Veterans Association), Evidence, ACVA, 3 April 2014, 1815; Thomas MacEachern (as an individual), Evidence, ACVA, 3 April 2014, 1825.

The Minister of Veterans Affairs, the Honourable Julian Fantino, asked the Committee to determine the best way to express it:

I ask you to determine how best to state our commitment to Canadians and their families and what is the best format to do so in the *New Veterans Charter*. It is important that Canadians express through the parliamentary process exactly what is our shared duty, responsibility, mandate, obligation, commitment, or covenant to Canadian veterans.¹⁷

A number of possibilities were put forward. One was to follow the example set by the United Kingdom, where a social covenant brought together the government, local officials, community organizations and the business world.¹⁸ Others suggested simply returning to the initial spirit of non-confrontation that was the basis of all pieces of legislation supporting veterans that had been passed over the years, but that seems to have been lost to bureaucratic or financial considerations:

The legislation is written in a way that you should have access except for contradictory evidence. But the way the adjudicators are trained now is the complete opposite. As I say, you don't need all these medical files.

The veterans legislation was written to be non-adversarial. The process was written to be non-adversarial. It's the only one in Canada and it has to stay that way.¹⁹

For unknown reasons, the NVC does not have the preamble paragraph that was included in most of the previous enactments. In the *Pension Act*, this paragraph was a construction given in section 2:

The provisions of this Act shall be liberally construed and interpreted to the end that the recognized obligation of the people and Government of Canada to provide compensation to those members of the forces who have been disabled or have died as a result of military service, and to their dependants, may be fulfilled. (*Pension Act*, s. 2)

Committee members, with the support of many witnesses,²⁰ agreed that, as a starting point, a similar provision should be included in the NVC, as well as the Veterans Bill of Rights (see Appendix E). Greater action would certainly be welcomed, but this simple addition to the Act would clearly show that the gratitude of the Canadian people toward today's veterans is as profound as the gratitude that has been shown for the past century without interruption.

17 Hon. Julian Fantino, *Evidence*, ACVA, 19 November 2013, 1115.

18 Brad White (Dominion Secretary, Dominion Command, Royal Canadian Legion) *Evidence*, ACVA, 6 March 2014, 1605.

19 Harold Leduc (as an individual), *Evidence*, ACVA, 8 April 2014, 1920.

20 Guy Parent, *Evidence*, ACVA, 28 November 2013, 1100; Gordon Moore, *Evidence*, ACVA, 6 March 2014, 1530; Donald Sorochan (as an individual), *Evidence*, ACVA, 10 December 2013, 1115.

Business of Supply

Third, the honourable member for Toronto—Danforth indicated that the member of the force said that her orders had equal application to every person. You will recall that a real point of consternation for the Procedure and House Affairs Committee, in its report on the visit of President Bush, was the seemingly selective nature of security barriers, with members being held back while some non-members were allowed to pass. That is not the case here.

Last Monday, the government House leader offered a *reductio ad absurdum* about what could eventually happen here. Given the report of the honourable member “walking with purpose” toward the delay, I really have to wonder if it is not that far away.

What is more is that I would observe that he waited until after the debate on the NDP's opposition day motion had concluded before rising on his question of privilege. Given the timing of the incident, the honourable member could have easily given the hour's notice required by Standing Order 48, and made his intervention after routine proceedings.

Before concluding, I simply cannot let the remarks of the House leader of the official opposition pass without any reply. Ever since the Royal Canadian Mounted Police succeeded the Dominion force in 1920, that force has had responsibility for the security of the grounds of Parliament Hill. That was the case last decade, last year and it certainly was last week as well. The NDP House leader had to be reminded of this point last Monday, and I remind him of it again now.

In closing, we do not believe this case warrants your finding of a prima facie case of privilege.

• (1205)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be brief because we have a very important opposition day motion to honour our nation's veterans coming forward. I look forward to hearing the comments from the member for New Westminster—Coquitlam.

What disturbs me, and I raised this with you last Friday, as well as at a previous point of privilege that the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley raised a few days ago, is that it is the inclination of the government to now investigate breaches of privilege that are raised by members of the opposition. That is not its role. It is not its role to do investigations or to decide on whether it constitutes a breach of privilege or not.

Mr. Speaker, that is your role. I have now raised this three times.

Last Friday the member for Northumberland—Quinte West said, “We are going to investigate this”, as if it is the government's purview and role. This was our concern when the government, the Prime Minister's Office, brought in all of the changes without consulting the opposition or you, just rammed it through Parliament. We are seeing an increasing number of breaches of privilege that are very serious, indeed, and it is your role, not the role of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, not the role of any member of the government, to do these investigations it has been doing.

It is up to you, Mr. Speaker, to do that, and we are confident that you will investigate this and find that a prima facie case of breach of privilege occurred.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, just a quick response to my hon. colleague's comments. I wish to make two points.

First, the government does not investigate questions of privilege. We merely want to try to get to the facts. I think all members would agree that the facts in a case of privilege are what really matter here.

You will recall, Mr. Speaker, the member of the official opposition raised a question of privilege at one time, only a few weeks ago. When the facts were finally uncovered, that member withdrew his question of privilege because the facts contained information of which the member was not aware. Once the member became aware of that, the question of privilege was withdrawn. It is important to get the facts straight.

Second, I would again point out, for the third time now, to the opposition House leader, despite his protestations that the force, the RCMP, has always had responsibility for security on the grounds of Parliament Hill. The official opposition House leader seems to infer that the changes made to security protocols in this place and on our grounds have sometimes, somehow, been altered, with respect to who is responsible for security on the Hill. The RCMP has always been responsible, and continues to this day to be responsible, for security on the grounds of Parliament Hill. There is no change. The government did not ram any changes through. I wish that my opposition House leader colleague could finally understand that very basic and simple point.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I am using the word “investigate” because that is the word the member for Northumberland—Quinte West used last Friday and it is actually the term that was used by the government House leader in this House subsequent to the question of privilege that was raised by the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley. It is the government itself that is saying, “We are going to investigate these claims”, as I have stressed.

I will say a final time, Mr. Speaker, it is your purview and your role to investigate any possible breaches of privilege that have occurred in the parliamentary precinct.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The Chair, as always, appreciates the input from hon. members related to points of order or questions of privilege and will return to the House with a ruling, at the appropriate time.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—CARE FOR VETERANS

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP) moved:

Business of Supply

That, in the opinion of the House, a standalone covenant of moral, social, legal, and fiduciary obligation exists between the Canadian people and the government to provide equitable financial compensation and support services to past and active members of the Canadian Armed Forces who have been injured, disabled or have died as a result of military service, and to their dependants, which the government is obligated to fulfil.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Châteauguay—Saint-Constant.

I am pleased to rise in the House to address today's NDP motion calling on the government to formally recognize the existence of a stand-alone covenant of moral, social, legal and fiduciary obligation between the Canadian people and the Government of Canada to provide equitable financial compensation and support services to past and active members of the Canadian Armed Forces who have been injured or disabled or have died as a result of military service and to their dependants.

Canada's New Democrats recognize this social covenant as the foundation of a respectful relationship between our government and our veterans. When the Conservatives deny this sacred obligation, they undermine the relationship with those who have fought for all of us. We call on all parliamentarians to stand up for veterans by supporting this motion.

To begin, I would like to thank my hon. colleague from Sackville—Eastern Shore for the tremendous work he has done, and continues to do, on behalf of Canada's veterans and their families. His tireless efforts championing the needs of our brave men and women are unrivalled and deserve the recognition of all members of the House.

Our country has a long history of standing up for the rights and freedoms that Canadians hold dear. The men and women who join the Canadian Armed Forces know they may be called upon to risk their lives on behalf of Canada to uphold peace, security or human rights here at home and around the world. For those who answer the call, we honour their service and are grateful for their personal sacrifices, including those sacrifices made by their families.

The social covenant with veterans was first openly recognized in our country by Prime Minister Robert Borden in 1917. He said:

The government and the country will consider it their first duty to see that a proper appreciation of your effort and of your courage is brought to the notice of people at home that no man, whether he goes back or whether he remains in Flanders, will have just cause to reproach the government for having broken faith with the men who won and the men who died.

This historic covenant acknowledges that our nation and its government and citizens will support our men and women in their missions, honour their service and look after them and their families when they are injured, they are disabled or they die in the service of our country.

New Democrats recognize the covenant between the Canadian people and the government to provide equitable financial compensation and support services to past and active members of the Canadian Armed Forces who have been disabled or have died as a result of military service and to their dependants, which in turn the government is obligated to fulfill. Yet rather than recognizing the covenant, the Conservative government continues to do damage control rather than live up to its obligation to veterans. It has made piecemeal funding announcements that only apply to a limited

number of permanently injured veterans while so many more remain unserved.

While all parties voted for the new veterans charter in 2005, the Conservatives have implemented it in a way that denies essential pension and support services that veterans deserve.

In response, the veteran's group Equitas is suing the government, claiming this change in benefits violates the covenant that exists between the government and veterans. Shockingly, the government's own lawyers claim no such covenant exists despite modern legislative and constitutional legal precedent otherwise.

Let me quote directly from Equitas' statement of claim against the government, as I believe it lays out the foundation for why formal recognition of this sacred covenant is so important. It says:

When members of the Canadian Forces put on the uniform of their country they make an extraordinary personal commitment to place the welfare of others ahead of their personal interests, to serve Canada before self and to put themselves at risk, as required, in the interests of the nation. A veteran, whether regular or reserve, active or retired, is someone who, at one point in their life, wrote a blank cheque made payable to "the Government of Canada," for an amount of "up to and including their life."

● (1210)

Military experts and veterans' advocates agree with New Democrats that the government must honour its moral, social, legal, and fiduciary obligation to Canada's veterans and their families.

For instance, the Royal Canadian Legion, representing more than 300,000 members, "...firmly believes this country has a solemn obligation owed to our military members" and states that:

...the Veterans Bill of Rights must be included in the New Veterans Charter and in the Pension Act, and that a modified version of the section 2 of the Pension Act be incorporated into the New Veterans Charter, and read as follows:

The provisions of this Act shall be liberally construed and interpreted to the end that the recognized solemn obligation of the people and Government of Canada to provide compensation to those members of the forces who have been disabled or have died as a result of military service, and to their dependants, may be fulfilled.

Further, when asked at the veterans affairs committee whether she believes the government has an obligation to honour this sacred social covenant, Dr. Stéphanie Bélanger, of the Canadian Institute for Military and Veteran Health Research, testified:

There is a social covenant and this is what started the research institute. ... There is lots of evidence of that social covenant existing in every country where the government will task people with a clause of unlimited liability, and because of this clause there is an obligation to serve back.

Tragically, in spite of the compelling case made by veterans' advocates, after nine years of Conservative government, too many veterans and their families still cannot access adequate health care, pensions, and vital supports.

Business of Supply

In Veterans Affairs budgets, \$1.13 billion has been returned to the federal treasury since 2006—over \$1 billion. That is shocking. This money should have gone toward improved benefits and services for veterans and their families. Veterans and their families are dealing with the closure of nine front-line Veterans Affairs offices and a reduction of more than 900 jobs from Veterans Affairs since 2009, amounting to 23% of the department's workforce. That is unacceptable.

Canadian Forces veterans and their families deserve our deepest gratitude and deserve to be taken care of. Injured and disabled veterans should not have to fight the government in court for the compensation and care they rightly deserve. Canadians expect parliamentarians to ensure that our veterans and their families are well cared for from the moment they sign up to the moment they pay the ultimate sacrifice. That care includes a dignified funeral and burial.

If the Conservatives are serious about improving veterans' care, they will stop fighting veterans in court and recognize this historic social covenant to provide comprehensive and compassionate care for the brave men and women who have served on our behalf. They would also not have hastily included the entirety of Bill C-58 in their latest budget implementation act in a cynical move to force the opposition to vote against legislation it would support if it were presented as a stand-alone bill. As well, we would have attempted to improve it on behalf of veterans and their families.

This move underscores the political games the Conservatives are playing with veterans' issues, and it is exactly why today's motion is so important.

It is Canada's New Democrats who have led the way on proposals to improve the programs and services available for veterans and their families. An NDP government would end service pension claw-backs. We would reopen shuttered Veterans Affairs offices. We would widen access to quality home care, long-term care, and mental health care services.

Today we repeat the call for the government to repair our country's relationship with our veterans to one that is based on respect, rather than neglect, by supporting our motion to recognize this sacred social covenant and taking immediate action to enshrine it.

• (1215)

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been around the veterans file for quite a while, certainly as long as the member opposite, and I do not recall this member raising any veterans' issues at all until very recently.

Certainly during the months of hearings in the standing committee on veterans' issues when we started the New Veterans Charter, there was not a single interjection from this member. Reading this motion, it is clear that the member has not been involved and is instead focused on some political effort back in his riding, perhaps because he is running against a veteran.

It was only about seven weeks ago that the minister tabled the support for veterans and families act. This is a very substantive act, with lots of measures or recommendations in line with the committee's recommendations. Here we have the member for New

Westminster—Coquitlam putting forward a non-binding resolution that does not even go as far as the wording in that legislation.

I would ask if this is the type of action that the member's constituents can anticipate, or will he ramp up support for the support for veterans and families act measures when it comes to a vote and maybe ramp down some of the political rhetoric?

• (1220)

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Mr. Speaker, I respect my hon. colleague across the way, but what he just said is absolutely false. It is not true.

I was at committee last year. I have been in committee, and he can check the records. I have asked questions. In fact, last year I asked a question about Daniel Scott, from Surrey, who lost his spleen and has health problems that will plague him for the rest of his life. The government gave Mr. Scott a one-time payment of just \$41,000. I asked the government about that in October of 2014.

With all due respect, I have been following this issue. I am not the critic for veterans affairs. Our critic and deputy critic have been doing an excellent job at committee and in this place. I have contributed where I can and I have done my best to raise these issues in the past. In fact, earlier this year, I met with Jim and Holly Scott, Daniel's parents. I sat down and talked with them and asked what I could do further, and what they want is the wording in this motion that we have finally brought forward.

The hon. member could do the right thing and vote in favour of this motion, which is coming right from Mr. Scott and from many veterans across the country.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is curious that the member from the Conservative Party would pose the question to the member from the NDP about the support for veterans and their families act. I want to tell the House how cunning the Conservatives are.

They talk about this lump sum payment increasing for members of the armed forces so that everyone across Canada thinks that this is a wonderful thing, but in section 44, they clearly define who it would be available to. It would be available to someone who suffers an immediate and severe impairment from a sudden and single incident. That means that people suffering from PTSD, which manifests itself months or years afterward, would not be entitled to this lump sum payment under this new legislation.

I wonder if the member, who gave us such an informed speech, might comment. Does he have any concerns about that?

Business of Supply

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Mr. Speaker, absolutely, I have concerns. Since I began working on this issue, I have found that a number of veterans from across the country have come forward with similar issues, saying that they have to fight the government to prove that they have had a medical problem or to prove what their injury is. Some have to prove every year whether they are disabled or not, and that has caused many veterans additional grief while trying to recover and improve their lives. They have had to fight a new fight with the government all over again.

I think that the government recognizes that it has had a problem. It has shifted ministers to try to deal with this issue and repair the damage.

I just want to add what Brian Forbes said. He is chairman of the National Council of Veteran Associations, and he calls the recent Conservative announcement a "half measure". This is an individual speaking on behalf of a national veterans organizations. He also said:

I have been afraid from the very beginning that these announcements would produce incomplete responses to the [Commons] committee and the recommendations that have been made by veterans' organizations for quite a few years now.

There are many veterans and veterans organizations speaking out about the half measures and the announcements that do not go far enough and showing that veterans are having to fight for the benefits that they so rightly deserve.

• (1225)

[Translation]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from New Westminster—Coquitlam for moving this motion in the House and giving us an opportunity to talk about veterans and the fate the government has in store for them.

That fate is not always an enviable one. As several reports over a period of more than a decade have consistently shown, the new veterans charter contains elements that are unjust. The House adopted the new charter in 2006, but it is very flawed.

Even at that time in the House, we were talking about how the charter had to be adopted so that the government could look after modern veterans properly. The pension system was designed mainly to help veterans of long-ago wars. When the House adopted the new charter, we said that it had to be a living document that would evolve. At the time, we already knew it had some problems and would have to be improved as problems arose.

Unfortunately, the government did not do a very good job because only one measure has been adopted in the House since. The new Minister of Veterans Affairs announced a few measures recently, but they are essentially half measures that were introduced in Bill C-58. I will come back to that a little later.

Two or three years ago, when the House was doing nothing to improve this new charter, veterans in British Columbia had to go to court in order to defend their rights, as other groups have had to do as well. They had to turn to the courts to show Canadians that when soldiers are injured while serving Canada, Canada does not do enough to take care of them. It is scandalous.

In a case backed by Equitas Society, they went to court because the veterans said that the pension system used to be more generous and took better care of injured veterans. They used reports to clearly illustrate that when veterans are injured, they get lump sums and pensions that are not big enough. What is more, if a soldier is injured in combat and does not have a pension, at age 65 he or she ends up with nothing. A number of troubling things like that have come up over the years. Equitas Society ended up going to court to call on the government to take better care of veterans and give them better compensation.

To block this class action suit, the government's lawyers had the audacity to tell the court that the government had no moral, sacred, fiduciary or legal obligation to take care of veterans. That was nonsense. This is the first time since World War I and the days of Sir Robert Borden that anyone has dared to say that the government has no obligation to take care of our injured veterans. Obviously our veterans were outraged.

Two years ago, when the minister and the government were asked repeatedly to refute the arguments of the lawyers in charge of this case, there was radio silence. The minister let the case move forward with that argument, which raised the ire of a number of opposition members and, obviously, of the veterans themselves, because it makes no sense. No government is so indecent that it would deny its sacred obligation to look after veterans.

• (1230)

When soldiers undertake to serve Canada, they also agree to put the nation's interests before their own. They agree to risk their lives. They agree to go into battle without the certainty that the country and Canadians will look after them and their families. That is completely absurd. We strongly condemn this situation, and that is why my colleague moved this motion.

Instead of fighting it out in the courts and opposing this class action suit, the government should have made appropriate improvements to the new veterans charter and at least responded to all the recommendations made by the committee nearly one year ago. These recommendations are not new as they have been raised many times before.

The new minister is only announcing half measures. One of the committee's recommendations was to include the sacred, moral, fiduciary and legal obligation to properly care for veterans. This was ignored by the government, which did not agree to this recommendation even though it said it would accept it.

Business of Supply

Recently, my colleague from Sackville—Eastern Shore asked the minister several times whether the government recognized this obligation. Once again, there was nothing but radio silence. The government refuses to recognize the sacred obligation to properly care for veterans. It is mind-boggling that the government continues to behave this way. We had to move this motion today to force the government to commit to fulfilling this moral obligation. I would like to once again thank my colleague from New Westminster—Coquitlam for moving this important motion because it will allow us to see where the government stands on this issue. Will it once again simply pay lip service to this issue and attack the opposition?

Because of the many questions we have asked in the House, the government accused us of voting against the \$5 billion it claimed to have invested since taking office. The Conservatives said it again not so long ago before they were caught red-handed. They did not invest \$5 billion, since over \$1 billion was returned to the public treasury. What is more, they are firing nearly one-quarter of the front-line staff who take care of our veterans, they are closing regional offices, and they are not consistently using the whole budget even though, as I mentioned, our veterans are not receiving sufficient compensation for injuries. Veterans receive less compensation than other people working in the public and private sectors. It is an ongoing battle for many of them to have their rights recognized, and now they have to deal with a shortage of staff.

The minister acknowledges that the budgets were cut too much in recent years, since the case managers were overburdened and the government is now having to backtrack and hire 100 new people to process veterans' files. There was a ratio of 40 veterans to one case manager, which was far too high. These case managers were not able to provide proper assistance to the veterans, follow up and fill out paperwork. There is often a large number of forms to fill out. The paperwork is never-ending, even if the veteran is an amputee, as we recently saw. An amputee was asked the following year to confirm that he was still an amputee. Veterans are swamped with forms to fill out, and the unspoken objective is to discourage veterans so they will stop filling them out. That makes no sense, when there are not enough case managers to pick up the slack.

• (1235)

The government needs to stop playing politics and stop accusing the opposition of playing politics when the government is the one doing it. The government must support this motion to improve the new veterans charter. We can put an end to the Equitas case by supporting our veterans and giving them appropriate compensation. That is what the government needs to do in this case.

[English]

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member opposite for his remarks. They are very thoughtful. I also want to say that I appreciate working with him on the veterans committee.

Last year, he and I and Conservative members and other NDP members of Parliament presented a report to the then minister of veterans affairs, and this report was unanimous. Members will know how unusual it is in this Parliament to have a unanimous report; it is unheard of. It was unanimous because we wanted to send a message to the government that this was what our veterans need, and we all

agreed including members of the government party. The then veterans minister said that, yes, he agreed with them all.

However, the Conservatives have come back with half measures, as the member just mentioned. These are half measures that do not go all the way, so much so that the veterans ombudsman said that, while the government was narrowing the gap, the announced changes do not encompass all that is needed for veterans.

I wonder if the member could tell the House his concern and the concerns he has heard from veterans about the half measures that the current government is taking to meet their needs.

[Translation]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Guelph for his question and comments. He is one of the newest members of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, and I have to say that he got into the swing of things quickly. It did not take him long to get up to speed on veterans' issues.

His comments on the government's half-measures are right on the money. After the government proposed its measures, many people said that they were just half-measures. They were announced in Bill C-58, which will die on the order paper because all of those measures were subsumed in the budget implementation legislation. We will be opposing that because it includes income splitting and many measures that we find utterly indecent.

I can already hear the government MPs saying that we opposed their measures, but those measures include lump sums that will help just a tiny fraction of veterans. They will not help enough people. For family caregivers, the government announced \$7,000, which is not very much. Those are the only measures—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. The hon. member for New Westminster—Coquitlam.

[English]

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge the efforts of my colleague for his work with veterans not only in his community but across the country.

The member touched on a recent announcement by the government to put Bill C-58 into the budget implementation act. I wonder if he could comment on whether he feels that veterans think this is going far enough, that this is what veterans are looking for, and that this is an appropriate reaction to, for instance, the call to agree that there is a social covenant that exists.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question and his remarks. Yes, these are indeed half measures. The ombudsman said that they are insufficient, and Sean Bruyere said they were merely half measures, as did Jenifer Migneault, Donald Leonardo and Brian Forbes, just to name a few. They all agree that these measures are not enough.

The government has had several years to address all the problems related to the New Veterans Charter, which have been raised in various reports. Instead, it is proposing only a few small measures so that it can claim that is taking care of veterans and that it will give them more support, when that is just not true. When a spouse has to quit her job to take care of a veteran, which happens quite often, they are given \$7,000 a year, and that is a pittance.

As another paltry measure, the government also proposed lump sum payments. According to Veterans Affairs Canada, that will help just a handful of veterans every year, even though many of them are seriously injured and not being paid adequate compensation. The government is still giving them just peanuts. It is obscene.

• (1240)

[English]

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always a distinct honour to rise in the House to speak on any issue for the riding of Durham, which I represent. Since the beginning of this year, January, it has also been my profound honour to rise in the House as Canada's Minister of Veterans Affairs. It is a huge responsibility for anyone to serve those who have served us, veterans and their families. It is a responsibility I take very seriously and I appreciate the Prime Minister's confidence in me.

It is very special to me as well because I joined the Canadian Armed Forces at 18 and spent 12 years serving Canada, the highest form of public service, in a place full of public servants. Like so many veterans I meet, shortly after hanging up my uniform, I tried to help my comrades and support veteran families the best I could, including here in Parliament. Therefore, I want to thank the member for New Westminister—Coquitlam for bringing the broader issue of our obligation to veterans to the floor of the House of Commons today. It is not spoken about enough in this place. It is also good to see that the member is passionate on public policy items beyond shark fin soup. This is a very substantive piece that I am glad he brought forward.

[Translation]

It is always important to discuss the needs of our veterans in the House. I have spoken many times about our men and women in the Canadian Armed Forces and our veterans in the three years that I have been here as a member. All of us, as members, must work to make sure we are meeting the needs of our veterans, today and in the future. That is our duty.

[English]

Almost seven weeks ago, if I recall correctly, I was very proud to bring Bill C-58 to the House for consideration, which has a profound set of modernizations to the new veterans charter. This appears to be the first formal response from the New Democratic Party to this substantive bill. I am a little surprised it has taken it so long to

comment substantively on this, but I am glad it is before us, nonetheless.

Our government inherited the new veterans charter, introduced and brought forward by the last Liberal government and then implemented by our government since 2006. Like any substantive change to the delivery of benefits and programs, it needed updating and there needed to be some gaps fixed. In 2011, our government proceeded to fix one of the larger gaps by creating the permanent impairment allowance supplement to support, in an additional capacity, the most seriously injured; and Bill C-58, the support for veterans and their families act, recognizes that there were also a number of key measures that needed to be addressed.

While all members of the House at that time, in 2005, voted for the new veterans charter—it is a very good approach to wellness, transition, and support for veterans and their families—it did emerge that there were critical gaps noted by several groups, the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, and others, as well as Ombudsman Guy Parent. Bill C-58 is meant to address those gaps.

[Translation]

However, there is a lot of work that remains to be done and some gaps that need to be filled, as identified by the Veterans Ombudsman and many other veterans groups, as well as the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs.

• (1245)

[English]

Many people weighed in on some of the gaps that had arisen and been recognized in the new veterans charter. Therefore, Bill C-58 is our attempt to get the balance right. I publicly thanked the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. As my friend from Guelph recently said, it is rare for an all-party committee of Parliament to agree on some recommendations. I want to thank it for that. It was a brief glimmer of taking the politics out of this file, of which I think we need to do more. I am hoping that, over the course of this debate today, we can go back to that brief glimmer moment and try to address substantively what is in Bill C-58 beyond just the motion about a covenant that the member brought today.

I am going to go through the substantive additions to getting the new veterans charter correct.

First, the most critical item the ombudsman, Guy Parent, identified, not impacting veterans now but was a real issue for the future, was post-65 income for moderately to severely injured service members. About 1,200 members, men and women, are released each year from the Canadian Armed Forces because of a medical issue.

Business of Supply

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. I am sorry to interrupt the minister for a moment. I understand there is some problem with the translation. I do not know if some of the switches are not turned on properly, but if the translation staff could sort that out it would be greatly appreciated.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the job the translators do. I have been trying to improve my French. I appreciate them being patient with me in that progress.

The RISB, the retirement income security benefit, is a benefit on which we worked. Groups, including the standing committee, identified there was a gap at age 65 for a moderately to severely injured veteran. When the earnings loss benefit ended, an income supplement for veterans while they are transitioning or retraining, for many people who were on that to age 65, there would be a sharp decrease in their income. That was an unintended gap, as I have described it, because the earnings loss benefit was meant as an income replacement while someone was doing job training or re-education. Post-65, it is more of a retirement issue. For those, particularly those injured, who did not have pension time from their time serving with the Canadian Armed Forces, something needed to be done so they did not have a steep drop in income.

Therefore, we introduced the retirement income security benefit, which would mean veterans post-65 would be guaranteed a 70% level of income compared to the year previous, at age 64, from Veterans Affairs. That would provide certainty for veterans and their families in their future, in their retirement years. It would give them that security and peace of mind.

Another is that it will have survivability to the spouse beyond 65. The old pension act does not. The exceptional incapacitation allowance did not have such survivability to a surviving spouse beyond age 65. Therefore, it is enhanced and better addresses the gap identified by the ombudsman a couple of years ago and again last year in the standing committee report.

We also introduced the critical injury benefit, which is still mischaracterized radically by people in the House. I urge the hon. members to actually look into the details. This was not meant to be a benefit that applied to all 700,000 veterans in Canada. It was another benefit earmarked for seriously injured veterans. In particular, it would address circumstances where a veteran was critically hurt, in Afghanistan for instance. I know the NDP members know of a case that is similar to this, where someone went through traumatic injury, hospitalizations and major surgeries, but because the disability award, the so-called lump sum, which is not the only thing seriously injured veterans get, by the way, as our friends still like to imply, was assessed once the individual recovered, the disability award was very low.

The critical injury benefit recognizes and compensates pain and suffering related to that trauma and the period of recovery. It is another gap that we have closed.

We also introduced the family caregiver relief benefit. I worked very closely with military veterans families since I left the military, long before I became a member of Parliament. We all know the incredible strain on the family that a serious injury causes. We need to do more, and our government has done more in recent years by expanding counselling for family members affected by post-

traumatic stress or operational stress in the home. More recent, we doubled that. We have allowed families to continue to access the important military family resource centres after their family members leave the military.

The caregiver relief benefit helps the most seriously injured members, who in many cases will have contract care in their home for which Veterans Affairs pay. However, we all know that for the spouse, partner or the adult child, it is a 24/7 job. This allows some respite, with almost \$8,000 a year, tax free, to be used to get additional support. It might be to fly in family members so they can recharge their batteries or help with family life.

Over time, I see us doing even more because the new veterans charter actually has programming for families, unlike the old pension act, which did not really have programming and did not anticipate the wellness needs.

Also, beyond Bill C-58, we have expanded the eligibility for hundreds more veterans in the permanent impairment allowance category. PIA is a lifetime benefit. I have also said that I want to wrap the permanent impairment allowance, its supplement and the retirement income security benefit into a lifetime pension for our most seriously injured. We are moving that way. After years of howling, I do not hear anything from opposition. We are making progress, and I do not hear substantive questions on that front.

• (1250)

I have also ensured that we show the respect our reserves deserve, to ensure that class A and class B reserves have the same access to earnings loss benefit as class C and regular force members do. If they are serving their country, they will get that income replacement and vocational rehabilitation up to \$75,000 per person, if they are injured.

I have also announced in recent weeks that over 100 case managers will be targeted to specific areas of need, with flexibility built into the system, and a combination of at least 100 more benefit adjudicators to get through the backlog, and we do have a backlog. The Auditor General recognized that, and we are acting on this.

Business of Supply

Critically, what is in Bill C-58, which the hon. member who brought forward this motion seems to ignore, is a purpose clause. His motion today about an obligation is in many ways a purpose clause. We have a far superior and advanced clause in C-58, which he apparently either does not know or glossed over. In fact, it reads:

The purpose of this Act is to recognize and fulfill the obligation of the people and Government of Canada to show just and due appreciation to members and veterans for their service to Canada. This obligation includes providing services, assistance and compensation to members and veterans who have been injured or have died as a result of military service and extends to their spouses or common-law partners or survivors and orphans. This Act shall be liberally interpreted so that the recognized obligation may be fulfilled.

Many of my colleagues, and I do consider my colleagues friends on this, talk about sacred obligation, solemn obligation. The obligation is clearly written in Bill C-58. In fact, this motion does not even suggest that it should be liberally construed. In fact, the members have not even followed the guidance the standing committee offered last June. Recommendation 2 from the standing committee said that the provisions of this act should be liberally construed and interpreted to recognize solemn obligation.

I am glad my friend brought this motion today, even though it is flawed and would not go as far as Bill C-58. I am happy to say I will be supporting my friend's motion today. However, I and the government urge him to dig a little deeper to see that the purpose statement, the obligation spelled out in Bill C-58, would go much further and would accord with what the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs recommended last June. His motion would not.

This purpose clause came as a result of looking at what the standing committee produced. It came as a result of talking to veterans groups and veterans organizations. That is what led to the support for veterans and their families act.

At the outset I referred to this. My first day in the House as minister I quoted Sir Robert Borden and the obligation we owed, since Borden's time in 1917, when he first articulated it to our veterans. He termed the line "just and due appreciation that we owe our veterans". In fact, we have used his language to show the connection from 1917 to today of this obligation. I have termed the obligation "a tremendous obligation". Whether we call it "solemn", "sacred", "tremendous", it will be enshrined in Bill C-58, which I hope the hon. member looks into further, and gets behind and supports.

I will support what the NDP has brought to the floor today, but I would ask that it go further and join with us and pass Bill C-58 quickly through the House. I included it in the budget implementation act in case the political gamesmanship continued on this file, because I made a solemn, sacred pledge to our veterans to ensure that these reforms and new benefits would pass before July, and they will.

● (1255)

Important to note is that from Borden's time to today we have an obligation that is living in the new veterans charter. The veterans charter is intended to be living, and Bill C-58 breathes new life and new reforms into the new veterans charter brought forward by the Liberals in 2005, implemented and updated in 2011, and updated again before the House now.

The care and benefits of veterans are not frozen in time to 1917. In fact, the Pension Act that emerged after World War I then led to the creation of Veterans Affairs Canada after World War II. Therefore, Borden's obligation predates my department. That is how historic it is. However, in Borden's time there was very little done. In fact, Sam Sharpe, the MP for Ontario North, who was a member of Borden's caucus, died as a result of PTSD in World War I. He was the only sitting MP re-elected to the House in World War I. Mental injuries from service were not even recognized back then.

We have come a long way. The money we are committing and the programs we are delivering in mental health care shows that we have an evolving commitment to meet our needs for our veterans now and in the future. We are doing more for families, for mental health, for alternate therapies such as equine therapy, assistance dogs and service dogs. Those programs were not delivered in the 1950s. We also have the my VAC account. We are doing home visits. Those were not conducted in Borden's time.

This is a positive obligation on the government to constantly ensure we look to the future to meet the needs, the medical programming and the benefits that veterans, their families and their children need. However, we need to recognize that it is an obligation, but not to be frozen in the way it was delivered in 1917 or 1950. I think all members of the House know what progress we have made in many areas of physical and mental rehabilitation for our veterans and their families. We owe it to them to use the new veterans charter as a living document, to use the obligation that we are talking about today, the obligation enshrined in Bill C-58, which we have specifically said should be liberally construed, owing back to the recommendation of George Hees, a minister in the 1980s, to give veterans the benefit of the doubt.

I want to make that even easier. Let us make it easier to get to yes for the veterans. Let us look at new programming that would get them well, back to work and able to support their family members. That is what is in Bill C-58. Therefore, I truly hope the opposition members, by raising the purpose provision of the bill, the obligation, which is very important, it is a principle, dig a little deeper and look at the benefits, programs and reforms we are rolling out to ensure we meet that obligation. Otherwise, it is just talk and posturing.

Business of Supply

I will constantly remind the opposition critic for the NDP, who I met when I was a young officer at a base in his riding, that he is the only member of the standing committee who voted for the new veterans charter. He has had since 2006 to bring something like this to the House, but it is here six weeks after we introduced, Bill C-58, the most substantive veterans' legislation in a generation. Let us move past the politics, let us get behind Bill C-58, and pass it.

• (1300)

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the minister for his acknowledgement. I also want to acknowledge his service to our country and the Canadian Armed Forces. As well, I would thank him for his acknowledgement of my efforts on the work that I did trying to improve the health of our oceans. Unfortunately, when it came to the vote on the ban on the importation of shark fins to Canada, the members of his party, except for three, did not support that. That is a very unfortunate. If three more had voted with the opposition, we would have had that pass. Unfortunately, that party voted against it.

However, he said that the Conservatives would be supporting this motion, which is very good news. Unfortunately, it is a long time coming.

My hon. colleague from Sackville—Eastern Shore asked the current minister, and previous ministers, many times if the minister felt that there was an acknowledgement or an obligation, and he failed to answer. Therefore, my question for the minister is this. Now that he is acknowledging this, what does that mean in terms of settling with Equitas and the class action lawsuit? Could he comment on that?

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, my colleague has brought the House together today on a single issue but, by that question, has shown that he has not actually done the research.

He is correct that, on my first day as minister, the hon. member for Sackville—Eastern Shore did ask me about the obligation. I quoted Robert Borden, and I called it a tremendous obligation that we owe our veterans. I think that would be in the *Hansard* around January 26. I invite the member to check it out.

Considering that he has brought us all together to debate this today, I would have hoped that he would at least get my first statements on the obligation as Minister of Veterans Affairs correct. We have a tremendous obligation.

The real question that I would ask him to ask his colleague from Sackville—Eastern Shore is why it has taken from 2006 until today for him to bring this before the floor of the House of Commons. As someone who likes to remind the House of how many ministers of veterans affairs he has faced off against, he is the only member of the committee who voted for the new veterans charter. He was on the old SCONDVA committee. There is nobody who knows this file more, and I would suggest that there is nobody who has surfed this file more from time to time.

Our obligation statement in Bill C-58 is closer to the ACVA recommendation that the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore asked of the House last June. I would ask him to check that out, too.

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I remember when I was at staff college and they talked

about what we now know is PTSD in the First World War. They actually called it LMF, or lack of moral fibre. Men could be taken out and shot because they had a lack of moral fibre. We have certainly come a long way since that time. Today, we had better recognize the fact that PTSD is not only an important consequence for some people but actually quite common.

I commend the new Minister of Veterans Affairs for his commitment to our veterans. I think he still has a great deal to prove, but he is certainly a great improvement over his predecessor. However, I did hear him cautioning the NDP about, to use his words, "talk and posturing". We have had nothing but talk and posturing from the Conservative government over the last few years.

I want him to give me a warm feeling that he really understands PTSD and the urgent need to make sure it is addressed by Veterans Affairs for our soldiers coming back from theatres of war.

• (1305)

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my friend for that sort of warm and fuzzy comment alongside a back of the hand. I want to thank him for his service before his time in the House, both on the sea and in the upper air for Canada. It is appreciated.

He is absolutely right in terms of the lack of moral fibre, the nervous shock, and the nervous breakdown. That is what Sam Sharpe, my predecessor in the House 100 years ago, returned from World War I with, as was said in *The Globe and Mail*. He had a nervous breakdown. Sadly, he leapt from the window of the Royal Victoria Hospital before returning to his riding.

We have come a long way. I hosted the Sam Sharpe breakfast last week with Roméo Dallaire, in part to show that we are making progress. We still have a long way to go, but if we look at our investments in recent years, we will have gone from a couple of operational stress injury clinics to 26 by the end of this year. We are looking at alternative means of support, because there is no one-size-fits-all solution for mental health.

We are also looking for support for the family. That was always the intention of the new veterans charter, to do more for families. The member would remember the old military expression from the time we served in the Canadian Armed Forces: if the military wanted us to have a family, it would issue us one. Now, we look at the family as being the core part of the unit for our military families and veterans. That is why the member's colleague from Markham—Unionville launched us on the new veterans charter route, to have more support for the family and the veteran at transition.

We will continue upon this path. I hope he recommends to his caucus and his leader to unanimously support Bill C-58 and our obligation statement in it.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague the minister for his exceptional speech today, as well as for his exceptional work on the veterans affairs file and his leadership there.

He mentioned a number of the benefits that have been increased under the charter and under the initiative of this bill. One of the specific issues that our finance minister addressed in our recent budget was the whole issue of family caregivers. I was pleased to see the extension of EI benefits available to those who are caring for a gravely ill family member from 6 weeks to 26 weeks. That is as an exceptional improvement.

I wonder if our minister could outline some of the specific improvements we made for the family caregiver aspect in terms of caring for our veterans and their families?

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my friend for that question and his passionate work on support for families with ill members in their homes, both young and old, and his work on palliative care. It is admired.

We are very proud of the family caregiver relief benefit that is in Bill C-58, one of the reasons why I urge members of the House to pass it. We would provide more support for the families of our critically injured.

The goal of the new veterans charter, and indeed Veterans Affairs in recent decades, is to provide the supports to keep the veterans in their homes as long as possible. That is part of wellness, to be with their family, to be with the people they know and trust in an environment with which they are comfortable. The veterans independence program all the way through to respite care being done by Veterans Affairs focuses on keeping our ill, injured, or very elderly in their homes. We have other provisions within our budget to apply that to more Canadians, but the family caregiver relief benefit would be a tax-free benefit of almost \$8,000 a year that would give families that extra flexibility.

We are also trying to make it as administratively simple as possible, so that if spouses need to attend a child's graduation and know there is someone in the home, that Veterans Affairs is caring for their loved one, but not before 9 o'clock or not in the evening, and they need to fly in a sister or brother or to hire professional help to fill that gap, we want them to have that so that their wellness as the family caregiver for the support for that veteran is sound, so that they do not have caregiver fatigue, which we know happens.

This is just one of many reforms we have had in recent years, providing more support in the homes of veterans and more support to families dealing with operational stress injuries in the home. This is yet another reason for the opposition to vote in favour of Bill C-58.

• (1310)

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister mentioned veterans who have taken their own lives. As we know, many veterans suffer from PTSD and it is a very unfortunate statistic that there have been more suicides of

Afghanistan vets than were actually killed there. We all recognize the benefits that are needed for our soldiers.

Will the minister support separating Bill C-58 from the budget omnibus bill?

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, certainly the focus of our veterans' mental wellness event last week at the Sam Sharpe breakfast was on telling the stories of some veterans who have become well after struggling with post-traumatic stress.

Roméo Dallaire likes to tell me not to ever say individuals recover, because they learn to cope, learn what programs work for them. Therefore we need to tell more stories, because if anyone is out there struggling with mental injuries from service or with mental health—men and women in uniform for Canada are Canadians, so we will have mental health issues—they need to come forward because there are great new programs in which we have been investing. Members need to get behind that. That is why we have been enhancing these benefits. Bill C-58 is yet another step in that road to enhancing care for our veterans.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today's motion should not be one that has to be brought forward by the opposition. It is a travesty that the current Conservative government has ignored veterans for the length of its nine years in government to the extent that we are here still, in the dying days of a Parliament, asking the Conservatives to finally give our Canadian Forces veterans their due for accepting unlimited liability in the face of various conflicts and wars. In the shadow of the First World War, Sir Robert Borden made a covenant with those Canadians who fought, that their government would support them. On the eve of Vimy Ridge, he told Canadians:

You can go into this action feeling assured of this, and as the head of the government I give you this assurance: That you need not fear that the government and the country will fail to show just appreciation of your service to the country and Empire in what you are about to do and what you have already done.

The government and the country will consider it their first duty to see that a proper appreciation of your effort and of your courage is brought to the notice of people at home that no man, whether he goes back or whether he remains in Flanders, will have just cause to reproach the government for having broken faith with the men who won and the men who died.

Those soldiers accepted unlimited liability on behalf of their country, and the government assured them with the words made true by Colonel John McCrae that their sacrifice would not be in vain. Yet, our current Prime Minister seems to believe that appreciation of service to Canada ends once his camera crew is done with the necessary shots for this week's 24 Seven.

Business of Supply

From its beginning a century ago, 625,825 Canadians fought in the First World War, a total of 61,082 never returned home, and 154,361 were wounded. In the Second World War, more than one million served, 42,042 died, and 54,414 were wounded. In Korea, 27,751 Canadians served, 516 giving the ultimate sacrifice, while 1,072 suffered injuries. Thousands have served as peacekeepers, and more than 40,000 Canadians served in Afghanistan.

Most of us watched as each of the 158 Canadians who died returned home. The thousands who were injured with wounds both visible and invisible are our neighbours, co-workers, friends, and family. These men and women and their families did incredible things that many of us here will never understand, because we have not had to face the rigours of combat or the terror that we or someone we love might not come home.

I have been fortunate, since being asked to take on the role of Liberal veterans critic, to meet with and speak to many men and women who have served this country, and the men, women and children behind them here in Ottawa and across the country. Last week I returned from the Netherlands with the Minister of Veterans Affairs, where I was fortunate to speak with many of the veterans who were there at the liberation 70 years ago.

These Canadians received a warm reception from the Dutch, not just those who had been there during the Second World War but their children and their grandchildren. In Groesbeek, we marched for over an hour side by side. I was at the front with a number of others from the Canadian delegation, the Minister of Veterans Affairs, and the mayor. As we approached the cemetery, I turned around, and there were 3,000 others still behind us, Dutch and Canadian alike, who were in lockstep as we moved in memory of those who had sacrificed to accomplish the liberation of the Netherlands and those throughout Europe and the Pacific who had brought about the end of the war.

I was struck by something when we arrived at a monument as we were walking. There was an inscription on it, which roughly translated from Latin, stated: "We live in the hearts of friends for whom we died". Truly, we who live on are stewards for these brave souls. When another Canadian is willing to lay down his or her life for us, we are stewards for what comes next.

It is not enough that their memory lives on. We are responsible to make sure that not only the legacy of these brave women and men is preserved, but also their standard of living and that their families.

Gathering at these monuments is one thing. Reading the words and being moved by them is one thing. However, acting is a whole other thing.

• (1315)

There is another side of this coin. There are those whose battles with the enemy are done but whose battles with the Conservative Government of Canada are just beginning. Take Jennie Migneault, for instance, another person with whom I have been so fortunate to speak since taking on this role. We were more than prepared to send her husband off to fight on our behalf, but when he came back and his PTSD made life difficult for him and their family, the current government did not provide the necessary resources for them to confront their new reality. In fact, she famously had to pursue the

Minister of Veterans Affairs' predecessor down a hall, and she still could not get a hearing. A government that has figuratively turned its back on the very veterans who served it quite literally rushed past the families left in the wake of its disastrous inaction.

Over the course of the current government, Veterans Affairs Canada has frankly been in crisis. Information published by the department clearly demonstrated that it lacked adequate staffing to deliver the services necessary to meet the needs of veterans and their families. In his message introducing last year's Veterans Affairs Canada report on plans and priorities, the Minister of Veterans Affairs' predecessor himself wrote of the complex and changing needs of our veterans and said that the department's processes must change for veterans so that they can better access benefits and services. That very same report highlighted that the first risk to the department is that "[t]he modernization of [Veteran's Affairs Canada's] service delivery model will not be achieved as expected, and will not meet the needs of Veterans, Canadian Armed Forces members, and their families".

Worryingly, despite this advice, Treasury Board of Canada data on the population of the federal public service showed, as of last year, that 949 full-time equivalents had been cut since 2008, approximately 25% of the Veterans Affairs Canada workforce. All that is to say that last fall, Veterans Affairs Canada was at its lowest staffing level since 2000. The Conservatives may have recently tried to replace 100 positions, but that is only a tiny fraction of the 900 front-line staff they cut, and even then, many of them are just part-time. The Conservatives try to say that they are putting resources into new services, but there is nothing the current government has done to back that up. Closing the gap is beyond them.

On April 23 of this year, the Veterans Ombudsman observed at committee that while these announcements might contribute to closing the gap, "The announced changes do not encompass all that is needed for veterans".

It is programs like disability and death compensation and the health-care program that have suffered the most significant cuts under the current government. It is the current government that has squandered \$1.13 billion in funding for the department since 2006. It is the current government that could not find a dime for veterans, because those billions of dollars it let lapse, that it clawed back, went to falsely balancing its books in this election year. There are veterans coming forward and applying for programs that are understaffed and underfunded, while the Conservatives seem a little too busy getting the camera angle right.

A benefit delayed is a benefit denied, and as long as the Conservative government continues, it appears that the government is in the business of denying benefits.

Business of Supply

In his report this fall, the Auditor General illustrated that one veteran in five is forced to wait up to eight months for mental health assistance, and Veterans Affairs Canada is largely unconcerned with "...how well veterans are being served and whether programs are making a difference in their lives". The inability to provide adequate mental health services to these veterans is a greater threat to past and present Canadian Forces members than any enemies we have faced recently in the theatre of battle. In the same period of time we were engaged in Afghanistan, 160 died by suicide. That is just the ones we know about. As long as the current government continues to blindly accept incomplete data, which is skewed by leaving so many people out of the count, we will never know the true impact.

• (1320)

The faces at the helm of Veterans Affairs Canada may have recently changed, but the song remains the same. These men and women deserve more than a PR campaign to convince them that everything is going to change.

We owe a great deal to the brave men and women of the Canadian Forces who are willing to accept unlimited liability and to sacrifice everything, including their lives. We owe a great deal to their families who are left behind to pick up the pieces and continue their lives without a father, mother, brother, sister, son, or daughter.

The government is not delivering, and it is in large part because it does not believe it has more than a political duty to pay lip service to those very serious words of prime minister Sir Robert Borden, whom I quoted earlier. Until it is truly willing to fully embrace that duty to veterans, that sacred covenant, nothing it does can be taken in good faith.

For our part, the Liberal Party of Canada has clearly indicated its support for a social covenant with Canadian veterans. At our last policy convention, Liberal members passed a resolution confirming its commitment to the successive generations of Canadians who have served their country honourably as members of the Canadian Armed Forces. They know that service in the Canadian Armed Forces requires those men and women to make a personal and grave commitment to put their lives on the line on behalf of their fellow citizens and that they may be called upon to risk their lives anywhere in the world that we in Canada deem it appropriate they do so.

Liberals know that military service is a burden borne not only by the service member but by their families, as evidenced by the countless sacrifices made to ensure the success of Canadian Armed Forces missions. The only sacrifice the Conservative government seems to know when it comes to service missions is having to take down its propaganda videos once they have endangered the safety and security of our special operators, as we saw in the past weeks.

The Conservative government's approach to veterans' policy demonstrates an utter lack of regard for our country's obligation to those who serve on our behalf in the military. Liberals have resolved that a future Liberal government would uphold the principle of this social covenant in its defence of veterans policies and would present a government that would finally live up to Canada's sacred obligation to care for veterans and their families throughout their lives.

A little over a year ago, I travelled to France and Belgium with a delegation to commemorate the 97th anniversary of the battle at Vimy Ridge. As I stood before the monument on Vimy Ridge, overpowered by its immensity as a testament to Canada's sacrifice in the First World War, the enormity of the impact of war was made so clear. Before us stood a memorial to a conflict colossal in its overwhelming effect on the lives of all those who fought and died or who returned and lived and tried to carry on in its wake. The contrast of something so beautiful serving as a reminder of the horror and cost of war was stark.

I have told this story before, but I feel it is important. It is foundational for me and should be for all of us. Early one morning, as the trip drew to a close, I stood alone at Essex Farm Cemetery, on the outskirts of Ypres, where Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae, a Guelph native, performed his work as a field surgeon in the Canadian artillery. It was here that McCrae's friend and student, Lieutenant Alexis Helmer, died from wounds sustained in battle. It was here that he composed *In Flanders Fields*, a poem we all know, a poem that just celebrated its 100th anniversary. I had heard the words hundreds of times, worn the poppy every Remembrance Day, and now stood between those crosses.

Suddenly I was aware of a small group of Canadian high school students on a similar pilgrimage on the remembrance trails of the First World War. They sat quietly pondering the carnage upon the surrounding fields 100 years earlier and the transformation of those events into words written by McCrae. I listened as they recited the poem, each of three stanzas recited one by one. It was as if I was hearing it for the very first time. Everything was still as the last student recited:

If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.

In that single moment, I understood the fundamental truth of our sacred covenant to our veterans. Our solemn obligation cries out that we must not break faith with those who died. Therein lies our sacred obligation: that our commitment to their well-being, their families, and all who return home to tell their stories is bound forever by the sacrifice of those who lived and died on those fields and elsewhere.

• (1325)

We just celebrated the centenary of that poem, yet we seem no further ahead over the last decade than we were when it started. We have had another war to end all wars, cold wars, and other very hot conflicts around the world.

Canada has taken on terrorism, yet somehow it is beyond the current Conservative government's grasp to finally and formally recognize that there exists a stand-alone covenant, including, as the motion says, our moral, social, legal, and fiduciary obligation to the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces and their families.

Business of Supply

The current Conservative government could start right now. It could start by adjusting the new veterans charter disability benefits to encompass post-traumatic stress disorder. It could ensure that the amount of money received is fair and not leave veterans feeling that they could have been compensated better if they had been hurt on a job site or injured in a car accident in Canada rather than off somewhere else serving and protecting Canada and Canadians' freedom.

It could start by no longer spending millions of taxpayer dollars fighting veterans seeking benefits in court and instead spend some of those millions bolstering programs that veterans are literally begging for.

It could use some of those millions to rehire any of the full-time front-line personnel it has let go or to reopen the Veterans Affairs centres in communities like Brandon, Manitoba, and Sydney, in Cape Breton.

It could start by acknowledging that the social covenant is, in fact, a sacred obligation and not just political rhetoric.

Every year in November, we see the incredible outpouring of love Canadians have for our friends and families who have served this country. Remembrance Day across the country is observed at schools, at cenotaphs, and in halls. We stand and pause and promise "never again" and say "Lest we forget".

However, it is not enough anymore. So long as veterans have to fight their government for benefits, we are forgetting. So long as veterans have to convince officials that their legs, which they lost fighting for Canada, have not grown back, we are forgetting. So long as the wife of a veteran has to chase the minister responsible for her husband's care down the hall in Parliament, we are forgetting. We are forgetting so long as we do not finally enshrine our social covenant with veterans and pay it more than lip service.

It is our duty to do more than support the motion. We need to implement it. I know that a Liberal government will but certainly hope we do not have to wait until the fall, for our veterans' sakes.

[Translation]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

My colleague is also a member of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. In May 2014, almost a year ago, following a study of the new veterans charter, we submitted a unanimous report on our observations and on ways to improve the charter.

To arrive at this unanimous report that all parties supported, I must admit that we watered down some of our positions to reach a joint agreement with the government, in order to present it to the minister and ask him to make the necessary changes to the new veterans charter.

Recent announcements include a very small minority of the things that were in the report, so much so, that I feel like we were swindled. By coming up with a unanimous report, we were under the impression that the government had no choice but to apply all these recommendations, which it did not.

What are my colleague's comments about the recommendations made with regard to the introduction of Bill C-58?

• (1330)

[English]

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for his question. I want to thank him more for his work on the committee.

He is quite right. Last year, in May, the committee issued a unanimous report. We did put a little water in our wine, as they say, because we wanted to send a message to the government. We wanted to send a message not just to the minister but through the minister to the Prime Minister that veterans' needs are not being met. This has come out in the Auditor General's report. It has come out in Veterans Affairs Canada's own reports that they are not being met.

We met with the Minister of Veterans Affairs' predecessor back then, and he agreed with all those recommendations. Do members remember that? He agreed with them all, but his hands were tied, and the current minister's hands are tied, because as hard as he is working, and I have to acknowledge that he is working hard, he cannot get to where we need to go on those recommendations, because he has a Prime Minister who wants more, this year, to balance the budget on the backs of our veterans. He refuses to close the gap completely, which would have been closed had we fully embraced those recommendations.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my friend for his speech. Certainly there were eloquent and very respectable parts of the speech and his talk about Vimy was very engaging. Some of the political stunts in it were a little unfortunate because it detracted from some otherwise powerful statements.

The member focused a few times on closing the gap. What caused this gap? I know that the member only joined this place in 2008, so I would suggest as veterans critic for the third party that he should speak to the Liberal member for Markham—Unionville. That member and the Liberal party created the new veterans charter. All members of the House at the time voted for it. The member was not there, nor was I, but the gaps we are talking about closing are Liberal gaps. He should do some research with the member for Markham—Unionville.

That said, let us take the politics out and say what we have addressed from the standing committee's report. A vast majority of the moves have been made to fix those gaps that all parties agreed on.

Business of Supply

Today, the NDP motion does not even go as far as recommendation 2 in that ACVA report. Our obligation statement in Bill C-58 gets it done. Will the member support Bill C-58?

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Mr. Speaker, until now I was not very disappointed in the minister's approach to the file, but he now suddenly has disappointed me. I will tell the House why.

The new veterans charter was brought in in 2005 and the then Liberal government never had an opportunity to deal with it because we lost the election. It was the Conservative government that was given the mandate to implement it. The new veterans charter in and of itself is a living, breathing document that would have met the needs of our veterans. Why did it not? Because the Veterans Ombudsman said so. He said it needed to be adequately funded in total. Accessibility to the programs had to be available to our veterans and the amounts of money they individually received had to be available by not making these thresholds of entitlement to the benefits so high.

What did the government do with the charter? It used it not to the benefit of veterans, but to the benefit of the Conservative government in trying to balance its books. Had it properly implemented it, our veterans would be better off today. Instead, we have a Prime Minister who rather than adequately funding the new veterans charter has chosen, for instance, to give \$2 billion to 14% of Canada's most wealthy through income splitting.

I said in my speech what Sir Robert Borden said. It is our first duty, not our second duty, not our third duty, our first duty to meet the needs of our veterans over and above the wealthy and those who will benefit from all the other programs the Conservatives have presented to make the wealthy wealthier.

• (1335)

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Guelph knows the degree of respect I hold for him not just on veterans issues, but on all issues that he brings to the floor. Certainly when it comes to working on the veterans files and his role as critic, he does an exceptional job.

It was not talked about during his speech, but I would like him to place on the record that veterans and all Canadians were amazed at the amount of money that had lapsed over the period of time since the Conservative government came to power. He did address the fact that there were 900 frontline workers in Veterans Affairs who were let go early on in the tenure of the government. The Conservatives have put 100 people back to work, but we know there was \$1.5 billion that had lapsed over that period of time.

I would appreciate his insights on this. Does he think that because there were no bodies in Veterans Affairs to deliver on the programs, to make sure that veterans were being looked after and had access to those very important programs, because of the cuts that were made in personnel, would that account for the fact that those monies that should have been getting out to veterans, that amount of money has lapsed over that number of years? I would like his insight on that.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Mr. Speaker, similarly, I want to thank and compliment the member for Cape Breton—Canso for his remarks and his hard work on this file. He has never once stopped informing me of what is happening to veterans in his riding.

He talks about the \$1.13 billion that lapsed. It was essentially money available that could have been spent on veterans, but the government said no, let us bring back into the treasury because we can maybe use it to pay down our debt. What did it do? It closed nine veterans offices, one of them in the member's riding—

Mr. Bryan Hayes: We opened 600.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Mr. Speaker, I am hearing from the other side that they opened 600. They did not open 600. They just pushed those veterans to Service Canada offices elsewhere. Do members know where they have to go if they are in Cape Breton? They have to leave the island. If they are on Prince Edward Island, they have to leave the island. If they are in Brandon, they have to drive hours to Winnipeg. This is because when they get to a Service Canada office, the people are not adequately trained to deal with veterans. Those people to whom we have talked will admit that they are not adequately trained.

In the face of all of that, we had report after report, including two Auditor General reports, not one, in 2012 and last year, both warning that these cuts are severely impacting our veterans. Their own department's reports said that cuts to staffing, which the member spoke of, are severely, negatively impacting access to services for our veterans.

We wonder why the Conservatives have an outbreak of anything but Conservative rising from what was their base. That is our veterans, who will no longer vote for them, because they have been abandoned. Our veterans have been abandoned by the Conservative government.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksasing.

Today we are debating a very important opposition motion on our obligation to our veterans and soldiers. It is a matter of resolving this issue once and for all. We are giving every member of this House the opportunity to say loud and clear during the vote that they believe that the government, Canada, and the people they represent have an obligation to soldiers and veterans, not only a legal obligation, but a moral, social and fiduciary one as well.

Certain people have been trying to avoid this issue for far too long. It is now time to give everyone the chance to take a clear stand on this issue. Taking care of our veterans should not be a partisan issue. It should be national issue. It involves our commitment as a nation to the people who agreed to risk their health and their lives to serve their country and stand up for Canadian values.

Business of Supply

When soldiers agree to go to war, their decision involves a lot more than just lacing up their boots and picking up their guns. By going to war, they are giving the government carte blanche without knowing what is going to happen to them. They have an idea of what the mission entails and what the dangers will be, but they never really know what will actually happen. They may never come back. They may lose a piece of themselves that they can never get back. They may be imprisoned, mistreated or tortured. They could lose limbs.

When soldiers agree to go to war, they also accept that they will be missing out on part of their lives here. They may be leaving behind a two-year old child. When they come back six months later, they will have missed out on events in that child's life. There are new technologies today that make communication easier, but these soldiers are still away for a certain period of time and they feel bad about it.

Those who agree to serve their country and defend its flag make enormous sacrifices. That is why, in return, Canadians, and particularly members of Parliament, need to recognize our obligation to them.

Furthermore, soldiers are not paid a millionaire's salary to go to war. They do this work even though they do not earn a fortune because they sincerely believe that it is more important to defend our country's values and freedom. They believe that the government is capable of making good decisions for them with regard to the commitments we make.

● (1340)

[English]

I would like to quote Karl Marlantes, ex-U.S. marine, who said:

When the peace treaty is signed, the war isn't over for the veterans, or the family. It's just starting.

Even though this marine is from the U.S., many Canadian veterans have expressed that feeling to me in the past.

[Translation]

In Canada, we train our soldiers to fight and to be the best soldiers. We have excellent soldiers who have a very good reputation and who can handle themselves in extreme situations. They are taught to use their bodies and weapons. However, they are not taught to fight endless battles with red tape, officials and the courts.

This makes no sense. We have people who were taught all their lives to fight, to keep trying and to never give up. However, we try to discourage them and drive them crazy with red tape, legal challenges and endless files. It is just incredible and mind-boggling that over the years a veteran can accumulate a file consisting of three binders that are two inches thick each. People get tired of fighting the system. In combat, an action has an immediate reaction and things happen simultaneously. In contrast, this situation just drags on. It often takes years before a case is settled. Our country has to be able to recognize that we have a moral obligation towards these people, the obligation to not treat them in this way and the obligation to ensure that their case is promptly and properly dealt with. It is unacceptable that peoples' lives are put on hold for many years while a decision is made about whether or not injuries will be recognized, when

everyone knows full well that the injuries were sustained in combat. That is not an acceptable way to treat people.

When a soldier goes into combat, he relies on his brothers in arms and has full trust in them. He knows that if something happens they will be there to pick him up, to rescue him and to get him out of there. Unfortunately, many of them have the same perception of their country when they are in combat. They see Canada as a brother in arms that will be there for them if something serious happens and that it will take care of them and their families. They see Canada as an ally and a brother in arms. However, when they return they realize that that is not at all the case and that the country they trusted is abandoning them and making them wait. When someone needs help, a real friend or a real brother in arms is there right away to help. They are there within a few hours to help when things are not going well and when you need someone to talk to. There is an immediate response. Unfortunately, in the cases we are talking about, people wait far too long with no response. They are left on their own and they are bounced back and forth. This is not an acceptable way to treat people.

We also cannot forget the sacrifice made by the spouses, partners and children of members of our military. Behind every soldier is someone who stays at home, takes care of the children, makes sacrifices and experiences unbelievable amounts of stress. They live in fear of not knowing what is going on and have to accept, for example, when their spouse says he has to leave for a period of time, that he cannot really say where or what will happen, but that he loves them very much and hopes he will come back. Imagine the stress. Behind these men there are also women. We also have some form of social obligation to these women and these men who stay at home while their military spouses go on mission. We also have a moral obligation to these families who make sacrifices every day to support people who choose to serve their country. We can never forget that.

In closing, I would remind the House that men and women in uniform often hear ministers, MPs and others giving speeches on military bases. I doubt that any soldier has ever refused to listen to a speech that an MP or minister has given to soldiers. Maybe things should go both ways. When families and military personnel try to talk to politicians, they should not react by fleeing, like the former veterans affairs minister, the member for Vaughan. On the contrary, by accepting this moral obligation, we also agree to be ready to listen to what they have to say about how we can do a better job of helping them. That is the best way to do things. It is now up to all members of the House to honour that moral obligation.

● (1345)

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech. She was very passionate, and her speech was so interesting. She did not mention this, but I know that she was once a member of the Canadian Armed Forces. I would like to talk more about the personal side of this debate on the NDP motion.

Can the member talk about her experience in the Canadian Armed Forces and the amazing work these men and women in uniform do? What does she think of the Conservative government's lack of interest in helping these men and women in uniform, and what might be the consequences for her former armed forces colleagues?

Business of Supply

• (1350)

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Speaker, all I can say is that over the years, I had the good fortune—if you can call it that—to have colleagues who talked about some of the experiences they had when they were sent on combat missions. Those individuals went through some difficult times, and some of their stories are hard to listen to. I have friends who have told me they remember the water in the river running completely red in Rwanda, because of all the bodies floating in it. When people are left with those kinds of images stuck in their heads, obviously the government and the country have a moral obligation toward them to recognize what they have been through and make sure that we are always behind them and supporting them. We also need to make sure that their families can count on us during the most difficult times to help these individuals heal and ease the suffering from the effects of their experiences.

[English]

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the House knows that since 2006 the current government has clawed back \$1.13 billion that could have been spent on programs. The government claims that it met its obligations, met the thresholds, and paid veterans what they were entitled to, yet in the face of that we have thousands of veterans begging for better payments and better services for themselves and their families.

The government also closed nine veterans offices from Corner Brook in Newfoundland and Labrador to Prince George, British Columbia. It let 949 front-line staff go. The Conservatives were warned by their own that this would have a negative effect on Veterans Affairs and a worse negative effect on the veterans those offices were to serve. The Auditor General even recited that point in his report.

I wonder if the member can comment on any concerns she might have and on the effectiveness of the Conservatives' response to the many claims by veterans for better benefits for themselves and their families.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Speaker, most of the people who have brought me their files—three or four binders, two inches thick—started their fight under a Liberal government. They have seen two or three successive prime ministers, and their files are still active under the Conservative government.

At the beginning of my speech, I said that taking care of veterans should not be a partisan issue, but a national issue. I do not want to start debating whether the Liberals or the Conservatives did the most damage to veterans. What I can say is that they did not do enough, that is for sure. Here we are in 2015 and we are still asking for everyone to stand up and recognize that we have a moral and social obligation to veterans. That is what is important, not which of the two parties was worse. Currently, we are seeing Liberal and Conservative MPs pointing the finger at each other, instead of making a sincere and deep commitment to understanding what veterans and soldiers are going through every day.

[English]

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to join this important debate today and to stand up for the veterans of our country who were there

for Canada when we needed them and deserve our being there for them once they have finished serving.

I want to congratulate my colleague, the member for New Westminster—Coquitlam, for bringing this motion to the House today, and I would be remiss if I did not mention the vast body of work undertaken by the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore, who has been relentless with his work on behalf of the veterans of this country.

Surely most Canadians would agree with New Democrats when we say that we value the work and sacrifice of all Canadian Forces and RCMP veterans, along with those currently serving, in every aspect of the difficult jobs they have undertaken on our behalf. Whether they serve at home or in war or in peacekeeping missions, these individuals distinguish themselves with professionalism and honour at every turn. Sadly, their professionalism and honour have not been reflected in the actions of the government, which has set out to nickel-and-dime veterans while somehow convincing itself that it is being nothing but supportive.

The truth is that under the Conservatives' watch, we have witnessed injured and disabled veterans having to fight their own government in court for the compensation and care they deserve. It has become so bad that during the last few weeks that Parliament will sit, the Conservatives are playing politics with veterans in an attempt to woo back some voters in October. To do this, they have cynically included provisions to assist veterans in the latest omnibus budget bill. It is nothing but an attempt to force opposition parties who support those measures to vote against them when they oppose the larger reckless measures in this massive bill.

I want to make it clear right now that if the Conservatives truly stood behind veterans, they would hive off that section of the budget and bring it for debate as a stand-alone item. I am convinced that if they were to do that, our veterans would be able to witness members of the entire House working together on their behalf. However, the Conservatives do not care about anything more than their political fortunes and are therefore planning to use veterans as a wedge in the October election. In that respect, they are showing even more contempt for our veterans than they have so far, which is really and truly saying something.

In reality, the Conservatives are not serious about making the circumstances of veterans any better. If they were serious about improving the care that our veterans actually receive, they would stop fighting veterans in court and recognize the historic covenant that is the veterans charter.

What our veterans deserve is a government that is willing to work with them and respect them, a government that wants to hear their stories and find ways to repair the damage that has been done. Instead, veterans are getting some last-minute attention from a government that up until now has made it seem as if the country they served so proudly has abandoned them.

*Business of Supply***GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

[English]

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. 1132 and 1133 could be made orders for returns, these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 1132—**Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau:**

With regard to funding allocated to the constituency of Berthier—Maskinongé: how much funding has the government allocated from fiscal year 2008-2009 to 2014-2015, broken down by (i) year, (ii) department or agency, (iii) initiative and amount?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 1133—**Ms. Joyce Murray:**

With regard to Tax-Free Savings Accounts (TFSAs) for each of the years 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, and, if available, 2013: broken down by income groups of \$0-\$20,000, \$20,000-\$40,000, \$40,000-\$60,000, \$60,000-\$80,000, \$80,000-\$100,000, \$100,000-\$120,000, \$120,000-\$160,000, \$160,000-\$200,000 and over \$200,000, (a) what is the (i) total number of TFSA holders, (ii) total number of TFSAs, (iii) average number of TFSAs per holder, (iv) total number of TFSA holders who contributed to a TFSA, (v) total number of TFSA holders who did not contribute to a TFSA, (vi) total number of TFSA holders who maximized contributions, (vii) total number of TFSA holders with withdrawals from a TFSA, (viii) total number of open TFSAs with no transactions during the year, (ix) total number of TFSAs opened during the year, (x) total number of TFSAs closed during the year, (xi) total number of TFSAs with deceased holders; and (b) what is the (i) total dollar value of contributions, (ii) number of contributions (transactions), (iii) average number of TFSA contributions (per individual), (iv) average dollar amount of TFSA contributions (per individual), (v) total dollar value of withdrawals, (vi) number of withdrawals (transactions), (vii) average number of TFSA withdrawals (per individual), (viii) average dollar amount of TFSA withdrawals (per individual), (ix) average unused TFSA contribution room, (x) total fair market value, and average fair market value (per individual)?

(Return tabled)

[English]

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wish to inform the House that Wednesday, May 13, shall be the day appointed, pursuant to Standing Order 81(4)(a), for the consideration of all votes in the main estimates for 2015-16 related to Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—CARE FOR VETERANS

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing has four minutes left to conclude her speech.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives know in their heart of hearts that they have made life more difficult for veterans and hope that their cynical budget shell game will fool enough people into believing them, but it is too late.

They are worried because we have the courage of our convictions and a plan to end service pension clawbacks, reopen shuttered Veterans Affairs offices, and widen access to quality home care, long-term care, and mental health care services. Most of all, they are worried that veterans have actually been paying attention.

The government should remain worried, because veterans will not see through the ridiculous budget game the current government is playing. They know, more than anyone else, that this is an eleventh-hour attempt to drive a wedge and nothing more. What the government ought to do is back up its support of the veterans charter that it voted in favour of in 2005 and implement it as it was intended.

Veterans remember that all parties voted for the new veterans charter. They also know that after being elected a year later, the Conservatives implemented it in a way that denies the essential pension and support services that veterans deserve. How would most Canadians react if they were to sit down with veterans and hear about the way the Conservatives have been nickel-and-diming them and fighting them in the courts? I am sure they would be outraged.

Most people understand that the men and women who join the Canadian Forces do so with the knowledge they could be called upon to risk their lives on behalf of Canada and might be called upon to put themselves in harm's way in order to uphold peace, security, or human rights here at home and around the world. Most people also understand that in return for these sacrifices and the way these individuals accepted the condition of unlimited liability, we as a country have certain responsibilities. That is how we honour their service and show our gratitude for their personal sacrifices, including the sacrifices made by their families.

This is at the heart of the social covenant that was first established by Prime Minister Robert Borden in 1917. He had this to say about the country's responsibility to our soldiers:

The government and the country will consider it their first duty to see that a proper appreciation of your effort and of your courage is brought to the notice of people at home that no man, whether he goes back or whether he remains in Flanders, will have just cause to reproach the government for having broken faith with the men who won and the men who died.

Privilege

That has been the working model ever since: a social covenant that acknowledges that our nation, its government, and its citizens will support these men and women in their missions, honour their service, and look after them and their families if they are injured or die in the service of their country.

Put another way, it is the arrangement that most Canadians would recognize as being fair and straightforward, the arrangement they might also assume is the way things are being done today because it is the way things were done many years ago.

If the government will not recognize these responsibilities, veterans know they can count on New Democrats to do so, and Canadians can know that too. New Democrats will recognize this covenant between the Canadian people and the government to provide equitable financial compensation and support services to past and active members of the Canadian Armed Forces who have been disabled or have died as a result of military service, as well as to their dependents. Canadians who are wondering how it got to the point that record numbers of veterans are turning to food banks or wondering why the veterans' group Equitas is forced to fight for their due through the courts can count on New Democrats to have our veterans' backs and to fight for them, first and foremost and every time, and not just when it is politically expedient.

• (1520)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to focus on the issue of the veterans' offices that were closed not that long ago.

I would argue that governance is about establishing priorities. The removal and closure of veterans offices was at a great cost. In my home province of Manitoba, the Brandon service office was closed down, and that had a significant impact on our vets, yet that year, as we see this year, the government continued to waste money. The most obvious waste of tax dollars is likely in the area of partisan political advertising. The government spent almost three-quarters of a billion dollars in advertising, and in promoting this budget alone, it will spend \$14 million or \$15 million in highly biased and partisan advertising.

I am wondering if the member might want to provide some comment on the government's priorities.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Speaker, let us be very clear. Services to veterans have been cut back through the Liberals as well, so it is very problematic.

I did talk about veterans offices, but I think I can wrap it up with this. This is a comment from Colin Pick, War Pensioners of Canada, Manitoulin-North Shore Branch:

The public are not aware that veterans are still greatly in need. The government portrays to the public that all is well with the vets.

However, that is not the case. Access to services for veterans is actually a problem. I have another quote that I hope to share with the House, because it is quite an important quote, but I will wait until the next question.

Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the speech of the hon. member with interest. I would like to ask her how she accounts for the fact that, through Service Canada offices now, there are 600 more points of contact for veterans than

there were before, especially in small towns where some of the older vets in particular would have to travel to larger centres to access these services.

Would she explain why 600 more points of access is not a good thing for veterans?

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Speaker, the problem is that these people are not the ones who have been on the front line. We need people who have actually lived it, who understand the issue, who are able to provide services. Some people have gone there and have basically been told that they do not know anything about how to help them.

This quote was sent to me by one of my constituents, Ed Pigeau. He talks about a young man who just took his life:

"Just to let you know Ed, and thanks for passing information along to try to help him, however, he has just been found dead in his apartment.....couldn't feel worse....." (name withheld)

I am filled with regret and remorse. Another Afghanistan veteran has committed suicide. Another soul lost.

So my question to you and your fellow colleagues is this: How many have to die before something is done. Do you and your colleagues not feel the loss, do you not understand the sacrifice they have made and that you and I and all our colleagues, have failed this soldier at his time of greatest need.

When you dine tonight and every night does your hand shake when you raise each fork to your lips? Do you sleep peacefully? Do you rise in the morning looking forward to another day?

How lucky are we to live our lives in peace, pursuing our goals, praying to our gods, all in the peace and comfort of our homes....

They did not hesitate nor did they falter when we needed them.

Do something now, before they are all gone.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

QUESTION ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise this afternoon on a question of privilege with respect to the response that was sent to my office to Question No. 1129, the order paper question I had submitted on the notice paper on March 23.

This question is of great importance because it concerns my ability to undertake my work as a parliamentarian on behalf of my constituents, but also because it falls directly within my critic portfolio as the ethics, accountability, and transparency critic for the official opposition, because these are questions of legitimate government practice.

At issue is the refusal of the government to answer a straightforward order paper question, which was sent to me, very strikingly, by the member for Oak Ridges—Markham, who claimed that it was not government policy to answer any questions that had anything to do with court proceedings.

As will be shown, this answer is not credible and raises deep concerns because the specific questions that are asked, as shall be shown, are not subject to any court investigation right now and, in fact, fall within the purview of parliamentarians in the House of Commons.

The decision to refuse to answer an order paper question is about the potential interference in my ability to do my work as a parliamentarian.

Although Members...customarily observe the convention during Question Period, the Speaker has ruled out of order questions concerning criminal cases, noting that the Chair has a duty to balance the legitimate right of the House with the rights and interests of an ordinary citizen undergoing a trial.

That states quite clearly and strongly that the convention would apply here.

I might also further go on to the question of the response, if he does not accept the *sub judice* convention, and I certainly think that is sufficient, and that is the question about the Speaker even reviewing such responses.

At page 522, O'Brien and Bosc says the following:

There are no provisions in the rules for the Speaker to review government responses to questions. Nonetheless, on several occasions, Members have raised questions of privilege in the House regarding the accuracy of information contained in responses to written questions; in none of these cases was the matter found to be of a *prima facie* breach of privilege.

It goes on also to say:

The Speaker has ruled that it is not the role of the Chair to determine whether or not the contents of documents tabled in the House are accurate nor to "assess the likelihood of an Hon. Member knowing whether the facts contained in a document are correct".

Furthermore, to heighten the explanation of that, on the role of the Speaker in reviewing the adequacy of answers, whether it be in question period or on order paper questions, at footnote 221, it indicates:

The Speaker has also suggested that if the Member is not satisfied with the response, the Member could resubmit the question for placement on the Order Paper...or ask that the question be transferred to debate under the Adjournment Proceedings...

Therefore, there are other avenues available to the hon. member. However, I would submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that we do not need to deal with that second set of questions because, very directly, the *sub judice* convention does apply. I may wish to come back for more submissions later.

• (1540)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to respond to both the government House leader and also to the very cogent arguments raised by the member for Timmins—James Bay.

First, there is no doubt that the question put forward, in what has become the infamous Question No. 1129 with respect to each Senate appointment made by the Prime Minister, is an issue of public policy. It states:

(a) did the government verify that each individual being appointed to the senate met their constitutional residency requirement; (b) how did the government verify that each individual met their constitutional residency requirement; and (c) what are the details verifying that each individual met their constitutional residency requirement?

This is something to which the government has to respond. For the government to try to pretend that any issue touched by the Duffy trial is something that it no longer has to answer as a matter of general public policy is simply absurd. It is an absurd conclusion for the government House leader to stand and say that the government can now define anything it wants as something that remotely or faintly may touch on some trial, that somehow it means the government is simply exempt from responding. It is something the member for Timmins—James Bay pointed out very effectively and very cogently

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in his argument, and the government House leader simply has not contradicted that.

Second, this goes back to the issue that was raised by Speaker Sauvé 35 years ago, saying that in terms of a *prima facie* question of privilege to be made there effectively is an argument that could be made when there is a deliberate attempt to deny answers to an hon. member, if it could be shown that such action amounted to improper interference with the hon. member's parliamentary work.

This is a very clear issue where the government is deliberately, because it is an embarrassing issue to it, trying to withhold what is a simple question of public policy, what is a simple constitutional process, and one that the government has responded to for decades. Now that we have the Conservatives entering this twilight zone where I assume they only have a few weeks in their mandate and are perhaps reacting to events in Alberta, they are trying shut down what should be an appropriate public policy response. They should have responded to the question raised in Question No. 1129 by the member for Timmins—James Bay. There is absolutely no reason for them not to. For them to try to throw out these outlandish reasons for why they cannot respond to a simple public policy question on the process that the Prime Minister's Office undertakes is something I think the public certainly sees through.

This is a question of privilege that I hope you will consider over the next little while, Mr. Speaker. If the government is going to respond, we will be responding in kind as well.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the member for Timmins—James Bay, the government House leader and the leader in the House for the official opposition for their interventions today. I expect we will hear from both sides once again, perhaps in a timely fashion, given the lateness of the agenda to which we are working.

* * *

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—CARE FOR VETERANS

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Bryan Hayes (Sault Ste. Marie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Etobicoke Centre.

I am proud to be a member of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. I actually asked to be on this committee because I care very much about the well-being of our Canadian Armed Forces, and I care because I am an air force brat, travelling the world with my parents and siblings for 17 years, my father having had a distinguished 37-year career in the Royal Canadian Air Force.

Both of my sisters and brother-in-law also served their country very well, again, in the Royal Canadian Air Force. My immediately family has over 100 years in the Canadian Armed Forces. I am the only one who did not have military service, so as a member of the veterans affairs committee, this is my way of giving back to armed forces and veterans to the very best of my ability. As a committee, we have recommended substantial improvements, many of which the government has adopted.

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Canadians recently marked the 70th anniversary of the liberation of the Netherlands and Victory in Europe Day, or VE Day, as we call it. I know a number of our colleagues had the opportunity to be there and experience that. We all saw Canada's veterans being welcomed with open arms by grateful Dutch citizens. We saw friendships rekindled and happy reunions, along with very moving ceremonies.

We also know that things did not simply go back to normal for many of our brave Canadian soldiers, sailors and airmen and women when they returned home after the war was over.

Certainly for Canadian Armed Forces members today, a homecoming may not be the easy return to the routine one might expect. Rather, for some, they return to a different world. A loving home, one hopes, but a jarring new reality shaped by severe and perhaps permanent injury or illness. Home may now be a place of stress, of uncertainty, of what may seem to be insurmountable challenges. That is as true for family members as it is for the full-time armed forces member, the reservist or the veteran.

This was painfully clear last week, as I attended the second annual Sam Sharpe breakfast, held in his honour to recognize the struggle of Canadian servicemen and women who suffer from operational stress injuries and to highlight individuals and organizations dedicated to assisting Canadian Forces members, their families and veterans.

Many may not be aware, but Lieutenant-Colonel Sam Sharpe was first elected to the House of Commons in 1908 as the sitting member for Ontario North at the start of World War I. After suffering mental injuries on the front, he returned to Canada and took his own life on May 25, 1918, at a Montreal hospital.

During the breakfast, we heard two very emotional stories of how PTSD impacted the lives of two of our veterans and how, with the help of services provided through Veterans Affairs, they were managing their PTSD, although, and this message was very clear, they would never be the same.

The people in the Government of Canada have a duty to such brave men and women in need of immediate and perhaps lifelong assistance. They must know that we are here for them. They must never doubt the intensity or sincerity of our care, compassion and respect.

I know I speak for all members in this place when I say that while politics may differ or approaches, ultimately every member of Parliament, from the government and the opposition benches, supports our veterans and expects the highest level of assistance to those in need.

That said, I am concerned with the political undertones of the NDP motion. I am troubled that the New Democrats have proposed this language a month after our government tabled the largest improvement to veterans benefits and supports since forming government. While I agree with the spirit of the motion and the vast majority of what is said in it, I am disappointed with the New Democrats for their continued political manoeuvring, using the noble cause of supporting Canada's veterans.

Perhaps many know, last week our government tabled economic action plan 2015 act. In particular, there is a section that proposes a

series of new benefits for veterans and families affected by injury and illness sustained during service to Canada.

• (1545)

This bill also presents a welcome statement of purpose for the new veterans charter, one that goes far beyond the motion being debated here today and that would be formally legislated and approved by both Houses of Parliament. It reads:

The purpose of this Act is to recognize and fulfill the obligation of the people and Government of Canada to show just and due appreciation to members and veterans for their service to Canada. This obligation includes providing services, assistance and compensation to members and veterans who have been injured or have died as a result of military service and extends to their spouses or common-law partners or survivors and orphans. This Act shall be liberally interpreted so that the recognized obligation may be fulfilled.

I hope the member for New Westminster—Coquitlam will support this purpose clause contained in Bill C-58 when the time comes to vote for it in Parliament in the coming weeks.

I was proud to have played a part in the unanimous report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. So many of the recommendations have been adopted by the government, including adding a new retirement benefit so that veterans have stable, reliable monthly income after age 65.

I want to make something very clear in this debate. Our government has a tremendous obligation to provide assistance to members and veterans of our forces who have been injured as a result of military service. We have an obligation as well to the families of those injured while in service.

I would like to take a few moments to highlight the new retirement income security benefit, which is arguably the largest of the new benefits we have introduced as a government over the past few months. The new retirement income security benefit would directly address this issue for moderately to severely disabled veterans and survivors. Beginning at age 65, eligible veterans would continue to receive monthly benefits totalling at least 70% of Veterans Affairs Canada's financial benefits received before the age of 65. This benefit would be determined on a case-by-case basis, taking into account other sources of income beyond the age of 65.

The key word here is "security". As per our government's veteran-centred approach, potential recipients in receipt of financial benefits administered by Veterans Affairs would be contacted before they reached the age of 65 to ensure a smooth transition to that security. For disabled Canadian Armed Forces veterans nearing 65, that would mean being better able to save for retirement and anticipate future earnings. Further, when that veteran passed on, his or her survivor would continue to receive approximately 50% of this lifelong monthly payment.

This was one of the key recommendations made by the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, and I am so pleased that the government acted swiftly to include it. I look forward to the recommendations being put forward and passed by the government.

Lest we forget.

• (1550)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to raise the issue of monies that have not been spent by the government. I am sure the member, being on the veterans affairs committee, would be aware of that. There is a great deal of concern at a time of need for veterans. There are many issues they are having to face. It seems that every other week, if not every week, there are questions to the government on its commitment to providing for veterans who are in need. Yet since 2006, the government has actually clawed back expenditures of just over \$1 billion.

I am wondering if the member might want to comment. It is one thing for us to be talking about supporting veterans, and it is another thing when the government does not spend allocated money and in essence claws back money that was voted on and allocated in budgets that was meant to go to veterans.

Mr. Bryan Hayes: Mr. Speaker, I would point out that the Liberals and the NDP are providing misinformation with respect to this. For Veterans Affairs, the budget is established. It is a Conservative budget. It is established to ensure that there are enough funds for every veteran that requires service. During the course of the year, over those nine years, six times, maybe even nine times, we asked for additional fund authorizations throughout the year in the event that we needed service.

What happens a lot of times with a budget is that a service simply is not required. It is very difficult to predict exactly how much service is going to be required. It is those authorizations, which totalled almost the exact amount the member opposite referred to, that were, in fact, not required. Every single veteran that required service during that time period received service. There was never a situation where service was not received because of a lack of funds. That is a fallacy.

• (1555)

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to know whether my colleague understands that, regardless of anything else, the priority is what is actually happening. What is happening is that veterans are still coming to my office feeling desperate and discouraged. They do not know what else to do about their file, which is taking forever to process. They do not know where to turn for help. We often hear about veterans who have to go to food banks to survive.

Does my colleague think that we need to do more for these individuals? Does he think that there are others to whom we have an obligation, the obligation of recognizing how much they have sacrificed? Are there still people who need our help?

[English]

Mr. Bryan Hayes: Mr. Speaker, I too, as a member of Parliament, have veterans come to my office. As a member of Parliament, I provide the direction they need and the assistance they need.

Business of Supply

Through Veterans Affairs Canada, the programs and services are in place. As I mentioned in my comments, I had an opportunity to attend a breakfast the other morning where two veterans spoke. These are veterans who have achieved those services. They knew where to go, and they had assistance.

I think it is the role of all of us as members of Parliament to make sure that we are reaching out to our veterans. I do that through my office, and my staff does that. I am sure the member opposite does that. It is the role of a member of Parliament.

I reiterate that the services are there, and our new legislation, Bill C-58, would expand upon those services. It is a fantastic piece of legislation that would benefit our veterans. I would really like to thank our Minister of Veterans Affairs for bringing this bill forward and his predecessors for their work in bringing this forward. It was one of the recommendations brought forward by the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, on which I am so proud to serve.

Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Sault Ste. Marie for his speech and for his family's combined service of over 100 years. Serving alongside him on the veterans affairs committee is an honour, because I know the member is seized with veterans, as many in the House are.

I would like to point out members in Veteran Affairs who are veterans, starting with our minister, who is an RMC grad and a veteran; our parliamentary secretary, who is an RMC grad and a veteran; and our deputy minister, who is an RMC grad, a veteran, and the former CDS. I myself am a former infanteer. We have a fighter pilot, and of course, there are members, like the member for Sault Ste. Marie, with a long family tradition. I am delighted to be serving along their side.

I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak to the motion. I am pleased to also lend my support to it, though I do share some concerns about the political undertones of the motion from the opposite side.

Our government places the highest priority on the health and well-being of all members of the Canadian Armed Forces. There are many veterans in the House, and as I said, some with recent service, me included. We are seized with ensuring that our veterans get the care and services they so rightly deserve from a grateful Canada. From the day they enrol, through basic training and their progression through the ranks, through deployments at home and abroad, through to when their service ends and they are back into civilian life, we want to ensure that our men and women in uniform, as well as their families, have everything they need.

We ask a great deal of those Canadians who serve in Canada's Armed Forces, both regular and reserve forces, those members who are so highly dedicated and serve concurrently with civilian occupations. We often forget that reservists make up 25% of Canada's missions abroad.

Business of Supply

As part of the rigours of military life, they face a number of unique challenges unfamiliar to most of us. Military service and the needs of the nation require them to deploy when needed to locations near and far, as they are presently, as part of domestic and overseas missions.

While visiting Canadian Armed Forces members stationed in Kuwait last week, our Prime Minister said:

Your courage, like the courage of generations of service personnel before you, is the currency in which our freedom, our lifestyles, have been bought and paid.

For that, the Canadian people offer you our deepest admiration and our eternal gratitude.

These are words we can never forget, in particular as we have just observed the 70th anniversary of VE Day in which Canada played a major role in the Second World War.

Present day Canadian Armed Forces personnel often move their residence frequently throughout their careers as part of their service both inside and outside the country. This process is generally disruptive to family life. It means new neighbours, friends, schools, sports teams, and so many normal family-related activities that many of us who are settled take for granted. Their families are constantly moved. As the member for Sault Ste. Marie pointed out, for 17 years his family moved around the world.

They often work irregular hours and complete difficult tasks. Their job to defend and protect Canada's interests is inherently stressful, and of course, they may face great physical danger as part of the job. Sometimes they are in life-threatening situations.

Our Canadian Armed Forces members never fail to respond when they are needed, and we hear from around the world over and over the high regard our service members are held in for their professionalism and their skills. Because we demand so much from them, we have a moral imperative to ensure that there is a strong system to care for them when they become physically or mentally ill or injured.

Allow me to take a few moments to outline some of our existing services in several areas. In my time of service, I personally relied on the military health care system for many of my own injuries. It is a great system.

There are also our compensation and support services, our comprehensive mental health services, and our ongoing support to military families. Because of the comprehensiveness of our health care system, the vast majority of our military personnel are very well and very healthy indeed. However, for those who require ongoing physical and mental health care, we are committed to continuously improving the system.

The old maxim, "prevention is better than a cure", is still a guide for military health care. In fact, prevention is a top priority, particularly when it comes to operational stress injuries. We address operational stress injuries through regular screening but also through fitness and safety programs. In addition, personnel are medically evaluated when they enrol and when they are taken on strength in the military.

• (1600)

They are medically evaluated before and after deployments, and they are medically evaluated on a routine basis throughout their careers. This is something that I have personally experienced.

Our military health care system is both comprehensive and collaborative. It supports our men and women in uniform in a wide variety of ways and through many different mechanisms, and it is highly adaptive.

As serving members' needs evolve mission to mission, our medical expertise has evolved, and we have responded by renewing and modernizing our services. For example, following an increase in the number of severe musculoskeletal and other combat injuries during our engagement in Afghanistan and indeed throughout a service career in terms of training, we established a Canadian Armed Forces physical rehabilitation program, creating seven centres of rehabilitation excellence across the country by partnering military health service units with pre-eminent civilian institutions.

Until recently, this has not had the attention that it really deserved. Weight, quite frankly, is weight, and in the past we have had load-bearing systems that were inadequate, which over time provided a lot of damage to bodies, backs, knees, ankles and to all kinds of things, especially for those people in the infantry who had to carry their homes, houses and all of their kit on their back. Nowadays, although the kit and equipment is much better, it is recognized much more through a study in science. It is being addressed and is no longer just anecdotal stories about injuries that soldiers sustained while on the job. We have also enhanced our post-deployment screening to ensure that any physical or psychological problems are quickly identified for early intervention.

The Canadian Armed Forces health care system is truly world class, and is committed to constant modernization and adaptation to best practice. It is far superior to anything that was provided decades ago, because it has been informed by modern medicine and disability management.

In partnership with Veterans Affairs, our presently serving members, veterans and all of their families benefit from a comprehensive system of support. However, more can and must be done to ensure that process, that seam that currently exists between these two huge entities, the military and Veterans Affairs, is as close together as we can make it in order to stop transitioning personnel from falling through the cracks. This work is occurring in earnest, and regular and constant improvements are being realized within this process.

We have strengthened and expanded our member and family supports in other areas. For example, financial assistance, often critical in times of illness or injury, is offered to military personnel and their families through the service income security insurance plan, which is commonly known as SISIP. This delivers life and disability insurance, vocational assistance and financial counselling through 18 offices across Canada.

In 2011, we introduced a new suite of benefits designed specifically to help severely injured personnel, by providing for home and vehicle accessibility modifications and monetary support to their spouses and caregivers. We also make on-base employment opportunities available to Canadian Armed Forces spouses and dependants throughout Canada and Europe, helping to improve the financial situation of our military families.

Indeed, whenever we reflect on the health of our military personnel, we know family support is absolutely vital to their well-being. In recognition of the fundamental role played by military families, we have worked hard to renew the military family services program by increasing its funding and expanding its services, especially through our 32 military family resource centres, which provide youth programs and activities; parenting support; daily emergency and respite child care; counselling and referral services; deployment and separation support; and education, training and employment assistance.

I wish that the NDP members were focused like us on delivering results rather than the games they have been playing in Parliament and elsewhere that only serves to confuse and misinform. Veterans should know that every MP on all sides of this House supports them. The political rhetoric that has been applied should become obsolete, because it is inaccurate and unfortunately it does mislead.

In that bipartisan light, I am pleased we are supporting this motion, largely because it was virtually copied from the text of our support for veterans and their families act, but also because I believe no one in this place should use our veterans as political talking points, as the other side does. I believe we should be striving to improve, because it is the right thing to do for all of our veterans, past, present and future. I hope that ultimately this is the case for the politically charged NDP motion.

• (1605)

[Translation]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that the NDP has moved this motion to help our veterans.

I represent the riding of Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, which is home to the Bagotville military base. I see as many veterans as soldiers. I recognize the crucial role the Government of Canada needs to play in helping these men and women. I am disappointed in the Conservative government's attitude towards veterans. My office staff often find themselves fighting on behalf of these veterans for financial compensation related to the degree of injury they suffered on their mission abroad.

I would ask my Conservative colleague why the government spends so much time in court fighting to avoid honouring the covenant between the federal government and veterans. Why does the government not simply give this money to veterans instead of spending it on legal fees? It seems as though these veterans would feel much more respected by their government.

[English]

Mr. Ted Opitz: Mr. Speaker, I respect the fact that my hon. friend comes from a part of Quebec that has a military base nearby. The brave men and women of Quebec have made tremendous contributions over all of Canada's history in Canada's armed forces

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and many of the units in Quebec are absolutely storied units for their exploits on behalf of Canada.

That is why there are members of Parliament, so that when veterans or constituents come to us, we provide them with the guidance that they need to get through any particular system or issue and to gain the benefits that they so richly deserve, especially veterans. I do that. Veterans come to my office to ask me these questions and I guide them through it.

If the member was paying attention to the budget, he will notice that there is money for Veterans Affairs. He will notice that many of the points that have been made by the veterans affairs committee are absolutely being adopted. I have a whole litany of them here. This government is moving forward and looking after veterans.

By the time we are done, under the leadership of the Minister of Veterans Affairs, this is going to be a world-leading veterans charter. Many of our colleagues, fellow nations and allies around the world are experiencing many of the same issues and we are learning from that too. It is a lessons learned sort of thing.

As far as veterans go, I would also like to point out that the RCMP, with its contributions to Canada, has served us and veterans well.

• (1610)

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the NDP for bringing this motion forward, but the reality is that the Conservatives are not going to change much.

I am from a riding in Cape Breton, which, per capita, has made the largest contribution to any conflict in the last 100 years. There was a Veterans Affairs office in Cape Breton that served over 4,000 veterans. There were over 1,000 walk-ins in the last year and 3,000 clients. The government can do all it wants with its money, but the reality is that veterans are coming home, they need a place to go and somebody to take care of them. That is not happening.

I do not want an answer about Service Canada, because that is not working down in Cape Breton. It is the same with all the offices across the country. How can the member represent his government and the Conservative Party knowing that when all these offices were closed, it threw all these veterans out into the dark?

Mr. Ted Opitz: Mr. Speaker, I am absolutely proudly supporting this, supporting my government and supporting what we have done, and continue to do, for veterans. Whether the member likes it or not, that is the reality.

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Many of these offices were within hundreds of metres, in some cases, of a Service Canada office. This has expanded the points of access to Veterans Affairs services to over 600 points of access. Many service members and veterans have called to tell me that the Service Canada offices are a godsend, especially for a lot of the older veterans who do not have to travel to larger centres. They can access service in their home towns and get the services they need very conveniently, very quickly and very cheaply. That is the whole point: to serve veterans, not to make it tougher on them.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my grandfather was from Finland. He fought in World War II, and I remember that he received a pension. I remember as a kid thinking that was strange. I did not understand how that worked because it was a pension that came from Finland and he did not even live there any more. Kaarina and Tauno, my grandparents, immigrated from Finland to Canada and yet the Finnish government still supported my grandfather. Then, when he passed away, that pension went on to my grandmother, my mummo.

As a kid I remember that was the first time I ever thought about that obligation that a country has to its servicemen and women. It was the first time I really thought about what it was. I knew my grandfather had fought in the war, I understood that, but I did not understand what it meant to sign up for something different, to sign up and say, "I am going to fight for this country and I am going to put my own life on the line".

As members know, I am the member of Parliament for Halifax. I have not served in Canada's military, unlike a couple of our previous speakers and other members of this House. However, as the member of Parliament for Halifax, which is home to Canadian Forces Base Halifax, I have learned a lot about our military and our veterans over the years, both as a representative and also as somebody who lives in the city.

It is difficult not to know at least a bit about the Canadian Forces if one lives in Halifax. CFB Halifax is Canada's east coast navy base and is home port to Maritime Forces Atlantic. It is the largest Canadian Forces base in terms of number of posted personnel. Anywhere people go around the Halifax harbour they will see evidence of the Canadian Forces.

As the MP for Halifax, I have had the opportunity to see first-hand the work that is happening at HMC Dockyard Halifax, one of the oldest defence establishments in Canada. I have attended events at Stadacona, which is in the north end of Halifax. I have visited the Halifax military family resource centre on many occasions.

Shortly after my election in 2008, I had the opportunity to go on the inaugural sail of HMCS *Halifax* by her new captain, Captain José Kurtz, the first woman to command a Canadian warship. That was an incredibly special event as Captain Kurtz took women from the community on her inaugural sail with her.

Before I go on, I do want to note that I will be splitting my time with the member for London—Fanshawe.

In this time, living in Halifax, and representing Halifax, I have learned two key things about the men and women who serve. The first thing that I have learned is that our military men and women are us. They are not separate from us, walled off on a base that is

isolated and different. CFB Halifax is part of our city, and the men and women serving there are part of the Halifax community. They are our soccer coaches. They are the neighbours who offer a hand shovelling the driveway, and we certainly had a lot of that this winter. They are our volunteer firefighters. They are our community board volunteers. They are part of our communities, and our communities are part of them.

The second thing that I have learned is that while they are members of our community, they are different. Every day they go into work and they make an extraordinary personal commitment, a commitment much more extraordinary than that which members and I make. When I worked at Dalhousie Legal Aid in Halifax, I went to work in the morning, I served my clients, and came home at the end of the day.

My colleague from New Westminster—Coquitlam quoted from the Equitas statement of claim. As members have heard, there is a court case going on right now. I would like to repeat this quote because I think it really sums up how our servicemen and women are different.

It states:

When members of the Canadian Forces put on the uniform of their country they make an extraordinary personal commitment to place the welfare of others ahead of their personal interests, to serve Canada before self and to put themselves at risk, as required, in the interests of the nation. A veteran, whether regular or reserve, active or retired, is someone who, at one point in their life, wrote a blank cheque made payable to "the Government of Canada," for an amount of "up to and including their life."

• (1615)

That blank cheque made payable to our country is not something that most of us have to write every day when we go to work, so while our servicemen and women are coaching our kids at soccer or helping raise money for the United Way in our communities, they are also unlike most of us in our community. That difference, that blank cheque of up to and including their life, is what creates our obligation and the obligation of our country and of our government to honour that commitment with a stand-alone covenant.

A moral, social, legal, and fiduciary obligation exists between the Canadian people and the government to provide equitable financial compensation and support services to past and active members of the Canadian Armed Forces who have been injured or disabled or have died as a result of military service. The government is obligated to fulfill this covenant.

Canadian Armed Forces veterans and their families deserve our deepest gratitude and they deserve to be taken care of. Too many veterans and their families still cannot access adequate health care, pensions, and other vital supports, including the nine front-line Veterans Affairs offices that have been closed in this country.

I want to thank my colleague from Sackville—Eastern Shore for helping us lead the way on proposals to improve programs and services available for veterans and their families.

The NDP has a plan to end service pension clawbacks, reopen shuttered Veterans Affairs offices, and widen access to quality home care, long-term care, and mental health services.

I also want to thank my colleague from New Westminster—Coquitlam for bringing forward this important motion and my colleague from Châteauguay—Saint-Constant for seconding the motion. Thanks to their hard work, this issue gets the important debate it deserves.

Our country has a long history of standing up for the rights and freedoms that Canadians hold dear. The men and women who join the Canadian Forces know they may be called upon to risk their lives on behalf of Canada and to uphold peace, security, or human rights here at home and around the world. We honour the service of those who accept the condition of unlimited liability and we are grateful for their personal sacrifices, including the sacrifices made by their families.

Members may have heard the minister make reference earlier to what was a saying, although it is now quite an outdated saying. It was that if the military wanted us to have a family, it would issue us with one.

The first time I heard that saying was during a meeting with then Rear-Admiral Maddison at the Halifax dockyard. Of course, it is a totally outdated saying. It is not true today. Canadian Forces have put a lot of work into supporting military families and acknowledging the role that families play in supporting our military servicemen and women. I have had opportunities to see that kind of support first-hand in talking to military families and seeing the special work that the Halifax Military Family Resource Centre does to support families in the Halifax area. That is why the social covenant not only acknowledges our veterans but also acknowledges their families. It acknowledges that our nation and its government and citizens will support these men and women on their missions, honour their service, and look after them and their families if they are injured or die in the service of their country.

Recognizing this covenant between the Canadian people and our government with past and active members of the Canadian Forces is essential. This covenant honours their service and their personal sacrifices and includes the sacrifices made by their families.

To highlight that, I would like to read a quote from Dr. Stéphanie Bélanger from the Canadian Institute for Military and Veteran Health Research:

There is a social covenant and this is what started the research institute. It is being studied as well in military ethics studies. There is lots of evidence of that social covenant existing in every country where the government will task people with a clause of unlimited liability, and because of this clause there is an obligation to serve back.

That sums it up perfectly.

I am proud to stand today to speak to the motion. I will be proud to vote for it and I encourage my colleagues across the House to support this motion.

● (1620)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

[Translation]

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 London—Fanshawe, Employment;

Business of Supply

and the hon. member for Drummond, Regional Economic Development.

[English]

Questions and comments, the hon. Minister of Veterans Affairs.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my friend for her remarks. Certainly she knows that I served in the military in Halifax for a number of years before we met at Dalhousie law school. I am glad that she talked about the important role that the Military Family Resource Centre in Halifax plays, as well as the one at Shearwater as part of the larger Halifax Regional Municipality.

I was struck by her comments confirming what I have said many times, which is that the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces are, indeed, us. They are Canadians from all walks of life and all parts of the country who step forward to serve.

That is why the veterans charter was created. It was to move to a system that looked at rehabilitation, wellness, and family, and that allowed for supports not just for physical injuries but for mental injuries. That is why it was brought in by the Liberals in 2005. That is why it is still a good system with the fixes that we have in Bill C-58, with the retirement income security benefit, critical injury benefit, family caregiver benefit, and a number of modernizing updates to the veterans charter.

My question for her is twofold. First, as the deputy leader of her party, can she urge her leadership to get behind Bill C-58? Most of Bill C-58 was agreed upon unanimously by the standing committee, including her critic, so why do we not move this measure through the House? It represents benefits and improvements to families.

More importantly, I have said that we support the motion brought forward today, but the purpose clause in Bill C-58 that talks about the obligation actually goes further. It includes all veterans and our obligation to all veterans, not just those who are injured, and it directly states that it should be liberally construed, which is what the standing committee wanted. By getting behind Bill C-58, we go further than the motion brought forward today by the member for New Westminster—Coquitlam.

I would ask her to get her party to support it.

Ms. Megan Leslie: Mr. Speaker, I do not have the wording of the bill in front of me, but the minister does know that there are parts of Bill C-58 that the NDP can support. However, the problem is that when Conservatives put everything plus the kitchen sink together, it forces those of us who want to support good parts of legislation to vote against the whole, because we cannot include these other egregious parts.

I do not understand why the government does not want to work with opposition parties to establish what can we agree on here. Is there some piece that we can pull out and work on together?

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The minister had some very good words about the veterans charter. This motion actually talks about creating the fiduciary duty with this covenant. That fiduciary duty would give the government a chance to pause and have a second thought about how its actions are reflecting that fiduciary duty, especially when we look at the money, time, and energy that has been taken by the government to fight veterans in courts.

I would hope that having a fiduciary duty would give the government pause before it embarks on these kinds of lawsuits that are so wasteful of everybody's time and money.

• (1625)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to quote directly from the bill's statement of its purpose and then ask for a response from the member. The bill states:

The purpose of this Act is to recognize and fulfil the obligation of the people and Government of Canada to show just and due appreciation to members and veterans for their service to Canada. This obligation includes providing services, assistance and compensation to members and veterans who have been injured or have died as a result of military service and extends to their spouses or common-law partners or survivors and orphans. This Act shall be liberally interpreted so that the recognized obligation may be fulfilled.

It is no doubt a wonderful platitude that is being expressed in the purpose of the legislation that the minister just made reference to, but I wonder if the member would provide some comment regarding the reality. Does she believe that the reality of the last few years reflects the actual purpose of Bill C-58 and what the minister is talking about?

Ms. Megan Leslie: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question and also for reading out the purpose, because that is what I could not find in front of me.

The member is right to point out the disconnect between the words and the reality. That is why I go back to this idea of creating a fiduciary duty so that we have this sense of duty that informs every single step we take as legislators.

That disconnect is very real. We have seen nine regional Veterans Affairs offices shut down across Canada. We have seen lay-offs at Veterans Affairs Canada. I am from Kirkland Lake, Ontario. There is a Department of Veterans Affairs regional office in Kirkland Lake, and I have seen the impact it has had on my hometown. I have seen money left over at the end of the year being given back to Treasury Board when veterans are going to food banks and when veterans are unable to make ends meet

We are not alone in this. There are veterans across Canada who are standing behind what we are saying. Veterans have spoken out publicly to say they need help and are wondering where they can get this help.

That is the disconnect. Hopefully something like a social covenant will guide a government, no matter colour or party affiliation, in making those decisions.

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to speak to this motion today, because Canadian veterans are our heroes, and they should be treated with the utmost respect and provided with all the support we can possible give.

Conservatives continuously remind us to support our troops—we hear it all the time—but fail to understand that support must continue

once those Canadian Forces are no longer active and they become veterans. We owe them that much. We were, and are, a country engaged in modern-day conflicts in places like Somalia, Bosnia, Lebanon, Cyprus, East Timor, Afghanistan, and now Iraq.

Our troops have answered the call to assist communities jeopardized by floods, earthquakes, ice storms, forest fires, hurricanes, and tornadoes domestically and around the world. However, Veterans Affairs Canada has not adapted to the very real needs of the veterans of the modern day. This government has failed to support the obligations we owe veterans who served in the great wars, in Korea, and on peacekeeping missions.

In fact, because of the shortsightedness of the Conservative government, our relationship with our veterans has been damaged and diminished rather than enhanced. Older veterans were told to learn to use the Internet, for example, for continued service when local VAC offices faced service reductions and closures.

The Conservatives have cut—and this has been said a number of times—more than 900 jobs from Veterans Affairs since 2009. That is 23% of the workforce.

Compensation for funerals under the Last Post Fund has not kept up with the actual costs, leaving cash-strapped veterans and their families to pay the difference. Veterans requiring long-term care beds have been shuffled off to provincial jurisdictions because they have had the misfortune of outliving their life expectancy.

The ministry refuses to extend our obligation as a courtesy to them beyond the contracted dates. These are veterans with special needs who need special care as a result of their service to our country.

New Democrats have long advocated for the continuation of the veterans long term care program. The rates of homelessness and suicide among our veteran population are horrifying, but testimony to that fact and effects of post-traumatic stress are not being seriously addressed. Families are left without the supports they need to deal with younger veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress, and injured veterans with obvious disabilities as a result of their service must suffer the delay and humiliation of proving to the department over and over again that they have been disabled, in order that they continue to receive support.

The current government's Bill C-58, as proposed, is a good start, but many veterans feel it just doesn't go far enough in enhancing programs and services for all veterans and their families under the new charter. New Democrats agree with these veterans and their families. That is part of why we have chosen to dedicate this opposition day to point out that financial compensation and support services to past and active members of the Canadian Armed Forces who have been injured, disabled, or died as a result of military service, and to their dependents, must improve. We have a moral, social, and legal as well as fiduciary obligation to do that.

Dr. Pierre Morisset, a retired major general and the chair of the Scientific Advisory Committee for Veterans' Health, was a witness before the veterans affairs committee last year, and he said, "When a soldier leaves the forces and is officially known as a veteran, then he's treated in the civilian health sector". Dr. Morisset went on to say that the civilian health care system is "not necessarily tuned to the reality of what kind of life the soldier may have had".

Similarly, Dr. Ruth Stewart of Athabasca University argued that:

The Canadian Forces represent a distinct culture, containing distinct subcultures. They possess unique languages, norms, and customs, and are socially stratified to a degree completely foreign to most north American civilians.

Once a soldier leaves the military, he or she is left to the care of civilian doctors who will do their best, but they do not have the expertise to deal with the specific issues veterans face. Veterans are our national heroes and, as such, they are a federal responsibility and should be looked after by the federal government. They are not, as the government believes, a problem to be dismissed, undervalued, or offloaded to the provinces.

This Parliament's veterans affairs committee identified three core themes for the study resulting in the new veterans charter: care and support of the most seriously disabled, support for families, and improving how Veterans Affairs Canada delivers the programs, services, and benefits of the new charter.

• (1630)

The Conservatives' Bill C-58 would only partly address some of the 14 recommendations contained in that unanimous report. It would, for instance, only provide assistance to help 100 of the most seriously injured.

The NDP believes that we have the obligation, and capability, to help all veterans and their families.

New Democrats will push for the retirement income security benefits to be increased from 70%, as outlined in the bill, to 100% of what the veterans received in VAC financial benefits before age 65, to ensure that veterans have financial stability.

The critical injury benefit proposed under Bill C-58 would provide a \$70,000 tax-free award to support the most severely injured and ill Canadian Forces members and veterans. However, under the proposed criteria for qualification, only two or three people per year would qualify. This is simply not good enough for our veterans. They have given their lives and their careers for this country.

We have also heard from veterans who are disappointed in the government for not addressing the disparities and unfairness related to lump-sum disability payments, as compared with civilian court awards for pain and suffering.

Scott Maxwell, executive director of Wounded Warriors Canada, said the new benefits under Bill C-58 would go to just 1% of all severely disabled vets and Sean Bruyca, veteran advocate, has expressed similar concerns.

Injured and disabled vets should not have to fight their own government in court for the compensation and care they deserve, but sadly, this has become all too common under the current government.

Business of Supply

If the Conservatives are serious about improving the care of our veterans, they should stop fighting those veterans in court and recognize our historic covenant.

Today, New Democrats are calling upon the government to restore our country's relationship with the veterans to one that is based upon respect rather than neglect.

Instead of including provisions to assist veterans in an omnibus budget bill—a cynical attempt to force opposition parties that support the measures for veterans to vote against them—the Conservatives should recognize the historic covenant that we share with veterans and honour it with decisive action.

I would like to speak, now, about the proud history of military service in London, Ontario.

I cherish the relationship I have been able to foster with the veterans in my community who have served us so well over the years. Their participation in our community enriches all of us. They support hospitals, young athletes, the homeless, the wounded, and the forgotten. I feel very privileged to stand with our veterans in the community.

Perhaps members have heard of the proposed demolition of many buildings at Wolseley Barracks, including the historic officers' mess. Bob Marshall, president of the Duchess of Kent Legion, would like to see the officers' mess repurposed as the Legion's new home, rather than demolition.

This is a reasonable proposal, a win for the Legion, a win for Wolseley Barracks, and a win for the community. I am fully behind it. I hope that the Minister of Defence has had time to consider this proposal adequately and that he will support it.

I would also like to remind the House that, when in opposition, the Conservatives promised they would make significant veteran reforms. Sadly, after nearly a decade in office, they have done little to address the gaping holes in the services offered Canadian veterans and their families. In fact, they have gone so far as to challenge the existence of our sacred covenant with those veterans.

The Conservatives have forgotten our veterans and the contribution of modern-day Canadian Forces veterans and RCMP who served in peacekeeping around the world. That is absolutely unacceptable. Canadians are passionate and proud in our gratitude for our veterans.

During Remembrance Week and beyond, Canadians choose to honour the men and women who gave us a strong and free country. It is long past time for our federal government to likewise honour all veterans, both past and present, by serving their needs.

Monuments and parades are lovely, but they are cold comfort to the veterans and families who are suffering neglect.

It is time to mean what we say when we repeat the promise to remember. It must be accompanied by real action. That is what New Democrats are promising and proposing today with this motion

Business of Supply

The NDP is the only party with a comprehensive veterans policy that we intend to implement when we become the government of this great country.

I am proud to support today's motion. I hope everyone in this House will do so also.

• (1635)

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a quick question for my colleague from London—Fanshawe, and I would like to thank her for her eloquent speech.

I would really like to know what we should expect. When the Prime Minister talked about motions in the past, it was in respect for this House to implement them, but the challenges we have today are because of not implementing those motions. I think today is a good day to reinstate that philosophy of actually following through from the government to the opposition.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Speaker, the member is quite right. We have heard a great deal in this House, and it goes back to our involvement in Afghanistan with the call to support our troops, making it very clear from the Prime Minister's Office that somehow support, or lack of support, for the troops was integral to the way the House would operate and do business. Therefore, there is a lot of talk, but very little action.

I would like to underscore some of the things about which I am very concerned. One is a lack of long-term care for our veterans.

If veterans were in World War II or Korea, yes, they would have long-term care, but for post-Korean veterans or veterans who suffered in the Golan Heights or gave all that there was to give in Afghanistan, they are not covered in terms of long-term care.

This is an affront to the men and women who put their lives on the line. Yet, we still see the Conservative government making excuses about why it cannot make sure that all veterans are provided with the services they absolutely need and deserve.

• (1640)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to base my question on a quote that the Liberal critic for veterans affairs gave earlier. In the shadow of the First World War, the then prime minister Sir Robert Borden made a covenant to those Canadians who fought. On the eve of Vimy Ridge, he told Canadians that:

You can go into this action feeling assured of this, and as the head of the government I give you this assurance: That you need not fear that the government and the country will fail to show just appreciation of your service to the country and Empire in what you are about to do and what you have already done.

The government and the country will consider it their first duty to see that a proper appreciation of your effort and of your courage is brought to the notice of people at home that no man, whether he goes back or whether he remains in Flanders, will have just cause to reproach the government for having broken faith with the men who won and the men who died.

When we reflect on that covenant and look at what has taken place over the last couple of years and what we are hearing from veterans from all regions of Canada, does the member believe that the government has been in keeping with what was then quoted by then prime minister Borden?

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Speaker, I do not think that the covenant has been broken just in the last few years. Rather, I think it has been broken over the last many decades.

It is interesting that, when Borden made that covenant with the men and women who went to war, I think it was from a sense of real and profound gratitude. Canadians knew how those men and women suffered in the fields, from the gas attacks, the constant bombardment, the discomfort of the trenches, and the lack of any hope in some cases. There was a real understanding. Unfortunately, almost 100 years later, that recognition seems to have faded.

Canadians go to Remembrance Day ceremonies, and they are absolutely genuine in their gratitude. I just wish the government were as grateful. I wish that the covenant spoken 100 years ago were part and parcel of what the governments of the last few decades understood as their obligation. Sadly, it quite simply is not.

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to address the motion put forward by the member of Parliament for New Westminster—Coquitlam.

I will be splitting my time with the member for Mississauga East—Cooksville.

I urge the NDP to work with our government to improve the well-being of Canada's veterans and their families. We understand the need to provide those who have bravely served our nation in uniform with the support they need to transition to civilian life.

Our recently announced increased benefits and services are evidence of our commitment to ensuring that Canadian veterans and their families are treated with care, compassion, and respect. It is through these new measures, which are included in economic action plan 2015, that we are demonstrating the importance we place on being there for our brave men and women when they need us most.

These new benefits and services we are proposing take significant strides in improving the new veterans charter. We are moving to better support families and caregivers, those who play such a vital role in the transition process. We are respecting reservists. The purpose clause in Division 17 of Bill C-59, the economic action plan 2015 act, which my colleagues have discussed, demonstrates our government's duty and commitment to veterans. It is an ongoing commitment.

I encourage all colleagues to listen to the debate today and recognize that the measures our government is introducing would enhance the lives of those who have served our nation. It is not only about supporting those who have served, it is also about supporting their families.

We recognize the vital role the families play in the lives of the men and women in uniform and how veterans' health issues can impact those who stand by them. We understand the important role those who stand beside Canada's veterans play in their recovery and well-being.

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I would like to highlight the action we have taken to support families and caregivers.

We recognize that the family caregivers of Canada's veterans play a large supporting role in providing those who have served with the care they need and deserve, which is why I am pleased to tell the House about a new benefit our government has introduced to help relieve some of the burden facing the families of those who are severely injured. A serious physical or mental injury causes not only immense challenges for the serviceman or woman but serious stress and strain on their families. Our government has proposed a new family caregiver relief benefit to provide an annual tax-free grant of \$7,238. Family members who help with the care of the most seriously injured veterans can have the added flexibility of getting relief during times of added stress on the family or even help to recharge their batteries, if that is what needs to happen.

Today Veterans Affairs already pays for in-home medical care for the most severely injured veterans. This funding would be in addition to other VAC benefits already in place to support veterans' daily needs. It is a recognition of their sacrifice and the sacrifice of their families. It tops things up just a bit and makes things a little easier.

This benefit is for caregivers in the home—spouses, common-law partners, parents, or adult children—who often try to juggle raising children or family duties alongside assisting their injured loved ones. Their own careers are often sidetracked or reduced, and often their own health and wellness can be impacted when there is an injured veteran at home. This new benefit recognizes their important work and would provide them with a little extra flexibility.

This funding could be used for relief options, such as covering the cost of having a professional caregiver come into the home or covering the cost of another family member or friend travelling to the veteran's home, and it would be provided in addition to other benefits already in place to support veterans' health care needs. It is a supplement. We believe that this would make a tremendous difference for these families.

This recently announced benefit is not the only action we have taken in support of veterans. Last year we announced an increase in the number of psychological counselling sessions for families of veterans from eight to 20 sessions.

● (1645)

We have also invested in research to help us gain a better understanding of the impact operational stress injuries, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, have on the mental health of the spouses and children of Canadian veterans. Post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental injuries have an effect on the whole family, not just on the injured veteran. Research such as this will help us get a better handle on the complex challenges facing today's veterans, their spouses, and their children when it comes to their mental health and their mental well-being. We want to identify possible next steps in this area.

We announced that we will develop and implement veteran-specific mental-health first aid training across the country for both veterans and their families. This will provide family members and caregivers of veterans with the training they need to support their

loved ones in a time of crisis. It will do this by teaching them about mental-health conditions; training them in the signs and symptoms of common mental-health disorders; providing them with the opportunity to practise crisis first aid for those with mental-health conditions; ensuring that they know where, when, and how to get help; and providing education on what type of help has been shown to be effective in their situation and why.

Those are some of the actions our government has taken to honour our commitment not only to members of the Canadian Armed Forces and veterans but to their families as well. I am disappointed to see that once again the New Democrats are playing their political games when our government has been unprecedented in the investments we have made in improving the well-being of Canadian veterans and those family members and caregivers who stand by the side of those injured veterans.

I urge all members of this House to vote in favour of the new measures our government is introducing in support of veterans and their families. It is by taking action and passing these measures that we will demonstrate our commitment and our duty to provide those who have bravely served our nation, and their families, with the help they need.

● (1650)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to know whether my colleague thinks that it is also extremely important to understand the reality on the ground in order to understand the situation of veterans and soldiers.

Many of them have said that it is very difficult to obtain services and that they often feel they have to fight to get them. They say that they have to go through a long process that sometimes causes them more psychological pain than the incident itself.

Given what they have gone through, should we not make their lives easier by taking into account what they are saying and improving the process they have to go through to get help?

[*English*]

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Mr. Speaker, I absolutely agree that we need to make sure that Veterans Affairs Canada makes the process for gaining benefits for veterans clear, simple, and easy to apply for. The minister has been very clear on the personal steps he has taken to make sure that every veteran in this country has the ability to access the benefits due to them.

We are not only expanding the breadth and seriousness of the benefits we are putting in place to support veterans, we are also making changes to make sure that any forms that have to be filled out, any phone calls veterans have to make, any online applications they endeavour to take part in are easy and that veterans have support in doing that. Not only do we need to make sure that our veterans have the ability to get this large number of benefits our government is providing for them but we are working to make sure that those veterans have the ease of application and that those benefits are readily available to them.

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Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what the government actually has done is close a number of offices in different regions of the country. They include, for example, Cornerbrook, Newfoundland and Labrador; Charlottetown, P.E.I.; Sydney, Nova Scotia; Windsor, Ontario; Thunder Bay, Ontario; Brandon, in my home province of Manitoba; Saskatoon, Saskatchewan; Kelowna, British Columbia; and Prince George, British Columbia.

I wonder if the member could comment on why the government found it necessary to close those Veterans Affairs offices, given that there is a big difference between talking on the telephone to someone and being able to meet face to face with an individual, which is something the employees in these offices did on a daily basis.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Mr. Speaker, before I answer the member's question, I would like to say that in 2005, when his party was in power, the budget of Veterans Affairs was about \$2.8 billion. Since our government has taken power, we have continued to increase the budget. Ninety per cent of the benefits go to veterans, and now that budget has reached over \$3.6 billion. We are standing up and supporting veterans far better than his party ever did when it was in power.

As far as offices being closed, in my riding of Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, we did not have a Veterans Affairs office. Veterans in my riding had to drive all the way down to Halifax if they were in Colchester County. It was over an hour to get to a Veterans Affairs office. If they were in the northern part of the riding, they actually had to leave the province and drive all the way out to Moncton. That was the closest Veterans Affairs office to them. Now we have put trained staff in the Service Canada offices, so Veterans Affairs can provide services to veterans in my riding in both Amherst and Truro. Veterans can go into their hometown or close to their hometown and get service directly without having to travel hours and hours.

This is the same situation that takes place all across the country. We have 600 new points of service for veterans to go to. Veterans, especially older veterans who may have served in Korea or in the Second World War, have mobility issues. It is harder for them to travel like they used to. Now they can get those services at Service Canada offices close to home.

• (1655)

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon (Mississauga East—Cooksville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very honoured to rise today to speak to our government's commitment and dedication to providing veterans and their families with the support they need and deserve. That is why we introduced the Support for Veterans and their Families Act and included these measures in our economic action plan 2015.

This important legislation will put new benefits and services in place to improve the health and well-being of those seriously injured during service. These are improvements the NDP members have pointed out the need for. These are advances the Veterans Ombudsman, veterans and their advocacy groups have called for. These measures also address the very recommendations the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs made in its report "The New Veterans Charter: Moving Forward".

As a member of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, I can attest to the extensive consultations and review we undertook to ensure our recommendations were sound and addressed the very concerns of veterans, their families and the groups that represented them.

The legislation will not only improve the new veterans charter, but it explicitly outlines the government's commitment and dedication to providing veterans with the help they need to successfully transition to civilian life in a purpose statement.

This purpose statement will be included in the new veterans charter so that this existing and important legislation recognizes and fulfills the obligation of the people and Government of Canada to show just and due appreciation to members and veterans for their service to Canada. I think we all agree this is very important and is obviously why we are having this debate today.

My colleagues on this side of the House have already spoken at length about some of the measures in the economic action plan, including the retirement income security benefit, family caregiver relief benefit and critical injury benefit. That is why in addition to the new measures introduced, we are putting more resources where they are needed to ensure service excellence.

Everyone knows case managers and the front-line service they offer are vitally important to veterans who need their services. That is why the minister announced last month that more than 100 permanent full-time case managers would be hired to improve one-on-one service. Veterans and their families experiencing complex mental health and transition needs will have them addressed more quickly and efficiently.

These additional resources, combined with a more balanced approach to managing the workload of the case managers, will help reduce the current ratio of 40 case-managed veterans to one case manager down to 30 case-managed veterans for each case manager. This will lead to better service and ultimately better outcomes for veterans. It also means veterans will be able to access the services they need quicker.

To ensure balanced caseloads, all case managers will have their caseload constantly assessed, adjusted and balanced so their time and attention is given appropriately to the needs of seriously ill or injured veterans.

It is absolutely critical that veterans as well as the Canadian Armed Forces members who are released right now from the military know they will continue to be well served and their needs met efficiently and with care, compassion and respect.

Our government has also committed the financial resources for the department to hire more than 100 new disability benefits staff, both temporary and permanent. Hiring more employees whose job it will be to evaluate disability benefit claims means veterans and their families will have faster access to disability benefits, health care and mental health treatment.

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Since becoming minister in January, the Minister of Veterans Affairs has consulted with veterans across the country to ensure we implement changes that will greatly benefit those who have served our country and their families. This has resulted in fundamental improvements required to the many systems, services, supports, benefits and programs provided or delivered so veterans can served better. Everything we do to support veterans is now “veteran-centric”, meaning everything we do centres around what is best for the veterans.

• (1700)

We are striving for service excellence and ensuring that veterans are treated with care, compassion and respect. That is why the minister has asked that options be examined to consolidate all Veterans Affairs benefits so they only have to access one single, clear and easy to understand benefit system. This action alone can have a dramatic impact on reducing stress on the injured soldier as he or she transitions to civilian life.

The improved way that veterans and their families are cared for and served did not only begin this year. Our government also took action last year in response to the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs by announcing the addition of a new operational stress injury clinic in Halifax. We also announced that the OSI satellite clinics in St. John's, Chicoutimi, Pembroke, Brockville, Kelowna, Victoria and the Greater Toronto Area would be expanded to speed access to mental health services for those with mental health conditions. These clinics play a key role in providing specialized assessment, diagnosis and treatment services for veterans and their families living with operational stress injuries.

In fact, to support them by the end of the year, veterans and Canadian Armed Forces members will have access to an established network of 26 operational stress injury clinics. Access is also being expanded to seven military family resource centres across the country as part of a pilot project. Traditionally, the services and programs offered through the centres have only been available to still-serving members of the military. Up to 1,200 medically released veterans and their families may now take part over the course of the pilot, giving them access to a wide range of services to help smooth some of the challenges they face as they transition to civilian life.

A mental health first aid training course designed especially for veterans and their families will help them better understand the various kinds of mental health conditions and their impact. A veteran or his or her family member will then be able to respond earlier when someone they care about is in crisis. New research funding will ensure that we have the information we need to develop policies and programs grounded in good science and research to support better mental health treatments, faster recoveries and better outcomes for veterans, serving members and their families.

We are making real and significant progress. We will continue to work each and every day to improve the programs, benefits and services that Canada's veterans and their families need and deserve.

Instead of playing political games, I urge all members of the NDP and the House to support the measures included in the support for veterans and their families act and in the economic action plan. It is the right and honourable thing to do for veterans and their families.

• (1705)

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise and ask a question of my colleague because I think there is a great deal of support in the House for the NDP motion in support of veterans. I know in my community, in Parkdale—High Park, I regularly visit our two legions: the Royal Canadian Legion, Maple Leaf Branch, which includes the Swansea Branch 46; and the one on the Lakeshore, Branch 344, the Queen's Own Rifles. That is where my dad joined the navy in the war, so it holds a special place in my heart.

However, it is not only in the legions across the country that we find support for our veterans. Certainly, just chatting with neighbours, friends and family, there is tremendous support and respect for our veterans and the work they do. Because they are willing to make a huge sacrifice for the country and for us, we to ensure that we support them when they return.

There has been a lot of friction with the government of late because of the closure of veterans offices, the cutting of personnel and taking veterans to court to deny them the benefits they should be receiving. I know the hon. member personally supports veterans, but does he not see that the government is at odds with veterans because of the cutbacks it has made and challenging the benefits of veterans in courts? Could he answer that for me?

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon: Mr. Speaker, I also visit the long term care facility that is in the member's riding where many veterans spend their days now when they have to be cared for.

I would like to stress that I have a lot of respect for veterans and I always have. I remember my grandfather. I was very young when he passed away. I remember he was missing his right arm. He lost it in the first war. Where I grew up, every family was affected by the Second World War, like families in our country. We should all stress very strongly, especially for my generation and younger generations, for us born after the war, that we have to understand and admit that what we enjoy today, all our freedoms and our great country, we owe to those who went and fought. Someone from almost every family in Canada went to Europe and fought for the freedom that we, who were born after the war, enjoy today.

The hon. member mentioned that there were some service cuts, et cetera. Actually, our government restored some services that had been deeply cut in 1990s by the previous government and we enhanced many services.

The member also mentioned the closure of service centres. We should give the new system, the contact points that have been established at Service Canada, a chance to work, to see if they work for veterans. If they need improvement, we will improve them, but we have to move with life. Things change in life. Technology changes. The way people communicate changes. Therefore, delivery of services also changes. Let us give it a chance.

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However, I think there is no disagreement on any side of the House that we have to support veterans because of their service to all of us and to our country.

• (1710)

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to remind the House that I will be splitting my time with the great member for the beautiful riding of St. John's South—Mount Pearl.

Before I start speaking on today's motion, I want to give a plug for the Royal Canadian Dental Corps. It has supported the Canadian Armed Forces in every major combat, peacekeeping and peace-making mission around the world for the last century, including World War I, World War II, Korea, the Balkans and Afghanistan. Its members have also worked with Kosovo refugees, trained mid-level providers for the Afghan National Army, provided oral health for Haitian earthquake victims and cared for under-served populations in the Pacific and Caribbean on U.S. navy missions.

These men and women have done a great service for our country, and today I would like to congratulate them on behalf of the entire House on the centennial of the Royal Canadian Dental Corps. As of May 13, it will have been in service for over 100 years. On behalf of all of us, I want to thank the Royal Canadian Dental Corps for its outstanding historic service, and for its many years to come.

We are here today to ask one simple question, which is what we do in opposition. We ask the government of the day a particular question. Ironically, this question has taken us all day, and we still have not gotten a confirmed answer. I myself have asked the following question probably 10 times to two different ministers, a prime minister and two different parliamentary secretaries, and even did a press conference on it with no response. We are asking the government a very simple question: Does it or does it not have a social, moral, legal and fiduciary responsibility to care for those it asked to put in harm's way?

It is funny, a former Conservative prime minister, Mr. Borden, once said that the government did. I wonder if the current Conservative Party does as well. However, we will find out soon enough from the votes here.

I will get back to the matter at hand regarding veterans' care.

First of all, I want to congratulate the new minister on his posting. There is no question that there is a different tone now from the previous minister. No offence to the previous minister, but it just was not his cup of tea I guess in this regard, to be completely frank, but it is not entirely his fault. The previous minister was following orders from the PMO and the PCO in how to run his department. However, the reality is, there is a different tone now and we see a different yard mark coming from the current minister.

The previous speaker is also on the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. We did a report that was unanimous. In this House, getting a unanimous report from a committee is almost impossible these days, but we did it. There were 14 recommendations that we all agreed should be done immediately; not tomorrow, not next week, not next year, not piecemeal, but all 14 recommendations should be done immediately.

In fact, three-quarters of those recommendations are now approaching five years in recommendations; not one year, not five months, but five years. Some of these recommendations have come from the Royal Canadian Legion, the gerontological advisory board, the government's own advisory board on Veterans Affairs, ANAVETS and many other veterans and individuals who had come up with these recommendations many years ago. We formulated them into a report, and what do we do get six months to the day of that report?

Well, the previous minister said that we were going to do this in a piecemeal approach. The thing is, he was telling the truth, because Bill C-58 that the government talks about now is dealing with about three or four of those recommendations. We have not had Bill C-58 even come up for debate yet in the House let alone before the committee, let alone before the Senate, let alone before royal assent. The government is telling us to push it forward, but we have not even seen it again yet.

Now if the government is amiable to some alterations and amendments to the bill, I am sure we can get it passed like that, because there are some good elements in that legislation. However, in typical Conservative fashion, it falls woefully inadequate on the recommendations that were in our report.

I want to thank the current veterans ombudsman and the previous ombudsman for the work they have done in advising our committee on many of these things.

Let us go to the history of the Conservative Party. The current minister is the 11th minister we have had in my almost 18 years of service here. The problems with Veterans Affairs and the RCMP and their families did not start with the Conservative Party. They started long before with the Liberal Party. However, these problems have been exacerbated by the current Conservative Party.

• (1715)

Let me take everyone back to a meeting in New Brunswick in 2005 when the current Prime Minister was in opposition and Greg Thompson was a former minister of veterans affairs. When the Liberals were in power, they said in the Agent Orange or chemical spraying in Gagetown debate that they were only going to cover people for Agent Orange in 1966 and 1967, for the one month each time, when the Americans were there. They said that was what they were going to do. The Liberals said that.

Mr. Thompson was brilliant in his advocacy against that. He said there was no way the Liberals could allow that and that the Conservative Party, if it formed government, would never do that. In fact, the current Prime Minister, who was then in opposition, said the exact same thing. At a meeting, he said that all people affected by the chemical spraying in Gagetown from 1958 to 1984 would be looked after and there would be a public inquiry.

What happened in 2006? Those words were out the door. In fact, thousands and thousands of people have died because of the chemical spraying in Gagetown and very little in compensation was offered. I think around 7,000 people actually received what I call a \$20,000 kiss-off. Many people, like Basil McAllister of Burton, New Brunswick, had to fight three VRAB decisions, two court cases over 10 years, to get further compensation for the chemicals that were sprayed on him.

Fortunately, though, people can rest assured that when the NDP forms government in October, we will have a national public inquiry into the chemical spraying in Gagetown. That is unacceptable and that is what we will do.

The money from the offices closed by the government went into advertising during the Stanley Cup playoffs. New Democrats will reverse that. We will not only reopen the offices but make them better than they were before and ensure that many more home visits happen for veterans who may wish to have someone come to their homes and fill out the forms properly. That is what we will do when we form government. In fact, there are many other things that we will do when we form government. Right now, we just have to wait and be patient. Soon it will be time for the Conservatives to find the exit door. I say that with great respect, of course, to my Conservative counterparts.

Let us go back to another promise the Prime Minister made to Joyce Carter of St. Peter's, Cape Breton. He told her in a letter, which he signed, not to worry because when Conservatives form government, as prime minister he would ensure that every single widow or widower of a deceased veteran would receive VIP service, not some of them, not a couple, not from New Brunswick, not from Nova Scotia, not from B.C., all would receive the VIP treatment. What happened? Almost four years after that date, some of them got the VIP treatment, not all of them.

That was another broken promise to the widow of a veteran. If someone can mislead the widow of a veteran, imagine what else that person could do to this country. That means nobody else is safe. It is unconscionable that the Prime Minister could have done that, absolutely unconscionable. She actually even had to come here to get that benefit. Unfortunately, not all of them received it even though it was promised to them.

Just today in the House of Commons the Minister of Veterans Affairs was asked a question. By the way, I should let every Conservative in the House know that every single time I have ever asked a question in the House of Commons, I have always provided the question in advance to the minister. Even though my own party completely dislikes that, I do it out of respect for the position of the minister.

The question was quite clearly about a 78-year-old veteran who served many years in the military, is injured, does not have much to live on, and wishes to enter into Camp Hill veterans hospital, run and administered by the Province of Nova Scotia, as World War II and Korean veterans do now. The province pays a small portion and the Government of Canada, through DVA, pays the rest. Twice now the minister asked whether I have lobbied the province to get him in there. I remind my Conservative colleagues that I have yet to see any

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legislation from anyone that says the care of veterans is a provincial responsibility. It is a federal responsibility.

On behalf of my party, I hope the Conservatives and other parties will join us in supporting this motion because it is critical that we do this. I want to say, in conclusion, that we should never regret growing old because it is a privilege denied to so many.

Lest we forget.

• (1720)

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that it was a pleasure getting my entertainment value from my colleague from the riding of Chicken Little. Every time I listen to this member speak, the sky is falling, things are a mess and nothing ever works.

I would like to ask my friend and colleague a question, because I do have a lot of respect for the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore. He has been here a long time. He has sat here as an opposition member, which he will continue to do after the next election, and he is good at it. He is good at sitting as an opposition member, so why change the course?

He must agree that there have been some significant improvements and that things have gotten better for many veterans and caregivers. This government is trying. We are learning. We are not perfect, and we do hear situations where, sometimes, individuals fall through the cracks. Unfortunately, that is one of the things that frustrates me as a parliamentarian. Nothing is perfect around here, and individual situations do change.

I want to give the member an opportunity to stand now and talk about some of the improvements and benefits that have happened because of the good work of the veterans affairs committee. I want to give kudos for that. The veterans affairs committee members have worked really hard on some of these issues and the review of the veterans charter.

I would like to give the member an opportunity to talk about some of the positive things that have happened.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Speaker, if my hon. colleague from Ontario had understood right from the beginning of my speech, I did say that the yardstick had moved ever so slightly with the new minister and previous ones. There is no question that, since I have been here, there have been slight improvements to the Department of Veterans Affairs. There are many veterans, and I have said this repeatedly not only in the House but right across the country, who receive excellent quality care from the Department of Veterans Affairs, and special kudos go to the individuals who work at DVA to provide that excellent care.

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At the same time, what we have to ask ourselves and the hon. colleague, if he has the chance to stand up again, is why would \$1.13 billion of lapsed spending from 2006 until now go back to the Treasury Board? Many veterans were denied hearing aids. Many veterans were denied VIP. Many veterans were denied other services. That is not us saying that. That is Dennis Manuge having to go to court on the SISIP case. This case could have been settled out of court many years ago.

Yes, there have been improvements, but there is an incredibly long way to go for any member of any government or any party, for that matter, to ensure that all veterans are well looked after, because not one veteran is asking for a Rolex watch or a trip to Florida. They are asking for basic dignity, and that is the minimum that they deserve.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to pick up on the member's comments regarding the issue of advertising. I made reference to this earlier today. Imagine, if we will, veterans who are in regions where outreach or service offices were being closed. At the same time, they tune in to their TV networks and find very partisan political ads to promote the government budget, for example.

Could the member provide some comments regarding the government's priorities when it is closing down services, while at the same time spending literally millions of dollars on self-promoting budget ads that are exceptionally partisan?

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Speaker, it is rather unfortunate that the government would waste taxpayers' dollars on these advertisements, really just to promote the Conservative Party of Canada. However, the reality is that it should be putting that money not just toward veterans' care, but toward our environment, people with disabilities, seniors, students to get a proper education, small business, et cetera. There are a lot of other areas to which the government could have allocated those funds.

Imagine closing offices and using that money for advertising. I think that veterans will be loud and clear come the next election, just like people were in Alberta. An orange wave is coming, and I advise my Conservative counterparts to get ready for it.

• (1725)

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I stand in support of the opposition motion, the New Democratic Party motion. I do not usually read out the whole motion when it is a long one, as it takes up precious speaking time, but I will in this case because I find it hard to believe we are actually debating it, that this subject is actually up for debate in the House of Commons.

The motion reads:

That, in the opinion of the House, a standalone covenant of moral, social, legal, and fiduciary obligation exists between the Canadian people and the government to provide equitable financial compensation and support services to past and active members of the Canadian Armed Forces who have been injured, disabled or have died as a result of military service, and to their dependents, which the government is obligated to fulfil.

It is hard to believe that we have to dedicate an opposition day, that we have to dedicate a day to debate what should be a no-brainer, what should be common sense, common Canadian sense.

Our veterans stood on guard for us. They stood on guard for Canada. Our veterans stood on guard for democracy. They stood on guard around the world in conflict zones like Iraq, Afghanistan, Bosnia, and Libya. They stood on guard for us in humanitarian missions like Haiti, after the earthquake in January 2010, and in Newfoundland and Labrador, after Hurricane Igor that same year.

Our veterans stood on guard for us, and we must stand on guard for them. That is the essence of the sacred covenant that exists between the Government of Canada and our Armed Forces. Our responsibility, our duty, is to be there for soldiers and veterans in their moment of need, not to abandon them to budget and service cuts. I call that the ultimate insult. Too many give the ultimate sacrifice and the government gives the ultimate insult.

There have been too many examples where the Conservative government has failed to stand on guard for our veterans.

The NDP MP for Sackville—Eastern Shore, Nova Scotia, who just spoke, this party's veterans affairs critic—and an outstanding critic he is—has a quotation on his office door by a U.S. senator, "If you can't afford to take care of your veterans, then don't go to war".

The Conservative government has not been taking care of our veterans. It was not taking care of our veterans when it closed nine Veterans Affairs offices across Canada, including one in Corner Brook, Newfoundland, my home province.

I was told just today of a Newfoundland veteran who served in Bosnia. He had to drive eight hours from Corner Brook, his home, to St. John's, the closest office, so that the staff there could start a profile on him. He drove for eight hours across the island of Newfoundland.

The Conservative government was not taking care of veterans when it cut 23% of the Veterans Affairs workforce, or 900 jobs, since 2009. The Conservative government certainly was not taking care of veterans when it spent more than \$700,000 fighting Afghan veterans in court to deny the existence of the social covenant I mentioned a moment ago.

Lawyers for the government have argued that it has no obligation or social contract with veterans. Those same lawyers also argued that is unfair to bind the government to promises made nearly a century ago by another prime minister.

That social contract was struck in 1917 by then Conservative prime minister Robert Borden:

The government and the country will consider it their first duty to see that a proper appreciation of your effort and of your courage is brought to the notice of people at home that no man, whether he goes back or whether he remains in Flanders, will have just cause to reproach the government for having broken faith with the men who won and the men who died.

Not only has the Conservative government failed to take care of our veterans, to respect that sacred covenant, but it has also been playing the worst sort of politics, the sort of politics that rots faith in our political system.

• (1730)

The latest massive omnibus bill, Bill C-59, is the budget implementation bill. It is 167 pages, which is short by omnibus standards, and it obviously includes measures on the budget. That is the same boutique budget that we will be voting against because it would cater to the wealthy, among other reasons. It would put the needs of the more affluent and more influential people first. However, Bill C-59 contains much more than this year's budget measures. The bill touches on almost two dozen other bills, from the federal balanced budget act and the prevention of terrorist travel act to public service sick leave and Canadian Labour Code changes.

The Conservatives have also cynically included provisions to assist veterans in that omnibus bill. They do this all the time. Such a move will force opposition parties who support those measures to help veterans to vote against the bill and then—and you can take this to the bank, Mr. Speaker—the Conservatives will throw in our faces that we voted against veterans. That is the kind of government we have in power, a government that is morally spent. I can definitely get much more creative, but I do not want to cross the parliamentary line. After nine years of Conservative government, too many veterans and their families cannot access adequate health care, pensions, and other vital supports.

I had a conversation just this morning with Jamie MacWhirter. He is a Newfoundlander and he is also a veteran. Jamie MacWhirter survived a seven-month tour in Afghanistan's most volatile war zones. He survived. He drove a refuelling truck loaded with 10,000 litres of diesel. His nickname was Fireball, for obvious reasons. Near misses for Jamie included rocket attacks, the horror of a suicide bombing that killed several children, fire fights, and roadside bombs. Jamie MacWhirter survived Afghanistan in one piece only to battle a different type of nightmare back here in Canada in Newfoundland and Labrador. Jamie MacWhirter has post-traumatic stress disorder, and the battle here at home was, and still is, for help.

Jamie MacWhirter says there is some help for veterans, some services available, but too often veterans do not know about them. Too often soldiers are afraid to speak out for fear of being kicked out of the military. They are afraid to ask for help. Soldiers do not feel safe in asking for help. When they do, too often the help is not there.

Jamie MacWhirter and others have formed a support group, PTSD Buddies, to help people with post-traumatic stress disorder, to help them share experiences, and to lean on one another for support. Veterans should lean on one another. It is good that they are coming together to support one another. That is what the best kind of soldiers do. However, veterans should also be able to lean on their own government.

I mentioned earlier that the Conservative government is fighting Afghanistan vets in court to deny the existence of the social covenant. Those vets are in a group called the Equitas Society. That group states:

Business of Supply

A veteran, whether regular or reserve, active or retired, is someone who, at one point in their life, wrote a blank cheque made payable to "the Government of Canada," for an amount of "up to and including their life."

One hundred and fifty-eight Canadians were killed in combat in Afghanistan. I say this with great respect for their families, for the loved ones they left behind. Even more personnel, an estimated 160, have died from suicide since returning home from Afghanistan.

• (1735)

The Government of Canada has a sacred obligation as the holder of that blank cheque to stand and deliver, to stand on guard for the men and women of our forces when they ask for help.

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hypocrisy from the member opposite is almost too much to bear, but I steeled myself and listened to it.

The NDP has a very strong anti-military history, and this phony concern for veterans shines through and through. New Democrats have never supported any military action to defend democracy anywhere around the world, including the fight against ISIS. Shamefully, they are opposing Canada's participation in protecting and defending western democracies.

That anti-military legacy started with the founder of their party, J. S. Woodsworth, who actually opposed Canada's participation in the Second World War. Imagine what the world would have been like if his advice had been followed? Vladimir Lenin called the western left "useful idiots" for keeping him in power.

Why is the NDP so anti-military and not willing to protect and defend democracy?

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Mr. Speaker, usually when I get asked a question after a speech, I thank the hon. member, but I am not going to thank the hon. member. Too often what he says in the House of Commons either makes no sense or is just an affront to everything I hold dear about the House.

One of the things the hon. member just said was that the hypocrisy is too much to bear, and he talked about how New Democrats never support a military action. I can say this from the perspective of a Newfoundlander and Labradorian. I am a Newfoundlander, and we have had more Newfoundlanders per capita serve in the Canadian Navy and the Canadian military than any other province or territory in this country.

Winston Churchill in the Second World War called Newfoundlanders "the best small boat men in the world". He was right. We are that. Newfoundland and Labrador have given more than our share to military conflicts. Hypocrisy—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Questions and comments, the hon. member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor.

Business of Supply

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-sor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will not comment on the exchange I just heard, but I also would like to offer a quote into this debate that my hon. colleague the member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl brought up, from Jamie MacWhirter from PTSD Buddies. There have been several in the group and they have been very proactive in the media, for reasons that are obvious. I want to quote him when he said, "So I thought if I could just get these people together we would all learn from each other and move forward with our lives".

Anyone suffering from distress will use that method to get the same people together, talk about how they are coping with it, share best practices, and so on and so forth. I agree with that, but what has happened here is that the offices have been closed, these offices that have the capacity to deal with these people. They are on the front lines, if I could use that term, for people like Jamie MacWhirter and PTSD Buddies. I would like my colleague to comment on how much more difficult it is that these specialized services have disappeared, especially in Newfoundland and Labrador and particularly the office in Comer Brook.

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the question, and I mean honourable when I say that.

In terms of the new group, PTSD Buddies, which has formed in Newfoundland, a group made up of veterans who come together to support each other, what they are doing is fabulous. Veterans should be able to lean on each other.

One of the central points in my speech is that, besides leaning on each other, they should also be able to lean on the Government of Canada. However, too often, and I gave numerous examples in my speech, they cannot rely on and cannot lean on the Government of Canada.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will try to be brief. I have personally suffered from PTSD for over 40 years. I was a signal maintainer on the railway and I witnessed four accidents in which people driving cars were hit, and they and the car were completely destroyed. For 40 years I have had dreams about this. It was back in a time where this was not a diagnosed illness for anyone.

It is just unacceptable that our young men, who go into war and do horrible things because they have to in war, come home and do not have the support and have to band together because the government has failed them.

I want to thank the member for putting this motion forward to have this discussion, because there is nothing worse than to live with this by oneself.

• (1740)

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Mr. Speaker, I would also like to thank the hon. member on this side for putting the motion forward.

The fact that we had to debate this issue shows that there is something wrong. The fact that the Conservative government is likely to vote against this motion shows that we have something wrong. Hopefully the Conservatives will vote for it. Hopefully they will not vote against it.

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is an excellent time to have this debate on this very topical member's motion.

In response to my hon. colleague from St. John's South—Mount Pearl, we have already said we are supporting the motion, so let us put that aside.

I would like to take a little bit of time to be as factual as I can and as non-partisan as I can and lay out on the table what is actually happening in the Veterans Affairs world.

I am a veteran. I have had the pleasure of serving in the Canadian Armed Forces alongside some of Canada's finest. The hon. Minister of Veterans Affairs is also a veteran. That is one of the many reasons his understanding and depth of knowledge in these matters is second to none. He understands the challenges of the military lifestyle and he knows first-hand how positive these changes at Veterans Affairs Canada will be for our men and women in uniform. I am glad to see more veterans being elected to this House, and hopefully more will be elected in October.

Veterans will get the services they need, and they will get them when they need them. The minister has clearly communicated with Canadians that how we serve and care for our veterans is a priority for this government and that veterans and their families will continue to get the support they need and deserve.

Our government has always supported veterans, and in doing so, we often see veterans join our team. One of these fine veterans is a man named Tim Laidler, who is now a candidate for us in British Columbia. We look forward to having him on the team.

Historically, the support from the government for veterans is based upon the Pension Act, which was first introduced in 1919 as assistance for soldiers returning from a war that is now a century old. As time evolved, different conflicts arose and our armed forces faced new challenges.

We cannot forecast all these things. In 1938, did we understand that we would have hundreds of thousand of World War II veterans? In 1949, did we understand that we would have thousands of Korean War veterans? In 2000, did we understand that we would have thousands of Afghan veterans? Tomorrow, or ten years down the road, will we be saying the same thing about some other conflict?

Veterans needs change, and we have to adapt with that. It is our responsibility to adapt and apply new laws and legislation that better address the needs of today's veterans while not forgetting the needs of our traditional veterans. There are almost 60,000 Second World War veterans still with us.

The Liberals' new veterans charter was designed from 1999 to 2005, culminating with its introduction and passage in Parliament in a single day. It has been said that the new veterans charter represented a new social contract with Canadian veterans.

We are all aware that the new veterans charter required some practical tuning. The government has taken on those challenges. Arguably, it could have been done faster. As with all governments, that is an easy charge to make, and frankly, I wish we could have done things faster.

Business of Supply

The fundamental concept behind the new veterans charter is based on the wellness and rehabilitation of our injured veterans and ultimately their transition back to civilian life. It is not intended to provide lifelong financial dependence unless that is the only option. It is all about getting the veterans and their families rehabilitated and back to a life of their own choice and under their own control.

It works alongside other benefits and programs from the Government of Canada, such as the service income security insurance plan, and ensures that military personnel who are seriously injured while on duty will see an increase in overall compensation the moment they leave the forces.

Our government has applied many changes that work to benefit veterans and their families, such as adding new monthly benefits so that veterans are not just receiving a single payment if they are seriously injured. We have also changed the single payment or lump sum so that veterans can break it out into smaller payments spread out in any way they like.

We also realize that the system is far too complex, like any system that has evolved over many decades. There was one payment for this situation and another for that. There were these forms and those forms. It does get very complicated. We are trying very hard to simplify that and cut through the red tape.

Qualifying veterans now have access to five different monthly payments in addition to the lump sum. It was said that a lump sum would kick them to the curb; that could not be further from the truth. Those who are seriously injured and need the help will get it in the form of the earnings lost benefit while they are in rehabilitation. They will get it, and that goes till age 65. That has now been added to by the retirement income security benefit, which now extends that benefit for life. We might call that a pension.

They are also compensated monthly with the permanent impairment allowance, and for those more seriously injured, the permanent impairment allowance supplement. Those go for life. We might call those a pension.

Also, for the worst off, there is the Canadian Forces income support, and I have already mentioned that we are adding the retirement income security benefit.

● (1745)

Over the coming months we will be examining options for consolidating all veterans' benefits so we can provide those veterans who need it the most with a single monthly payment. They would get all those things I just talked about but instead of five payments showing up in their bank account, they would get one. They will still get a breakout as to where it comes from, but this simplifies the process and cuts down the red tape and confusion.

We have vastly increased post-secondary training, allowing veterans to benefit from two distinct retraining programs, one with DND, another with Veterans Affairs, as they transition from the Canadian Armed Forces. One of these benefits from Veterans Affairs Canada is a retraining allowance of \$75,800 to do post-secondary training. We have loosened up all the restrictions on that. It is extremely flexible, even to the point where if the veteran cannot use it, the veteran's spouse can. Therefore, the family unit can make progress and get back to a life under its control.

We have also worked with and listened to many of the veteran stakeholder groups, the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs and the Veterans Ombudsman. The Veterans Ombudsman and the Canadian Forces Ombudsman are now working hand and glove on all matters.

At the veterans affairs committee, we sat through dozens of meetings and met dozens of witnesses. Certain items were identified that needed fixing. Between the measures already taken as a result of the recommendations, every one of which was acted on, contrary to some things members might hear, and the introduction of Bill C-58, which is now a key component of our budget implementation bill, our government has addressed each and every one of those items and each and every one of the recommendations in that report, specifically compensation after age 65 for our most seriously injured veterans. I mentioned that the earnings loss benefit and rehabilitation goes to age 65. That was the cut off. We have now extended it under the retirement income security benefit for life. Add to that the permanent impairment allowance and the permanent impairment allowance supplement for life. Together, those are pretty nice pensions.

We have addressed the disparity in benefits between reserve and regular force veterans. If a reservist goes to Afghanistan and gets a leg blown off, it does not just affect the reservist's career if he or she stays in the reserves, it would obviously affect his or her life career, whatever that happens to be. Therefore, it only made sense that those two soldiers be treated equally. That is now the case.

We have addressed the problem that there were too few supports for family members of our seriously injured veterans. We have extended more of those benefits to them because when soldiers suffer, and I use the word "soldier" as a generic term, meaning army, navy or air force, for whatever reason, the families suffer, so we have to address the family unit because that is what needs to be fixed.

We have introduced post-65 support for survivors and widows of veterans who had died either in service or from a service-related injury. That is an important change. I know a number of the widows of the Afghanistan soldiers who died who are very pleased with that.

We have created compensation for veterans who are seriously injured but who may also completely recover after years of hospital rehabilitation treatment. At the end of the day, they may not need a big lump sum but they certainly need something to compensate for the pain and suffering while they are going through that treatment process, whether they are recovering from surgery or whatever it might be. Therefore, we introduced the new critical injury benefit, which is a tax-free amount of \$70,000 and is immediate and upfront.

Business of Supply

We have introduced important new supports for the families of Canadian veterans. We understand that those who stand beside our veterans play a key role in helping them successfully transition to civilian life. If the family member is not in good condition to help the member, then the family unit will not work.

We are making real and significant progress.

This government is also committed to closing the seam between Veterans Affairs Canada and the Canadian Armed Forces. When many veterans leave they have become lost in the gap between DND and VAC, and that is changing rapidly now. They are out there not as a soldier anymore but not holding hands with VAC yet, maybe because they have not come forward or they do not understand what is available because they have not seen the advertising that was put out there to tell them what is available so they can get those services. They tend to fall through a gap sometimes.

What this means is that our legislation includes new authorities allowing Veterans Affairs to evaluate the applications of veterans while they are still serving in the Canadian Armed Forces, before they even become a veteran.

Each year, 5,000 to 6,000 men and women retire from the military to civilian life. That adds some highly qualified and character-rich civilians to help Canada prosper in all the ways that they do. About 1,200 of those people are medical releases. Unfortunately, the majority of retiring members present their case to Veterans Affairs only after leaving life in uniform. That is changing. The average time spent before they are released medically is between three and five years. During that time frame, they are being evaluated, they are going to rehab and they are also getting paid 100% of their military salary whether they are doing a military job or not.

● (1750)

Some of these delays in seeking programs create an uneasy transition for veterans and their families alike. Some get lost in the transition. However, what is happening is that the Department of National Defence and Veterans Affairs are holding hands all the way through the process. The soldier, before he becomes a veteran, will be dealing with Veterans Affairs so that when he leaves, there is no gap. It is a seamless transition.

I am pleased to say that we have also taken concrete steps to support a veteran's transition to civilian life in other ways. We are ensuring that contact between medically releasing members and Veterans Affairs is made at the earliest point possible, long before the member actually walks out the door of the Canadian Forces and becomes a veteran.

We are ensuring that rehabilitation professionals are identified as early in the transition process as possible and where the veteran intends to reside after his or her medical release.

The benefits the veteran expects to get will be adjudicated before he or she leaves the Canadian Armed Forces. Again, it would be a seamless transition, so when the soldier becomes a veteran, everything is already there.

More money is going into research to better understand the transition from military to civilian life, to guide suicide prevention activities, to improve the recognition, diagnosis, and treatment of

mental illness in veterans, and to support the development of national standards and a certification process for psychiatric service dogs, to name just a few.

Extending more psychological counselling to families of veterans is also important. That includes parents and children. By the end of the year, an established network of 26 operational stress injury clinics will be there to support the needs of veterans.

There is also a four-year pilot project to increase access to military family resource centres and related services in seven locations. Traditionally, the services and programs offered through these centres have been available only to still serving members of the military and their families. This is a tremendous resource. I have seen it in action often. It gives them access to a wide range of services to help address their needs as they transition to civilian life. Those services will now be available to veterans and their families.

All of this work builds on progress made by our government to improve benefits and support for Canadian veterans.

There is always more to do, and there always will be more that we will be trying to do. However, the key word is progress, and that is what we are making. The government continues to demonstrate true appreciation for veterans and their families. The key components are care, compassion, and respect.

As we continue to improve the way we care for veterans and their families, we do so with three objectives in mind. First is to have a veteran-centric approach to everything we do. Everything has to be about the veterans and their families. Second is to facilitate a successful transition from military service to civilian life by closing the seam between the Canadian Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs. Third is to strive for excellence and make access to services easier by reducing red tape and eliminating administrative burdens.

The Minister of Veterans Affairs has reached out and listened to veterans organizations and advocates. He has established and maintained an open dialogue that continues to grow and is a continuous source of knowledge and inspiration. Recently he had a very successful stakeholder summit.

We will continue to focus on our Canadian Armed Forces members and our veterans and to adapt and improve our service to them. That is why in addition to the new measures introduced we are putting more resources where they are needed to ensure service excellence. Case managers offer the front-line service that is critically important to veterans. My own niece, Beverly Martin, is one of the leading case managers in the western part of the country.

Business of Supply

The minister has taken action and announced last month that more than 100 permanent, full-time case managers will be hired to improve one-on-one service. Effectively, veterans' needs will be addressed more quickly and efficiently. We know that, and we are taking action. The target is an optimal 30 case-managed veterans for each case manager. Better service and flexibility will allow better access to the services needed by veterans as a result.

Our government also committed the financial resources for the department to hire more than 100 new disability benefits staff, both temporary and permanent. That means that veterans and their families will have faster access to disability benefits, health care, and mental health treatment.

Our government is striving for service excellence and to ensure that veterans are treated with care, compassion, and respect. We are evaluating options for considering consolidating all Veterans Affairs benefits into one single, clear, and easy-to-understand benefits system. One might call it a pension. The goal is to reduce stress on the injured soldiers as they transition to civilian life. We understand that any administrative process that serves to delay or complicate support needs to be fixed quickly.

Even more importantly, if an administrative hurdle or form actually goes so far as to impact the overall wellness of a veteran, there is something seriously wrong, because everything VAC is structured to do is to help ease the burden of transition for a veteran after a service injury.

Speaking of forms, that has come up. I have a form that has been questioned. It is called "Medical Questionnaire: Activities of Daily Living".

- (1755)

That form is 11 pages long, and it is a little bit complex, but it is designed for every veteran who is receiving benefits. The whole form is designed to ensure that the member's condition is still there and that the services and benefits that they are receiving are still relevant. If they are not, it ensures that changes are made so that they are improved. The whole form is all about making sure that the veteran is getting the service that he or she needs, and nothing else.

It is understandable why someone with PTSD might read something into some of the questions, but nowhere on that form does it say anything about missing limbs.

Our government also took action, and last year announced the addition of a new operational stress injury clinic in Halifax. There is also a network, that I think I mentioned, of 26 operational stress injury clinics across Canada, and they will be expanded to speed up access for mental health services for those with mental health conditions. These clinics play a key role in providing specialized assessment, diagnosis and treatment services for veterans and their families who are living with operational stress injuries.

These and many more actions are being taken to improve the programs, benefits and services that Canada's veterans and their families need and deserve. I urge all members of the NDP and the House to support the measures included in the support for veterans and their families act and in the economic action plan. We are committed to ensuring that veterans and their families have the

support and services that they need. Under our government, benefits for veterans have gone in one direction, which is up.

The other thing that has come up a number of times is the lapsed funds, which shows a deliberate misunderstanding, because I know that they understand how it works. Those who have been in government certainly understand how it works. It shows a deliberate representation that is not accurate.

Funds for the Department of Veterans Affairs or any other department are allocated through authorizations. Those funds are forecast. If we need more in any department, we go back and ask for more. If we forecast something and we need less, it is often because the demand is not there. All of these programs are demand driven. If there is a demand, the funds will be spent without question. If the demand is not there, we are not taking funds away from something that could have been done. The demand was not there. If it had been there, it would have been met. Consider it a line of credit. At the beginning of the year, we fill up the line of credit. At the end of the year, if we have not used it all, the line of credit goes back and it gets re-issued again next year.

We are not talking about \$1.3 billion that has gone to somebody else. That is simply not true. Anybody over there who has been in government knows that, or should know that. If the demand is there, it does get met.

We also understand that the needs of veterans are changing. As new conflicts arise around the globe, as the previous generation comes to retirement age, and as the nature of treating injuries becomes ever more sophisticated, so too must the support provided to veterans be enhanced, especially for those who have been injured in the course of service. Before tabling the support for veterans and their families act, we consulted with veterans and their families in communities across Canada on the best ways to support them and to support those who bravely served our nation through the years.

As a member of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, I do know first-hand that all of the veterans affairs experts were consulted prior to developing the new veterans charter moving forward. These are supports that the members in the House have called for, including the NDP, and rightly so. These are supports that the Veterans Ombudsman has called for. These are supports that veterans and their families have called for. We have responded and we understand that there will still always be more that we need to do, because we want to adapt to changes as they come about.

Business of Supply

The increased benefits that we recently announced are evidence of our commitment to ensuring that Canadian veterans and their families are treated with care, compassion and respect. We know that there is an obligation. It has been recognized as far back as by Conservative Prime Minister Robert Borden, but we are not frozen in time. Every single government from Robert Borden on has tried its very best to honour that obligation. In fact, our government tabled support for the support for veterans and their families act, which included the following purpose written in the act:

The purpose of this Act is to recognize and fulfill the obligation of the people and Government of Canada to show just and due appreciation to members and veterans for their service to Canada. This obligation includes providing services, assistance and compensation to members and veterans who have been injured or have died as a result of military service and extends to their spouses or common-law partners or survivors and orphans. This Act shall be liberally interpreted so that the recognized obligation may be fulfilled.

This purpose, coupled with our strong action in support of veterans and their families, shows that we do understand the value and importance of providing those who have served our country with the support that they need and deserve. I am heartened by the new team at the Department of Veterans Affairs, many of whom are veterans, including the minister, the parliamentary secretary, the deputy minister and many others in critical positions.

• (1800)

It is not time to play politics, but I know that is inevitable in this place. I urge the NDP and all members of the House to work with us for the health and well-being of Canada's veterans and their families. The Conservatives are supporting this motion, even though we know it is intended to be political, we know it is intended to wedge us, but we support it because it is the right thing to do and, in fact, it is what we are already doing.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question to the parliamentary secretary is simply this. Does that mean you are going to open up the Windsor office again?

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, I will point out that I am not a parliamentary secretary anymore. To save you the trouble, I will advise him to ask the question through you and not directly to a member.

All of that aside, no, it does not mean we are going to open up the Windsor office. I was on the deficit reduction action plan cabinet committee at Treasury Board that did this process. We looked at every way in every major department that we could be more efficient. Yes, that meant saving some money, but it also meant being more efficient. We looked at the workload of various areas. The nine places that were closed had, in fact, a relatively low user rate.

In fact, several departments, National Defence, for example, took a full 10% cut. Veterans Affairs took the smallest cut of any, other than maybe aboriginal affairs, in the neighbourhood of about 1.9%. All of the cuts were designed to look at areas that provided more efficiency and better bang for the buck so we could focus on those who needed us most, the most seriously injured veterans.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Veterans Ombudsman Guy Parent made a presentation at committee on veterans affairs back on April 23. In his report to committee members, he stated:

The recent announcements by the Minister of Veterans Affairs are narrowing the gap in areas of the New Veterans Charter that you identified in your June 2014 report, *The New Veterans Charter: Moving Forward*.

However, he indicated:

The announced changes do not encompass all that is needed for Veterans, but they have kick started the renewal process...

Would the member not agree that the ombudsman is right in his assessment and that the government could have done more in dealing with this issue?

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, I will point out for my hon. colleague that comment was made in April. The ombudsman was quite right, that there were many things that we needed to do more of, and we did. Whenever we have this discussion, opposition members always point out one side of what someone like the ombudsman or the Auditor General has said. They never report the other side. He also reported there were a lot of good things, and my hon. colleague did allude to that.

This was in April. The report was tabled in June and had 14 very substantive recommendations that did go to the things about which the ombudsman talked. As I have said countless times, there is always more we want to do. We made a tremendous amount of progress under the current Minister of Veterans Affairs and his new team. We know there will always be more to do.

We are taking this in chunks and, frankly, we are taking it in pretty big chunks right now. We have made a lot of progress and we will continue to do that with the help of dedicated people like the Veterans Ombudsman, who is holding hands, literally almost, with the Canadian Forces Ombudsman.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with a few more months remaining in this Parliament, the hon. member for Edmonton Centre is a privy councillor and has been in the House of Commons since 2006, after a 30-year career in the Canadian Armed Forces. Because he is not running in the next election, this may be one of his last major interventions in the House on veterans. I can assure all of my colleagues here that there has not been a stronger champion for the military and veterans in the last generation than the member of Parliament for Edmonton Centre. It is also his birthday. I will not use this question and comment to ask him his age, because that might be why he is retiring. I am the younger navigator version of the RCAF caucus.

Business of Supply

My question is about the 1,200 men and women who were medically released from the Canadian Armed Forces. In his experience, the veterans charter focuses on transition. The best post-military career for these people is a new career if their military career was cut short because of injury. With up to \$76,000 potentially being spent transitioning, has he not seen the benefit of a veterans charter working for those injured veterans, particularly with the improvements we have made through Bill C-58?

• (1805)

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. navigator colleague for the question. I will just say that I will never be 67 again.

With respect to the member's question, it is absolutely true. If financial dependence is the only thing left for a veteran, then we have to be there, but people want to work. They want to have a life. They want to have some satisfaction, some self-respect, some purpose in life. I cannot think of veteran I have talked to, and I have talked to many veterans, who have said that, no, they just want to be paid and sit at home. They do not want to do that. That are not the kind of people they are.

These are the kind of people who joined the military to do something, to make a difference, and they have and will continue to do that. However, if that gets taken away from them for reasons completely beyond their control, we have to do everything we can to give them something else, another profession, another life, another purpose, so they can transition and have the satisfaction that every family deserves, whatever profession they are in.

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to wish my hon. colleague across the aisle a happy birthday, and I would also like to ask him a question.

I brought this motion forward because I have heard from many veterans across the country who have been utterly frustrated with getting the support and services they have been trying to get for themselves or their families for their care. There have been many veterans who have been denied support and they are speaking out. It takes a lot for them, as the member alluded to, for this group to speak out. However, many have been so frustrated that they are in fact speaking out.

I asked the minister this question earlier, but he did not answer it. I ask the question because the member did indicate he will support this motion. My question then is: What does that mean for the class action lawsuit? Will he encourage the government to settle the class action lawsuit with Equitas? That is what is really behind this. I would like to hear my hon. colleague's comment on that.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, it is a good question, but I am not in a position to answer it. This is something that is before the courts, and I would not be qualified to speak on that anyway even if I wanted to.

The fact is, through Bill C-58, through the statement of purpose, we are acknowledging the sacred obligation, which we have always tried to fulfill, as has every government before us, Liberal and Conservative alike, tried to fulfill. It is wrapped up in some legal nuances and details that defy logic sometimes to a non-legal mind.

I will say that veterans are never shy to speak up. I do not know any veteran who is shy to speak up, but I have vocally sympathized with some of their frustrations. That is why we have been working so darn hard to fix that. We have not fixed everything, we will probably never fix everything, and it is always going to be a work in progress, but we have made huge strides. For most of the folks who are in that situation now, please come back and let us have another talk, because there is a new team in town.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I just want to thank my colleague for his speech. We were both elected in 2006 and we are both from Alberta. I just want to say that I hope this is not the last speech I hear from him, but if it is, it was a wonderful speech. I was glad to sit behind him as he delivered it. He has been an absolutely wonderful colleague. He has been very helpful to me in my role as the member of Parliament for Wetaskiwin, which is just down the road south of Edmonton. He has come out several times to meet with veterans and so on in my constituency.

The question I have for the member is on a concern that we do sense in the room from time to time in that there is a bit of a cultural issue within Veterans Affairs Canada. It is a difficult organization. It is accountable to Treasury Board and accountable for the finances to the taxpayers of Canada.

Does my hon. colleague think that the services that are being provided by Veterans Affairs now are more fulsome and comprehensive than they were when we first showed up as members of Parliament in 2006? Is he satisfied that, for any of the veterans not receiving the benefits, there are enough mechanisms in place to make sure that every veteran who deserves benefits is receiving them?

• (1810)

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, there is absolutely no question that what is available today to veterans is vastly more comprehensive, broader, deeper and affects families to a much greater extent. All around, it is a hugely better package, and it has been acknowledged for that. Even the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore has said that there is more in the new veterans charter than there was before, and we have improved on that very substantially in the last couple of years, and we are going to continue to do that.

It is always going to be a work in progress, as I said. With that many clients, there will always be some who seem to fall through the cracks. We may drop the odd ball, but we are going to try very hard to pick it up on the first bounce.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before we resume debate, I will let the hon. member for Windsor West know that there are about two and a half minutes remaining in the time provided for government orders today. We will get him started.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Windsor West.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak here today to a very important motion. The first thing I want to address is the rhetoric that has come across from that stream over there. I listened today very intently to what the members said and what they projected back on us, saying that the NDP is not supportive and is actually anti-military in terms of how we approach things.

Business of Supply

My grandfather, John Clifford Addison, died on the HMS *Scorpion*. My grandmother was lucky enough to survive the bombing raids of London and to marry Fred Attwood, who came back after serving in the merchant marines and the Royal Navy and raised me as his grandson. I will not take any lessons from any of them about being anti-military. I grew up listening at the kitchen table to stories of what he and his mates went through.

I cannot understand the divisive rhetoric coming from that group over there. I was really shocked to hear, when I asked the question about opening up the Windsor office, which is in the motion about opening offices, that they are going to vote for this motion, but they will not open the offices again. That is a shame.

When we add up the closure of the offices, it saves less than \$6 million. What did the Conservatives spend on advertising for Keystone in Washington alone? They spent \$26 million. The money in our offices kept those buildings open, served our veterans, employed people, and made sure that people got care. What did Washington advertising do? It did nothing. It only irritated our neighbours and our friends. However, what it did do was leave an impression with Canadians, and I hope they listen to this now. It is about choices: \$26 million in Washington, or less than \$6 million to employ people in Canada to serve our veterans and keep our offices open. That is what we should have been doing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. It being 6:15 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the business of supply.

The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

• (1815)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: Mr. Speaker, we request that the division be deferred until tomorrow, May 12, 2015, at the expiry of the time provided for government orders.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Accordingly, the vote is deferred until tomorrow at the end of government orders or just before the period set aside for private members' business.

I see the hon. member for Northumberland—Quinte West rising.

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think if you seek it, you will see unanimous support for seeing the clock at 6:30.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

OPPOSITION MOTION—FEMININE HYGIENE PRODUCTS

The House resumed from May 8 consideration of the motion

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion of the member for London—Fanshawe, relating to the business of supply.

Call in the members.

• (1840)

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

(*Division No. 400*)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy	Adler
Aglukkaq	Albas
Albrecht	Alexander
Allen (Welland)	Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Allison	Ambler
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	Andrews
Angus	Armstrong
Ashton	Aspin
Atamanenko	Aubin
Ayala	Barlow
Bateman	Bélanger
Bellavance	Bennett
Benoit	Benskin
Bergen	Bernier
Bezan	Blanchette
Blanchette-Lamothe	Blaney
Block	Boivin
Borg	Boughen
Boutin-Sweet	Brahmi
Braid	Breitkreuz
Brousseau	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Bruinooogee
Butt	Calandra
Calkins	Cannan
Carmichael	Caron
Carrie	Casey
Cash	Charlton
Chicoine	Chisholm
Chisu	Chong
Choquette	Christopherson
Clarke	Cleary
Clement	Comartin
Côté	Crockatt
Crowder	Cullen
Cuzner	Daniel
Davidson	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Davies (Vancouver East)	Day
Dechert	Devolin
Dewar	Dion
Dionne Labelle	Donnelly
Doré Lefebvre	Dreeshen
Dubourg	Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Dusseault
Dykstra	Easter
Eglski	Eyking
Falk	Fantino
Fast	Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Fletcher
Foote	Freeman
Fry	Galipeau



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

This is Exhibit "G" referred to in
the affidavit of JIM SCOTT
sworn before me at VANCOUVER
this 12 day of JUNE 2016
[Signature]
A Commissioner for taking Affidavits
for British Columbia

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 147 • NUMBER 212 • 2nd SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, May 12, 2015

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

Business of Supply

PIPEDA has been in force since 2001. Concerns about the protection of children's online privacy were raised with Parliament in 2007 during the first statutory review of this act. There was general consensus among witnesses that children warrant extra privacy protection, given their particular vulnerability to deceptive and privacy-invasive practices. Indeed, at the conclusion of its review of the act, Parliament recommended that the government examine the issue of consent by minors to determine if PIPEDA should be amended.

• (1725)

Our government heard stakeholder concerns and is responding to the recommendations of committee by introducing enhanced protection for the privacy of minors that is now before the House. This is an important amendment, and along with all other measures in this bill, it should be passed quickly.

The digital privacy act takes real and tangible steps to protect society's most vulnerable individuals. I hope hon. members will join me in supporting this bill so that these new protections can come into force quickly.

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the speech by the hon. member, who, if I am not mistaken, is also a member of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology.

The government seems to be in a hurry to move forward with this bill. However, we still have some concerns about privacy protection. The Privacy Commissioner raised those concerns.

Can the hon. member elaborate on how this bill will really protect the privacy and communications of Canadians who communicate honestly and in good faith? Does this bill contain measures that will really protect Canadians' privacy?

[English]

Mr. John Carmichael: Mr. Speaker, the committee heard many witnesses. They provided views and testimony from both sides of the spectrum.

It is important to note, as per my colleague's question, that the digital privacy act would require organizations to tell Canadians if their personal information has been lost or stolen. As well, heavy fines of up to \$100,000 would be imposed on companies that deliberately break the rules. The legislation would place strict limits on the type of personal information companies can disclose; establish new rules to protect the privacy of vulnerable Canadians, particularly children, as I just discussed; provide provisions to protect seniors from financial abuse, something we have spoken about extensively this afternoon; include measures to allow the use of information to help find missing children; and give the Privacy Commissioner of Canada more power to enforce the law and help hold offenders to account.

Bill S-4 meets those objectives more than adequately.

• (1730)

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—CARE FOR VETERANS

The House resumed from May 11 consideration of the motion.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion of the hon. member for New Westminster—Coquitlam relating to the business of supply.

Call in the members.

• (1810)

[English]

And the Clerk having announced the results of the vote:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster on a point of order.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as you know, the practice in this House is that we stand and we vote in our seats. The Minister of National Defence is not in his seat. He is in the seat of the Minister of Industry. That is a practice that is a long-standing parliamentary tradition, and since he was not in his seat, I would ask you, Mr. Speaker, to rule on the matter.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order. I thank the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster for bringing this to the attention of the House. As is customarily the case when members are standing in their place to vote, I note that the hon. Minister of Defence essentially is normally seated immediately next to the hon. Minister of Industry, and when members are standing in their place, they are essentially in the same place as where their seat is. The fact that the Minister of Defence happens to be sitting in a different chair at the moment I do not know necessarily negates the fact that he was essentially standing in his place at the time of the vote, and therefore his vote would count.

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

(Division No. 402)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy	Adler
Aglukkaq	Albas
Albrecht	Alexander
Allen (Welland)	Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Allison	Ambler
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	Angus
Armstrong	Ashfield
Ashton	Aspin
Atamanenko	Aubin
Ayala	Barlow
Bateman	Bélanger
Bellavance	Bennett
Benoit	Benskin
Bergen	Bernier
Bezan	Blanchette
Blaney	Block
Boivin	Borg
Boughen	Boulerice
Boutin-Sweet	Braid
Breitkreuz	Brison
Brousseau	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)

Government Orders

Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Butt
Calandra
Cannan
Caron
Casey
Chicoine
Chisu
Choquette
Clarke
Comartin
Crockatt
Cullen
Daniel
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Dechert
Dewar
Dionne Labelle
Doré Lefebvre
Dubourg
Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Dusseault
Easter
Eyking
Fast
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Foote
Fry
Gallant
Garrison
Genest-Jourdain
Gill
Godin
Goldring
Goodyear
Gravelle
Grogulé
Harris (St. John's East)
Hawn
Hiebert
Hoback
Hsu
James
Julian
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kerr
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lamoureux
Lauzon
Lebel
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Lemieux
Leung
Lizon
Lukiwski
MacAulay
MacKenzie
Mai
Martin
Mathysen
Mayes
McColeman
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Menegakis
Miller
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Mulcair
Nantel
Nicholls
Nunez-Melo
O'Connor
Opitz
Pacetti
Paradis
Péclet
Perreault
Plamondon
Preston
Raitt
Rankin
Ravignat
Regan

Bruinooge
Byrne
Calkins
Carmichael
Carrie
Charlton
Chisholm
Chong
Christopherson
Cleary
Côté
Crowder
Cuzner
Davidson
Day
Devolin
Dion
Donnelly
Dreeshen
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Dykstra
Egliniski
Falk
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Fletcher
Freeman
Galipeau
Garneau
Genest
Giguère
Glover
Goguen
Goodale
Gourde
Grewal
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hayes
Hillyer
Holder
Hughes
Jones
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Kellway
Kent
Komarnicki
Lake
Latendresse
Lavertière
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)
Leef
Leslie
Liu
Lobb
Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)
Maguire
Marston
Masse
May
McCallum
McGuinty
McLeod
Michaud
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)
Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Murray
Nash
Norlock
Obhrai
O'Neill Gordon
O'Toole
Papillon
Payne
Perkins
Pilon
Poitievre
Quach
Rajotte
Rathgeber
Raynault
Reid

Rempel
Rickford
Saganash
Saxton
Schellenberger
Seeback
Sgro
Shipley
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)
Sims (Newton—North Delta)
Sitsabaiesan
Sopuck
St-Denis
Stoffer
Strahl
Sweet
Toet
Trottier
Truppe
Valeriotte
Van Loan
Wallace
Warkentin
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)
Weston (Saint John)
Wilks
Woodworth
Young (Oakville)
Yurdiga
Richards
Ritz
Sandhu
Scarpaleggia
Scott
Sellah
Shea
Shory
Smith
Sorenson
Stewart
Storseth
Sullivan
Tilson
Tremblay
Trudeau
Valcourt
Van Kesteren
Vaughan
Warawa
Watson
Williamson
Yelich
Young (Vancouver South)
Zimmer— 266

NAYS

Nil

PAIRED

Nil

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I declare the motion carried.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1815)

[Translation]

FACILITATING THE TRANSFER OF FAMILY FARM OR FISHING CORPORATIONS ACT

Ms. Francine Raynault (Joliette, NDP) moved that Bill C-661, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (transfer of family farm or fishing corporation), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak today to my Bill C-661, the facilitating the transfer of family farm or fishing corporations act. I will start by explaining the objective of this bill, and then I will talk about some problems it addresses and I will give some broader context.

I strongly believe that this bill is a step in the right direction for our regions' economies, and I hope that I will have the support of the entire House to help our farmers and fishers. It will be up to my colleagues to decide what they think, but I believe they will agree with me that this bill offers a clear solution to a major problem people are currently faced with.

2nd Session, 41st Parliament,
62-63-64 Elizabeth II, 2013-2014-2015

2^e session, 41^e législature
62-63-64 Elizabeth II, 2013-2014-2015

HOUSE OF COMMONS OF CANADA

Commissioner for Taking Affidavits
for British Columbia

This is Exhibit H referred to in
the affidavit of JIM SCOTT
sworn before me at VANCOUVER
on the 17th day of JUNE 2016
[Signature]

BILL C-58

PROJET DE LOI 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

Loi modifiant la Loi sur les mesures de réinsertion et d'indemnisation des militaires et vétérans des Forces canadiennes et une autre loi en conséquence

Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate and House of Commons of Canada, enacts as follows:

Sa Majesté, sur l'avis et avec le consentement du Sénat et de la Chambre des communes du Canada, édicte :

SHORT TITLE

TITRE ABRÉGÉ

Short title

1. This Act may be cited as the *Support for Veterans and Their Families Act*.

1. *Loi sur le soutien aux vétérans et à leur famille.*

Titre abrégé
5

2005, c.21

CANADIAN FORCES MEMBERS AND VETERANS RE-ESTABLISHMENT AND COMPENSATION ACT

LOI SUR LES MESURES DE RÉINSERTION ET D'INDEMNISATION DES MILITAIRES ET VÉTÉRANS DES FORCES CANADIENNES

2005, ch. 21

2. The definition "compensation" in subsection 2(1) of the *Canadian Forces Members and Veterans Re-establishment and Compensation Act* is replaced by the following:

2. La définition de « indemnisation », au paragraphe 2(1) de la *Loi sur les mesures de réinsertion et d'indemnisation des militaires et vétérans des Forces canadiennes*, est remplacée par ce qui suit :

10

"compensation"
« indemnisation »

"compensation" means any of the following benefits under this Act, namely, an earnings loss benefit, a supplementary retirement benefit, a Canadian Forces income support benefit, a permanent impairment allowance, a retirement income security benefit, a critical injury benefit, a disability award, a death benefit, a clothing allowance, a detention benefit or a family caregiver relief benefit.

« indemnisation » Allocation pour perte de revenus, prestation de retraite supplémentaire, allocation de soutien du revenu, allocation pour déficience permanente, allocation de sécurité du revenu de retraite, indemnité pour blessure grave, indemnité d'invalidité, indemnité de décès, allocation vestimentaire, indemnité de captivité ou allocation pour relève d'un aidant familial prévues par la présente loi.

« indemnisation »
"compensation"

3. The Act is amended by adding the following after section 2:

3. La même loi est modifiée par adjonction, après l'article 2, de ce qui suit :

	PURPOSE	OBJET	
Purpose	<p>2.1 The purpose of this Act is to recognize and fulfil the obligation of the people and Government of Canada to show just and due appreciation to members and veterans for their service to Canada. This obligation includes providing services, assistance and compensation to members and veterans who have been injured or have died as a result of military service and extends to their spouses or common-law partners or survivors and orphans. This Act shall be liberally interpreted so that the recognized obligation may be fulfilled.</p>	<p>2.1 La présente loi a pour objet de reconnaître et d'honorer l'obligation du peuple canadien et du gouvernement du Canada de rendre un hommage grandement mérité aux militaires et vétérans pour leur dévouement envers le Canada, obligation qui vise notamment la fourniture de services, d'assistance et de mesures d'indemnisation à ceux qui ont été blessés par suite de leur service militaire et à leur époux ou conjoint de fait ainsi qu'au survivant et aux orphelins de ceux qui sont décédés par suite de leur service militaire. Elle s'interprète de façon libérale afin de donner effet à cette obligation reconnue.</p>	Objet
	<p>4. Subsection 18(2) of the Act is replaced by the following:</p>	<p>4. Le paragraphe 18(2) de la même loi est remplacé par ce qui suit :</p>	
When benefit payable	<p>(2) The earnings loss benefit begins to be payable on the day on which the Minister determines that a rehabilitation plan or a vocational assistance plan should be developed. <u>For greater certainty, if the determination is in respect of a member, the earnings loss benefit is not payable until the day after the day on which the member is released from the Canadian Forces.</u></p>	<p>(2) L'allocation est exigible à compter du jour où le ministre décide qu'un programme de réadaptation ou d'assistance professionnelle devrait être élaboré. <u>S'il prend cette décision à l'égard d'un militaire, il est entendu que l'allocation n'est exigible qu'à compter du lendemain de la libération de celui-ci des Forces canadiennes.</u></p>	Début de l'allocation
2011, c. 12, s. 9	<p>5. (1) The portion of section 39 of the English version of the Act before paragraph (a) is replaced by the following:</p>	<p>5. (1) Le passage de l'article 39 de la version anglaise de la même loi précédant l'alinéa a) est remplacé par ce qui suit :</p>	2011, ch. 12, art. 9
When allowance payable	<p>39. The permanent impairment allowance under subsection 38(2) and an increase to the permanent impairment allowance under subsection 38(3) begin to be payable on the <u>latest</u> of</p> <p>(2) Section 39 of the Act is amended by striking out "and" at the end of paragraph (a), by adding "and" at the end of paragraph (b) and by adding the following after paragraph (b):</p> <p>(c) the day after the day on which the member is released from the Canadian Forces.</p>	<p>39. The permanent impairment allowance under subsection 38(2) and an increase to the permanent impairment allowance under subsection 38(3) begin to be payable on the <u>latest</u> of</p> <p>(2) L'article 39 de la même loi est modifié par adjonction, après l'alinéa b), de ce qui suit :</p> <p>c) le lendemain de la libération du militaire des Forces canadiennes.</p>	When allowance payable
	<p>6. The Act is amended by adding the following after section 40:</p>	<p>6. La même loi est modifiée par adjonction, après l'article 40, de ce qui suit :</p>	

Real CHANGE

THE FUTURE WE OWE OUR VETERANS

Our servicemen and women, who have put their lives on the line for their country, stand for the very best of what it means to be Canadian. For many, their commitment has come at a high cost. During our mission in Afghanistan, for example, 158 members of the Canadian Armed Forces lost their lives, with thousands more wounded or left suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. Today, our brave women and men are stationed in conflict zones, including Ukraine, Iraq, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, contributing their expertise as trainers, peacekeepers, in combat and in disaster relief, among other areas. We have a social covenant with all veterans and their families that we must meet with both respect and gratitude.

For a decade, Stephen Harper's Conservatives have dishonoured us all by failing to uphold this sacred obligation. They have not been truthful to, or respectful of, our veterans. They have laid off hundreds of frontline support staff and closed nine local service offices – making it even harder for veterans to access a vital support system that the Auditor General already criticized as “complex and time-consuming.” Veterans who need crucial mental health services are waiting months, even years, to get help. Harper even left over \$1 billion budgeted for veterans' services unspent.

A Liberal government will live up to our obligation to Canada's veterans and their families. We will demon-

strate the respect and appreciation for our veterans that Canadians rightly expect, and ensure that no veteran has to fight the government for the support and compensation they have earned.

Honouring our veterans' sacrifices

A Liberal government will re-establish lifelong pensions for our injured veterans. We will increase the value of the disability award in line with the sacred obligation and social covenant we have to those injured while serving their country. By re-instituting this pension as an option for injured veterans, they will be able to determine the form of compensation that works best for them and their families. We will ensure that each injured veteran has access to financial advice and support. The financial impact of re-instating this option will occur during the 2015-2016 fiscal year.

We will invest \$25 million to expand access to the Permanent Impairment Allowance, which provides income support to veterans who have had their career options limited by a service-related illness or injury. We will invest \$40 million to increase the Earnings Loss Benefit to 90 percent of pre-release salary, and index it to the

This is Exhibit 2 "referred to in our affidavit of JIM SCOTT sworn before me at VANCOUVER this 12 day of JUNE 2016
[Signature]
A Commissioner for taking Affidavits for British Columbia

THE FUTURE WE OWE OUR VETERANS

consumer price index (CPI).

Better education and training opportunities for veterans

We will invest \$80 million per year to create a new Veterans Education Benefit that provides full support for the cost of up to four years of college, university, or technical education for veterans after completion of service. This will not only honour the service of our veterans, but enhance an already talented and skilled labour force.

We will ensure that job opportunities for returning veterans are included in Community Benefits Agreements for new federally funded infrastructure projects.

Enhanced support for veterans' families

We will invest \$100 million per year to expand support for the families of veterans. This will include education, counseling, and training for families who are providing care and support for veterans living with physical and/or mental health issues as a result of their service. We will also end the time limit for surviving spouses to apply for vocational rehabilitation and assistance services.

We will increase the veteran survivor's pension amount from 50 percent to 70 percent, so that surviving veterans' partners do not face a decline in quality of life with the loss of their loved one. We will also eliminate the "marriage after 60" clawback clause, so that surviving spouses of veterans receive appropriate pension and health benefits.

Veterans served us with honour, and they deserve to be

treated with dignity when they pass away. We will double funding to the Last Post Fund to expand it and ensure that veterans receive a dignified burial.

Better services for our veterans

We will ensure higher standards of service and care for all veterans. This means a "one veteran, one standard" approach. We will re-open the nine Veterans Affairs service offices closed by the Harper Conservatives, and we will fully implement all of the Auditor General's recommendations on enhancing mental health service delivery to veterans.

We will hire 400 new service delivery staff, including much-needed case managers at Veterans Affairs, starting in April 2016 – double the current planned increase. We will also ensure that the promised expansion of mental health professionals to support veterans takes place immediately.

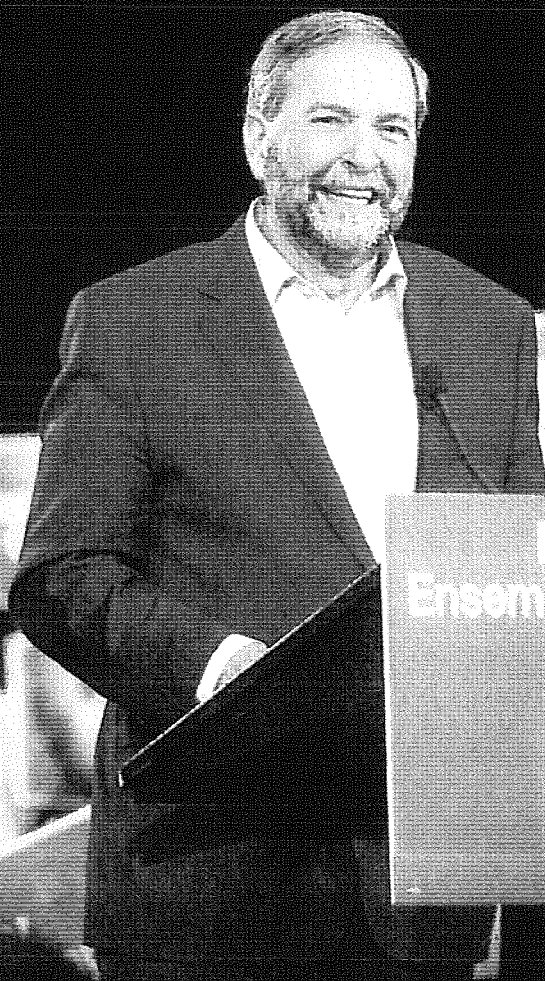
Canada must be a world leader in caring for, and supporting, our veterans, and a Liberal government will budget \$20 million to create two new centres of excellence in veterans' care. One of the two centres of excellence will specialize in mental health, PTSD, and related issues for both veterans and first responders.



Building the country of our dreams

Tom Mulcair's plan to bring change to Ottawa

This is Exhibit 5 "referred to in
 the affidavit of Jim SCOTT
 sworn before me at VANCOUVER
 this 12 day of June 2016
[Signature]
 A Commissioner for taking Affidavits
 for British Columbia



Ready for Change
 Ensemble pour le changement

Tom
Mulcair
 NDP

- ▣ Investing \$1.3 billion per year in a national strategy to improve transit and reduce gridlock.
- ▣ Boosting investment in tourism.
- ▣ Supporting regional economic development.
- ▣ Helping retrofit over 50,000 homes and apartment buildings.
- ▣ Investing in flood mitigation and disaster preparedness.

Guarantee retirement security and provide help where it's needed most, *starting with:*

- ▣ Securing a better retirement for all Canadians by expanding the CPP/QPP.
- ▣ Eliminating CEO stock option loopholes, and reinvesting the money to eliminate child poverty.
- ▣ Increasing the Guaranteed Income Supplement to help lift 200,000 seniors out of poverty, and returning the retirement age from 67 to 65.
- ▣ Restoring home mail delivery.
- ▣ Creating an action plan to end violence against women, increasing shelter funding and launching an inquiry into murdered and missing Indigenous women.
- ▣ Ensuring youth participation in sports with funding to support low-income and disadvantaged youth.
- ▣ Taking action to close the pay gap between men and women.
- ▣ Fixing the Nutrition North food program, and investing in clean energy to get Northern communities off diesel.
- ▣ Providing support to train and hire 2,500 more front-line police officers, and investing in crime prevention and anti-gang programs for youth.

Take leadership to build a better Canada, *starting with:*

- ▣ Working with the provinces and territories, and recognizing their efforts already underway, to develop a pan-Canadian cap-and-trade program to stop climate change.
- ▣ Establishing a true Nation to Nation relationship with Indigenous communities, and closing the education gap for Indigenous youth.
- ▣ Bolstering food and rail safety regulations and enforcement.
- ▣ Investing \$454 million to give our veterans the respect and support they deserve.
- ▣ Restoring Canadians' rights by repealing Bill C-51.
- ▣ Ensuring everyone's vote matters by bringing in proportional representation for elections.
- ▣ Giving the Parliamentary Budget Officer independent authority, and creating a Parliamentary Science Officer.

Allow the Security Intelligence Review Committee to conduct joint investigations with Canada's other independent national security review bodies, as recommended by the Maher Arar Commission.

Improve oversight of national security intelligence activities through the establishment of a special committee of Parliament.

Today, Canada is not making an effective contribution to the fight against terrorism and extremism. To better harness the valiant efforts of our men and women in the Canadian Forces, the NDP will take a new approach. The NDP will:

End the ineffective combat mission in Iraq and Syria and redirect Canada's resources to saving the lives of civilians displaced by the conflict.

Work with regional and international allies to cut off the flow of funds and weapons to extremist groups, including the Islamic State.

Prioritize de-radicalization efforts to protect Canada's youth from ISIS recruitment by creating a National Coordinator who will work in cooperation with local communities.

Canadian Forces in the 21st Century

After almost a decade in government, the Conservatives have failed to effectively manage the Department of National Defence (DND), and have left the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) with a legacy of outdated equipment, bungled procurements, and a shameful disregard for CAF members when they need help.

A new vision is necessary to ensure that our military can defend Canada, protect Canadians, and contribute to international peace and security with an agile, well-equipped, world-class force.

As a result of Conservative cuts, already long overdue new equipment purchases are being delayed for years. The attempt to sole-source the F-35 fighter jet while hiding the full costs was just one of several major procurement failures on the Conservatives' watch.

But the most shameful failure of the Conservatives during their time in office is the treatment of members of the Canadian Armed Forces and veterans.

CAF members who have to sell their homes at a loss when they are transferred have been unfairly compensated. The grievance process simply isn't working to resolve CAF members' issues. The Universality of Service policy has led to the unnecessary discharge of men and women, many of whom have been coping with mental or physical injury that could have been accommodated.

Moreover, many have been released without adequate support to transition to a new life outside of the military. Additionally, the failure to acknowledge and address the problem of sexual harassment and assault in the military has been well-documented.

Given these challenges, it's clear that Canada's defence policy requires review. It's time for a made-in-Canada defence strategy that reflects modern global realities.

The NDP will:

Provide the Canadian Forces with the personnel, equipment and training they need to defend Canada and protect Canadians.

Carry forward the National Shipbuilding Procurement Strategy to ensure Canada has the ships we need, and focus on industrial and regional benefits to support our shipyards.

Ensure fairer treatment of our men and women in uniform and their families by improving the grievance process.

Immediately address the deficit of mental health supports in the Canadian Forces, and provide psychologists in uniform as part of deployable mental health teams.

Reform the Universality of Service Principle, which is unfair to our men and women in uniform.

Draft a new Defence White Paper by 2016 to articulate a clear strategic vision for the Canadian Armed Forces and Canada's defence policy in the 21st Century.

Meet our military commitments by maintaining Department of National Defence budget allocations.

Improve our search and rescue systems to meet international standards with respect to response times, and ensure that our capabilities are sufficient to meet the needs of the North.

Launch a comprehensive review, as part of the Defence White Paper, to determine how best to meet Canada's needs in the replacement of our aging fleet of CF-18 Fighters, and ensure that any new program is subject to a competitive process.

Implement a fair and open process for military purchasing, ensuring that Canadians get the most competitive price and that military personnel get what they need.

Increase transparency within the Department of National Defence through the creation of the Office of the Inspector General.

Implement the recommendations of former Supreme Court justice Marie Deschamps to address sexual harassment and assault in the military, and continue the movement to reform and civilianize the military justice system.

Tom Mulcair would get us back to being #1 in peacekeeping again. The NDP will work to increase our contribution to UN peacekeeping missions every year so Canada can become the top western contributor to peacekeeping. The NDP will also seek to contribute personnel who can play a leadership role and prioritize the contribution of personnel to situations requiring advanced linguistic, logistical and intercultural expertise.

Treating Our Veterans with Respect

Stephen Harper has clawed back veterans' pensions, cut front-line services and failed veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). To add insult to injury, Stephen Harper then spent nearly a million dollars of their own tax dollars fighting them in court.

The Conservatives closed nine Veterans Affairs offices, which made it harder for veterans to get the services they need.

Tom Mulcair's plan will reverse the Conservatives' disrespect of these nation-builders with investments to improve medical care for Canada's veterans and their families.

The NDP will ensure Canada honours the sacrifices of our veterans and provides the services and benefits they've earned by making a \$454-million investment over four years to help give veterans the help they need and deserve, including:

- Working with veterans to immediately review, update and improve the New Veterans Charter, including addressing the issue of lump-sum payments currently offered to seriously injured veterans.

- Developing a "One Veteran, One Standard" policy that ensures all veterans are treated equally, regardless of when or where they served.

- Providing \$165 million to improve treatment for veterans with PTSD and mental health issues.

- Enhancing long-term care for Canadian Veterans and expanding the Veterans Independence Program.

- Establishing a formal covenant for veterans' care that recognizes the government's moral, social, legal and fiduciary obligation to care for Canada's veterans.

- Eliminating the Veterans Review and Appeal Board, which is staffed by appointees who have often been unresponsive to the realities faced by veterans seeking disability benefits, and replacing it with a medically focused peer review process for appeals.

- Increasing survivors' pensions and ensuring funding is in place to support dignified funerals for veterans through the Last Post Program.

- Launching a public inquiry into the spraying of Agent Orange at CFB Gagetown.

For many years, the NDP has fought for Canada's veterans and their families so that they get the services and care they deserve. We will give the Veterans Ombudsperson greater powers to ensure that programs for veterans are delivered efficiently, effectively and transparently, and reopen the nine Veterans Affairs offices closed by the Conservatives.

We will also apologize and make amends to those who were dismissed or forced out of the military on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity – fairness that is long overdue.

We will recognize the contributions of police, firefighters and other public safety officers by:

Establishing a Hero's Benefit to recognize the contributions of firefighters, police officers and other public safety officers who die or are permanently disabled in the line of duty.

Restoring Canada's Place in the World

The country that the Conservatives are projecting onto the world stage is no longer recognizable to many of the countries we have worked with closely over the decades, and it's no longer recognizable to us as Canadians.

Canada's role in the world in the past 10 years has become one where we lecture foreign governments at the United Nations and stymie progress to tackle climate change.

An NDP government would work as an even-handed, fair arbiter abroad with a renewed focus on the UN and other international institutions.

With the NDP, Canada will become a world leader on climate change cooperation, in the same way the Canada-United States acid rain agreement became a model for the world. Under Stephen Harper, Canada's relationship with the U.S. has deteriorated, causing damage to Canadian businesses and decreasing economic opportunities.

We will prioritize results over rhetoric, take an active and collaborative approach to diplomacy, and promote an independent foreign policy that's accountable to Canadians.

This approach starts by working to earn a Canadian seat at the United Nations Security Council, something the Conservatives failed to do. This is an important step in rebuilding Canada's role as a leader in democratic development, peacekeeping and peacebuilding.

To make Canada a leader on the world stage, the NDP will:

Bring a clear plan of action to the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris to advance global action on climate change.

Fully implement Canada's Action Plan on Women's Peace and Security.

- This action will help eliminate sexual violence as a weapon of war and ensure women's equality is at the heart of Canada's foreign policy. We will also increase funding for the promotion of women's rights and health, including access to safe abortion.

This is Exhibit K "referred to in the affidavit of JIM SCOTT sworn before me at VANCOUVER this 12 day of JUNE 2016
[Signature]
A Commissioner for taking Affidavits for British Columbia

Office of the Prime Minister



Cabinet du Premier ministre

Ottawa, Canada K1A 0A2

Dear Mr. Hehr:

I am honoured that you have agreed to serve Canadians as Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence.

We have promised Canadians a government that will bring real change – in both what we do and how we do it. Canadians sent a clear message in this election, and our platform offered a new, ambitious plan for a strong and growing middle class. Canadians expect us to fulfill our commitments, and it is my expectation that you will do your part in delivering on those promises to Canadians.

We made a commitment to invest in growing our economy, strengthening the middle class, and helping those working hard to join it. We committed to provide more direct help to those who need it by giving less to those who do not. We committed to public investment as the best way to spur economic growth, job creation, and broad-based prosperity. We committed to a responsible, transparent fiscal plan for challenging economic times.

I expect Canadians to hold us accountable for delivering these commitments, and I expect all ministers to do their part – individually and collectively – to improve economic opportunity and security for Canadians.

It is my expectation that we will deliver real results and professional government to Canadians. To ensure that we have a strong focus on results, I will expect Cabinet committees and individual ministers to: track and report on the progress of our commitments; assess the effectiveness of our work; and align our resources with priorities, in order to get the results we want and Canadians deserve.

If we are to tackle the real challenges we face as a country – from a struggling middle class to the threat of climate change – Canadians need to have faith in their government’s honesty and willingness to listen. I expect that our work will be informed by performance measurement, evidence, and feedback from Canadians. We will direct our resources to those initiatives that are having the greatest, positive impact on the lives of Canadians, and that will allow us to meet our commitments to them. I expect you to report regularly on your progress toward fulfilling our commitments and to help develop effective measures that assess the impact of the organizations for which you are answerable.

I made a personal commitment to bring new leadership and a new tone to Ottawa. We made a commitment to Canadians to pursue our goals with a renewed sense of collaboration. Improved partnerships with provincial, territorial, and municipal governments are essential to deliver the real, positive change that we promised Canadians. No relationship is more important to me and to Canada than the one with Indigenous Peoples. It is time for a renewed, nation-to-nation relationship with Indigenous Peoples, based on recognition of rights, respect, co-operation, and partnership.

We have also committed to set a higher bar for openness and transparency in government. It is time to shine more light on government to ensure it remains focused on the people it serves. Government and its information should be open by default. If we want Canadians to trust their government, we need a government that trusts Canadians. It is important that we acknowledge mistakes when we make them.

Canadians do not expect us to be perfect – they expect us to be honest, open, and sincere in our efforts to serve the public interest.

Our platform guides our government. Over the course of our four-year mandate, I expect us to deliver on all of our commitments. It is our collective responsibility to ensure that we fulfill our promises, while living within our fiscal plan. Other issues will arise or will be brought to our attention by Canadians, stakeholders, and the public service. It is my expectation that you will engage constructively and thoughtfully and add priorities to your agenda when appropriate.

As Minister, you will be held accountable for our commitment to bring a different style of leadership to government. This will include: close collaboration with your colleagues; meaningful engagement with Opposition Members of Parliament, Parliamentary Committees and the public service; constructive dialogue with Canadians, civil society, and stakeholders, including business, organized labour, the broader public sector, and the not-for-profit and charitable sectors; and identifying ways to find solutions and avoid escalating conflicts unnecessarily. As well, members of the Parliamentary Press Gallery, indeed all journalists in Canada and abroad, are professionals who, by asking necessary questions, contribute in an important way to the democratic process. Your professionalism and engagement with them is essential.

Canadians expect us, in our work, to reflect the values we all embrace: inclusion, honesty, hard work, fiscal prudence, and generosity of spirit. We will be a government that governs for all Canadians, and I expect you, in your work, to bring Canadians together.

You are expected to do your part to fulfill our government's commitment to transparent, merit-based appointments, to help ensure gender parity and that Indigenous Canadians and minority groups are better reflected in positions of leadership.

Veterans and their families have earned our respect and gratitude. Veterans should not have to fight their own government for the support and compensation they have earned. As Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, your overarching goal will be to ensure that our government lives up to our sacred obligation to veterans and their families. I expect you to ensure that veterans receive the respect, support, care, and economic opportunities they deserve. You will ensure that we honour the service of our veterans and provide new career opportunities, make it easier for veterans to access services – including mental health services – and do more to support the families of Canada's veterans. I ask you to work closely with your colleague the Minister of National Defence to ensure a seamless transition for Canadian Forces members to the programs and services of your department.

In particular, I will expect you to work with your colleagues and through established legislative, regulatory, and Cabinet processes, including our first Budget, to deliver on your top priorities:

- Work with the Minister of National Defence to reduce complexity, overhaul service delivery, and strengthen partnerships between Veterans Affairs and National Defence.
- Re-establish lifelong pensions as an option for our injured veterans, and increase the value of the disability award, while ensuring that every injured veteran has access to financial advice and support so that they can determine the form of compensation that works best for them and their families.
- Expand access to the Permanent Impairment Allowance to better support veterans who have had their career options limited by a service-related illness or injury.
- Provide injured veterans with 90 percent of their pre-release salary, and index this benefit so that it keeps pace with inflation.

- Create a new Veterans Education Benefit that will provide full support for the costs of up to four years of college, university, or technical education for Canadian Forces veterans after completion of service.
- Improve career and vocational assistance for veterans through ensuring that job opportunities for returning veterans are included in Community Benefits Agreements for new federally-funded infrastructure projects.
- Deliver a higher standard of service and care, and ensure that a “one veteran, one standard” approach is upheld.
- Re-open the nine Veterans Affairs service offices recently closed, hire more service delivery staff, and fully implement all of the Auditor General’s recommendations on enhancing mental health service delivery to veterans.
- Create two new centres of excellence in veterans’ care, including one with a specialization in mental health, post-traumatic stress disorder and related issues for both veterans and first responders.
- Provide greater education, counselling, and training for families who are providing care and support to veterans living with physical and/or mental health issues as a result of their service.
- End the time limit for surviving spouses to apply for vocational rehabilitation and assistance services.
- Increase the veteran survivor’s pension amount from 50 percent to 70 percent.
- Eliminate the “marriage after 60” clawback clause, so that surviving spouses of veterans receive appropriate pension and health benefits.
- Double funding to the Last Post Fund to ensure that all veterans receive a dignified burial.
- Work with the Minister of National Defence to develop a suicide prevention strategy for Canadian Armed Forces personnel and veterans.

These priorities draw heavily from our election platform commitments. The government’s agenda will be further articulated through Cabinet discussions and in the Speech from the Throne when Parliament opens.

I expect you to work closely with your Deputy Minister and his or her senior officials to ensure that the ongoing work of your department is undertaken in a professional manner and that decisions are made in the public interest. Your Deputy Minister will brief you on issues your department may be facing that may require decisions to be made quickly. It is my expectation that you will apply our values and principles to these decisions, so that issues facing your department are dealt with in a timely and responsible manner, and in a way that is consistent with the overall direction of our government.

Our ability, as a government, to successfully implement our platform depends on our ability to thoughtfully consider the professional, non-partisan advice of public servants. Each and every time a government employee comes to work, they do so in service to Canada, with a goal of improving our country and the lives of all Canadians. I expect you to establish a collaborative working relationship with your Deputy

Minister, whose role, and the role of public servants under his or her direction, is to support you in the performance of your responsibilities.

In the coming weeks, the Privy Council Office (PCO) will be contacting you to set up a meeting with PCO officials, your Deputy Minister and the Prime Minister's Office to further discuss your plans, commitments and priorities.

We have committed to an open, honest government that is accountable to Canadians, lives up to the highest ethical standards, and applies the utmost care and prudence in the handling of public funds. I expect you to embody these values in your work and observe the highest ethical standards in everything you do. When dealing with our Cabinet colleagues, Parliament, stakeholders, or the public, it is important that your behaviour and decisions meet Canadians' well-founded expectations of our government. I want Canadians to look on their own government with pride and trust.

As Minister, you must ensure that you are aware of and fully compliant with the *Conflict of Interest Act* and Treasury Board policies and guidelines. You will be provided with a copy of *Open and Accountable Government* to assist you as you undertake your responsibilities. I ask that you carefully read it and ensure that your staff does so as well. I draw your attention in particular to the Ethical Guidelines set out in Annex A of that document, which apply to you and your staff. As noted in the Guidelines, you must uphold the highest standards of honesty and impartiality, and both the performance of your official duties and the arrangement of your private affairs should bear the closest public scrutiny. This is an obligation that is not fully discharged by simply acting within the law. Please also review the areas of *Open and Accountable Government* that we have expanded or strengthened, including the guidance on non-partisan use of departmental communications resources and the new code of conduct for exempt staff.

I know I can count on you to fulfill the important responsibilities entrusted in you. In turn, please know that you can count on me to support you every day in your role as Minister.

I am deeply grateful to have this opportunity to serve with you as we build an even greater country. Together, we will work tirelessly to honour the trust Canadians have given us.

Yours sincerely,



Rt. Hon. Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P.
Prime Minister of Canada

Office of the
Prime Minister



Cabinet du
Premier ministre

This is Exhibit "L" referred to in
the affidavit of JIM SCOTT
sworn before me at VANCOUVER
this 12 day of JUNE 2016.
[Signature]
A Commissioner for taking Affidavits
for British Columbia

Ottawa, Canada K1A 0A2

Dear Ms. Wilson-Raybould:

I am honoured that you have agreed to serve Canadians as Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada.

We have promised Canadians a government that will bring real change – in both what we do and how we do it. Canadians sent a clear message in this election, and our platform offered a new, ambitious plan for a strong and growing middle class. Canadians expect us to fulfill our commitments, and it is my expectation that you will do your part in delivering on those promises to Canadians.

We made a commitment to invest in growing our economy, strengthening the middle class, and helping those working hard to join it. We committed to provide more direct help to those who need it by giving less to those who do not. We committed to public investment as the best way to spur economic growth, job creation, and broad-based prosperity. We committed to a responsible, transparent fiscal plan for challenging economic times.

I expect Canadians to hold us accountable for delivering these commitments, and I expect all ministers to do their part – individually and collectively – to improve economic opportunity and security for Canadians.

It is my expectation that we will deliver real results and professional government to Canadians. To ensure that we have a strong focus on results, I will expect Cabinet committees and individual ministers to: track and report on the progress of our commitments; assess the effectiveness of our work; and align our resources with priorities, in order to get the results we want and Canadians deserve.

If we are to tackle the real challenges we face as a country – from a struggling middle class to the threat of climate change – Canadians need to have faith in their government's honesty and willingness to listen. I expect that our work will be informed by performance measurement, evidence, and feedback from Canadians. We will direct our resources to those initiatives that are having the greatest, positive impact on the lives of Canadians, and that will allow us to meet our commitments to them. I expect you to report regularly on your progress toward fulfilling our commitments and to help develop effective measures that assess the impact of the organizations for which you are answerable.

I made a personal commitment to bring new leadership and a new tone to Ottawa. We made a commitment to Canadians to pursue our goals with a renewed sense of collaboration. Improved partnerships with provincial, territorial, and municipal governments are essential to deliver the real, positive change that we promised Canadians. No relationship is more important to me and to Canada than the one with Indigenous Peoples. It is time for a renewed, nation-to-nation relationship with Indigenous Peoples, based on recognition of rights, respect, co-operation, and partnership.

We have also committed to set a higher bar for openness and transparency in government. It is time to shine more light on government to ensure it remains focused on the people it serves. Government and its information should be open by default. If we want Canadians to trust their government, we need a government that trusts Canadians. It is important that we acknowledge mistakes when we make them.

Canadians do not expect us to be perfect – they expect us to be honest, open, and sincere in our efforts to serve the public interest.

Our platform guides our government. Over the course of our four-year mandate, I expect us to deliver on all of our commitments. It is our collective responsibility to ensure that we fulfill our promises, while living within our fiscal plan. Other issues will arise or will be brought to our attention by Canadians, stakeholders, and the public service. It is my expectation that you will engage constructively and thoughtfully and add priorities to your agenda when appropriate.

As Minister, you will be held accountable for our commitment to bring a different style of leadership to government. This will include: close collaboration with your colleagues; meaningful engagement with Opposition Members of Parliament, Parliamentary Committees and the public service; constructive dialogue with Canadians, civil society, and stakeholders, including business, organized labour, the broader public sector, and the not-for-profit and charitable sectors; and identifying ways to find solutions and avoid escalating conflicts unnecessarily. As well, members of the Parliamentary Press Gallery, indeed all journalists in Canada and abroad, are professionals who, by asking necessary questions, contribute in an important way to the democratic process. Your professionalism and engagement with them is essential.

Canadians expect us, in our work, to reflect the values we all embrace: inclusion, honesty, hard work, fiscal prudence, and generosity of spirit. We will be a government that governs for all Canadians, and I expect you, in your work, to bring Canadians together.

You are expected to do your part to fulfill our government's commitment to transparent, merit-based appointments, to help ensure gender parity and that Indigenous Canadians and minority groups are better reflected in positions of leadership.

You have a double role as both Minister of Justice and the Attorney General of Canada. As Minister of Justice, you are the legal advisor to Cabinet. In this capacity you are responsible with the administration of justice, including policy in such areas as criminal law, family law, human rights law, public law and private international law, constitutional law and Aboriginal justice. As the Attorney General of Canada, you are the chief law officer of the Crown, responsible for conducting all litigation for the federal government and for upholding the Constitution, the rule of law, and respect for the independence of the courts.

As Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, your overarching goal will be to ensure our legislation meets the highest standards of equity, fairness and respect for the rule of law. I expect you to ensure that our initiatives respect the Constitution of Canada, court decisions, and are in keeping with our proudest legal traditions. You are expected to ensure that the rights of Canadians are protected, that our work demonstrates the greatest possible commitment to respecting the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and that our government seeks to fulfill our policy goals with the least interference with the rights and privacy of Canadians as possible.

In particular, I will expect you to work with your colleagues and through established legislative, regulatory, and Cabinet processes to deliver on your top priorities:

- Lead a process, supported by the Minister of Health, to work with provinces and territories to respond to the Supreme Court of Canada decision regarding physician-assisted death.
- Develop, in collaboration with the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, and supported by the Minister of Status of Women, an approach to, and a mandate for, an inquiry into murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls in Canada, including the identification of a lead Minister.

- Review our litigation strategy. This should include early decisions to end appeals or positions that are not consistent with our commitments, the Charter or our values.
- You should conduct a review of the changes in our criminal justice system and sentencing reforms over the past decade with a mandate to assess the changes, ensure that we are increasing the safety of our communities, getting value for money, addressing gaps and ensuring that current provisions are aligned with the objectives of the criminal justice system. Outcomes of this process should include increased use of restorative justice processes and other initiatives to reduce the rate of incarceration amongst Indigenous Canadians, and implementation of recommendations from the inquest into the death of Ashley Smith regarding the restriction of the use of solitary confinement and the treatment of those with mental illness.
- Work with the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness and the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs to address gaps in services to Aboriginal people and those with mental illness throughout the criminal justice system.
- Working with the Ministers of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness and Health, create a federal-provincial-territorial process that will lead to the legalization and regulation of marijuana.
- Undertake modernization efforts to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the criminal justice system, in cooperation with provinces and territories. This should include improved use of information technology to make the system more efficient and timely, exploration of sentencing alternatives and bail reform, and the creation of a unified family court.
- Support the Minister of Canadian Heritage to restore a modern Court Challenges Program.
- Work with the Ministers of Finance and National Revenue to develop a modernized regulatory and legal framework governing the Charitable and Not-for-Profit sectors.
- Engage all parties in the House of Commons to ensure that the process of appointing Supreme Court Justices is transparent, inclusive and accountable to Canadians. Consultations should be undertaken with all relevant stakeholders and those appointed to the Supreme Court should be functionally bilingual.
- Support the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness in his efforts to repeal key elements of Bill C-51, and introduce new legislation that strengthens accountability with respect to national security and better balances collective security with rights and freedoms.
- Support the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness in his efforts to repeal key elements of Bill C-42 and implement our commitment to reduce the number of handguns and assault weapons on our streets.
- Implement our platform commitments to toughen criminal laws and bail conditions in cases of domestic assault, in consultation with stakeholders and with the goal of keeping survivors and children safe. You should undertake this work in consultation with the Minister of Status of Women and the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

- Work with the President of the Treasury Board to enhance the openness of government, including supporting his review of the *Access to Information Act* to ensure that Canadians have easier access to their own personal information, that the Information Commissioner is empowered to order government information to be released and that the Act applies appropriately to the Prime Minister's and Ministers' Offices, as well as administrative institutions that support Parliament and the courts.
- Introduce government legislation to add gender identity as a prohibited ground for discrimination under the *Canadian Human Rights Act*, and to the list of distinguishing characteristics of "identifiable group" protected by the hate speech provisions of the *Criminal Code*.

These priorities draw heavily from our election platform commitments. The government's agenda will be further articulated through Cabinet discussions and in the Speech from the Throne when Parliament opens.

I expect you to work closely with your Deputy Minister and his or her senior officials to ensure that the ongoing work of your department is undertaken in a professional manner and that decisions are made in the public interest. Your Deputy Minister will brief you on issues your department may be facing that may require decisions to be made quickly. It is my expectation that you will apply our values and principles to these decisions, so that issues facing your department are dealt with in a timely and responsible manner, and in a way that is consistent with the overall direction of our government.

Our ability, as a government, to successfully implement our platform depends on our ability to thoughtfully consider the professional, non-partisan advice of public servants. Each and every time a government employee comes to work, they do so in service to Canada, with a goal of improving our country and the lives of all Canadians. I expect you to establish a collaborative working relationship with your Deputy Minister, whose role, and the role of public servants under his or her direction, is to support you in the performance of your responsibilities.

In the coming weeks, the Privy Council Office (PCO) will be contacting you to set up a meeting with PCO officials, your Deputy Minister and the Prime Minister's Office to further discuss your plans, commitments and priorities.

We have committed to an open, honest government that is accountable to Canadians, lives up to the highest ethical standards, and applies the utmost care and prudence in the handling of public funds. I expect you to embody these values in your work and observe the highest ethical standards in everything you do. When dealing with our Cabinet colleagues, Parliament, stakeholders, or the public, it is important that your behaviour and decisions meet Canadians' well-founded expectations of our government. I want Canadians to look on their own government with pride and trust.

As Minister, you must ensure that you are aware of and fully compliant with the *Conflict of Interest Act* and Treasury Board policies and guidelines. You will be provided with a copy of *Open and Accountable Government* to assist you as you undertake your responsibilities. I ask that you carefully read it and ensure that your staff does so as well. I draw your attention in particular to the Ethical Guidelines set out in Annex A of that document, which apply to you and your staff. As noted in the Guidelines, you must uphold the highest standards of honesty and impartiality, and both the performance of your official duties and the arrangement of your private affairs should bear the closest public scrutiny. This is an obligation that is not fully discharged by simply acting within the law. Please also review the areas of *Open and Accountable Government* that we have expanded or strengthened, including the guidance on non-partisan use of departmental communications resources and the new code of conduct for exempt staff.

I know I can count on you to fulfill the important responsibilities entrusted in you. In turn, please know that you can count on me to support you every day in your role as Minister.

I am deeply grateful to have this opportunity to serve with you as we build an even greater country. Together, we will work tirelessly to honour the trust Canadians have given us.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Justin Trudeau', written in a cursive style.


Rt. Hon. Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P.
Prime Minister of Canada

May 18, 2016

Delivered Via Fax

British Columbia Court of Appeal
The Law Courts
400-800 Hornby Street
Vancouver, BC, V6Z 2C5

Attention: Mr Justice Groberman
Mr. Justice Harris
Mr. Justice Willcock

This is Exhibit "M" referred to in
the affidavit of Jim Scott
sworn before me at Vancouver
this 12 day of June 2016

A Commissioner for taking Affidavits
for British Columbia

My Lords:

Re: BCCA Action CA041232 - Scott and others v. The Attorney General of Canada

Further to the letter of Mr. Paul Vickery, counsel for the Appellant, Attorney General of Canada, dated May 16, 2016, please be advised that it is the position of the Respondents that the assertion of Mr. Vickery "that the British Columbia Court of Appeal is now free to render its decision in the appeal heard on December 3 and 4, 2014 is not correct or appropriate. It is our position that there should be further submissions on the appeal before judgment may be given.

Mr. Vickery is correct that the Abeyance Agreement entered into between the parties in the above noted action expired on May 15, 2016. A copy of the Abeyance Agreement dated the 27th day of May, 2015 and signed by the then Minister of Veterans Affairs is enclosed. The premise for the Negotiations referred to in the Abeyance Agreement was that the government had repudiated certain arguments made by the Appellant on the appeal.

One of the repudiated arguments related to the Social Covenant. Paragraphs I and J refers to two actions of Parliament, one contained in a Bill and the other in a unanimous resolution of Parliament that reflect the repudiation of the argued positions of the Appellant on the hearings in December of 2014.

The Respondents relied upon the Appellant's repudiation of these arguments in its dealings with the Government and in its position in this Court where it was agreed to relieve the Appellant from its agreement to abandon the appeal as set forth in paragraph 1 (a) of the Abeyance Agreement. Further, the Respondents relied upon the publicly stated positions of the new Government of Canada that, it too, repudiated the arguments advanced in 2014. If new positions are to be advanced by the Liberal Government, it is submitted that it should advance the arguments in its own right rather than asking the Court to rule upon repudiated arguments of the former government.

It is the position of the Respondents that in all of these circumstances the Appellant is estopped from relying upon the repudiated arguments and that before judgment may be rendered, directions from the Court are required as to the most expeditious way to properly

put before the court the legally significant events that have occurred since December of 2014 and the scheduling further of argument required because of those events.

It is our submission that an Appeal Case Management Conference be held to further discuss these matters.

We will be providing any response that may be required to the table of concordance prepared by the Defendant within the two week period envisaged by the court when the table was originally requested.

We very much appreciate your consideration of this request.

Yours truly,

MILLER THOMSON LLP

Per:



Donald J. Sorochan, QC
DSO/ds

Enclosure
18356859.1

cc.

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Armed Forces Declaration by the NATO Heads of State and Government

The skill and dedication of the men and women serving in our Armed Forces are essential to collective security. These brave men and women serve our nations, facing danger and risking injury and death in the course of their duty. Their families also play a vital role, coping with relocation and separation, and enduring the consequences of injury and bereavement.

In putting the needs of their nation and their service above all else, the members of the Armed Forces of the nations of the North Atlantic Alliance make immense sacrifices. In return, we reaffirm our support to them and their families, during and after their service, now and in the future.

We value the service and respect the commitment of each nation's Armed Forces personnel and their families. They must know that their sacrifices are not forgotten when they return home, that they will continue to be looked after if they are wounded and when they retire, and that their families will continue to be supported if they are killed. We affirm the importance we collectively attach to this, and commend the efforts being made across the Alliance to maintain and strengthen the bonds between our Armed Forces and the societies from which they come. We will seek to enhance the sharing of best practices and lessons learned in support of our Armed Forces personnel and their families, including on our national approaches to providing medical care to injured personnel and support to families.

As we mark the 65th Anniversary of NATO and two decades of operations on land, sea and air, including in Afghanistan and in the Balkans, we pay tribute and express our profound gratitude on behalf of our nations and peoples to all the brave men and women who stood ready to defend the Alliance and our values as well as to those, including from partner nations, who served in NATO-led operations and missions. We honour these courageous men and women, and their families, and place our trust in those who will follow them in years to come.

Déclaration des chefs d'État et de gouvernement des pays de l'OTAN sur les forces armées

Les compétences et le dévouement des hommes et des femmes qui servent dans nos forces armées sont essentiels pour la sécurité collective. Ces hommes et ces femmes servent nos pays avec bravoure, en affrontant le danger au risque d'être blessés ou de perdre la vie en service. Leurs familles jouent aussi un rôle crucial, devant s'adapter aux déplacements et aux séparations, et subir les conséquences des blessures ou de la perte de leurs proches.

En accordant une priorité absolue aux besoins de leur pays et à l'accomplissement de leur devoir, les membres des forces armées des pays de l'Alliance atlantique consentent d'immenses sacrifices. En retour, nous tenons à réaffirmer que nous les soutenons, tout comme leurs familles, pendant et après leur temps de service, aujourd'hui et à l'avenir.

Nous apprécions à sa juste valeur le service que rendent les membres des forces armées de chaque pays et leurs familles, et nous respectons leur engagement. Ils doivent savoir que leurs sacrifices ne sont pas oubliés lorsqu'ils regagnent leurs foyers, qu'ils continueront d'être pris en charge s'ils sont blessés et lorsqu'ils partiront à la retraite, et qu'un soutien continuera d'être apporté à leurs familles s'ils perdent la vie. Nous soulignons l'importance que nous y attachons collectivement, et nous saluons les efforts actuellement déployés dans l'ensemble de l'Alliance pour maintenir et resserrer les liens entre nos forces armées et les sociétés dont elles sont issues. Nous chercherons à renforcer le partage des meilleures pratiques et des retours d'expérience, en faveur des membres de nos forces armées et de leurs familles, y compris en ce qui concerne les approches de nos pays s'agissant des soins à prodiguer aux personnels blessés et du soutien à apporter aux familles.

Alors que nous célébrons le 65^e anniversaire de l'OTAN et deux décennies d'opérations terrestres, maritimes et aériennes, notamment en Afghanistan et dans les Balkans, nous rendons hommage et exprimons notre profonde gratitude, au nom de nos pays et de nos concitoyens, à tous les hommes et femmes qui se sont tenus prêts à défendre avec bravoure l'Alliance ainsi que nos valeurs, et à tous ceux et celles, y compris en provenance des pays partenaires, qui ont servi dans des opérations et missions dirigées par l'OTAN. Nous rendons hommage à ces hommes et femmes courageux, ainsi qu'à leurs familles, et plaçons notre confiance en ceux et celles qui les suivront dans les années à venir.

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Dalia GRYBAUSKAITĖ Lithuania / Lituanie	Xavier BETTEL Luxembourg / Luxembourg	Mark RUTTE Netherlands / Pays-Bas	Erna SOLBERG Norway / Norvège	Bronisław KOMOROWSKI Poland / Pologne
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Recep Tayyip ERDOĞAN Turkey / Turquie	David CAMERON United Kingdom / Royaume-Uni	Barack OBAMA United States / États-Unis	Anders FOGH RASMUSSEN NATO / OTAN	

This is Exhibit N referred to in the affidavit of Jim Scott sworn before me at Vancouver this 12 day of June 2014

[Signature]
A Commissioner for taking Affidavits for British Columbia