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Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, April 29, 2020

The House met at 2:30 p.m.

Prayer

• (1440)

[*Translation*]

RECALL OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

The Speaker: Colleagues, before we begin our proceedings, I would like to say a few words about the special measures in place today.

[*English*]

To that end, pursuant to an order made Monday, April 20, 2020, the application of Standing Order 17 will be suspended for the current sitting to allow members to practise physical distancing. Members desiring to speak and address the Chair may do so from any seat in the House.

I will ask that all members tabling a document or moving a motion sign the document and bring it to the table themselves.

[*Translation*]

I wish to inform the House that pursuant to order made on April 20, I sent a notice of meeting calling the House to meet this day. On Thursday, April 27, I sent every member a message explaining why the House was being recalled. I now lay this notice on the table.

[*English*]

Pursuant to an order made on Monday, April 20, 2020, the House will now proceed to the introduction of government bills.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

CANADA EMERGENCY STUDENT BENEFIT ACT

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-15, An Act respecting Canada emergency student benefits (coronavirus disease 2019).

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

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties, and if you seek it, I think you will find unanimous consent for the following motion.

I move:

That, notwithstanding the order of Monday, April 20, 2020:

(a) the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food be added to the list of committees in paragraph (l) of the order adopted on Saturday, April 11, 2020;

(b) the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities be instructed to undertake a review of the Canada Emergency Response Benefit Act and that the Committee report its findings and recommendations to the House no later than June 30, 2021;

[*Translation*]

(c) the time provided for questioning ministers in the Special Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic be extended to 95 minutes on Tuesdays and Thursdays in order to provide an additional five-minute round of questioning for the New Democratic Party caucus;

(d) the government implement new financial incentives and support measures to connect Canadians, particularly students and Canadian youth, to the various jobs available, for example, in the agriculture and agri-food sector, in order to ensure regional economic stability and food production during this crisis;

(e) the government ensure that the Canada Emergency Response Benefit and the Canada Emergency Student Benefit (CESB) are offered in a manner that meets their objective while encouraging employment in all circumstances;

(f) the government define the final parameters of CESB in regulations in the short term and that an additional support of \$250 be provided for students with dependents or with disabilities, in addition to the \$1750 that has already been announced; and

(g) the government implement measures without delay to provide additional support for seniors and persons with disabilities in order to assist with extraordinary expenses incurred as a result of COVID-19, and examine the best way to do this, including looking at Old Age Security and the Guaranteed Income Supplement as potential mechanisms.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

*Government Orders**[English]*

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to a motion adopted on Monday, April 20, 2020, I wish to state that there is an agreement among the representatives of all recognized parties to govern the proceedings in relation to Bill C-15.

Therefore, I move:

That, pursuant to the order adopted on April 20, 2020, Bill C-15, An Act respecting Canada emergency student benefits (coronavirus disease 2019), be disposed of as follows:

(a) the bill be ordered for consideration at second reading later this day;

• (1445)

[Translation]

(b) when the House begins debate on the motion for second reading of the bill, two members of each recognized party and a member of the Green Party may each speak to the said motion for not more than 20 minutes, followed by 10 minutes for questions and comments, provided that members may be permitted to split their time with another member; and, at the conclusion of the time provided for the debate or when no member rises to speak, whichever is earlier, all questions necessary to dispose of the second reading stage of the bill shall be put without further debate or amendment, provided that, if a recorded division is requested, it shall not be deferred; and

(c) if the bill is adopted at second reading, it shall be referred to a committee of the whole, deemed considered in committee of the whole, deemed reported without amendment, deemed concurred in at report stage on division, and deemed read a third time and passed on division.

[English]

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

CANADA EMERGENCY STUDENT BENEFIT ACT

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.) moved that Bill C-15, An Act respecting Canada emergency student benefits (coronavirus disease 2019), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

[English]

The Speaker: Pursuant to an order made earlier today, two members of each recognized party and a member of the Green Party may each speak to the motion for not more than 20 minutes, followed by 10 minutes of questions and comments. Members are permitted to split their time with another member.

The hon. Minister of Employment.

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the Deputy Prime Minister.

I am pleased to participate today in this debate on Bill C-15, an act respecting Canada emergency student benefits. We are here to discuss how we can best support Canada's students.

[Translation]

For over six weeks, Canadians have been adapting to the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is affecting our country and the entire world.

In order to support Canadians during this crisis, our government has taken significant action and implemented Canada's COVID-19 economic response plan, which provides \$146 billion in support.

[English]

A key element of this plan is the Canada emergency response benefit, created to support Canadian workers facing unemployment due to COVID-19. The benefit is now providing eligible workers with temporary income support of \$500 a week for up to 16 weeks.

When we launched the benefit on April 6, some Canadian workers expressed concerns about eligibility. We listened, and on April 15 we made it more inclusive. Now workers, including the self-employed, can earn up to \$1,000 per month while collecting the benefit. The benefit also applies to workers who have recently exhausted their EI regular benefit payments and are unable to start working again because of COVID-19.

To give the House a sense of the scope of this effort, public servants have now processed over 10.15 million applications to date under the Canada emergency response benefit. This figure is a reflection of the real need of Canadians during this time and of our public service's dedication to our country.

We know that more support is needed for Canadians. Young people are facing a serious set of challenges in this difficult time, be it interrupted studies, reduced work opportunities or disruptions to summer co-op or internship plans.

• (1450)

[Translation]

Many Canadian post-secondary students are wondering how they will be able to pay their tuition, buy groceries and cover their rent if they cannot find a summer job.

It is estimated that over a million post-secondary students may not be eligible for the Canada emergency response benefit.

[English]

Students are a valuable part of our communities and are ready to bring innovative solutions and a helping hand to our workforce in response to COVID-19.

Last week the Prime Minister mentioned Felix, a recent engineering grad from Carleton University. Felix has experience working on communication satellites, and a few weeks ago he talked to a local manufacturer about what they could do in the fight against COVID-19. Now they have started designing and creating reusable face shields for front-line workers.

Felix is not the only one stepping up. Young people from all over Canada are pitching in and doing their part.

This proposed legislation before us is how we are supporting them in turn. If approved, this framework would provide financial relief to students during the important summer months through a temporary income support benefit worth approximately \$5.2 billion. I will focus on the largest piece of this framework, which is the Canada emergency student benefit.

Last week our government announced a four-month Canada emergency student benefit. Students who are not receiving the CERB and meet the criteria for this new benefit will be able to apply to receive \$1,250 per month between May and August. Students with permanent disabilities and students with dependants would receive an additional \$750 per month, for a total of \$2,000 a month.

[Translation]

Students will be able to work part time and still receive the benefit, which is part of our effort to keep Canadians connected with the labour market.

Like the Canada emergency response benefit, the Canada emergency student benefit will not have to be repaid.

[English]

The CESB would be available to students who are enrolled in a post-secondary education program leading to a degree, diploma or certificate, or who ended their studies no earlier than December 2019. This means that students who are enrolled in a post-secondary education program or who just recently ended their post-secondary studies would be eligible. It would also be available to high school graduates who will be joining post-secondary education programs in the coming months.

[Translation]

The Canada emergency student benefit will also be accessible to both current CEGEP students and those who recently completed their CEGEP studies and plan to go back to school in the fall.

Our government has also committed over \$75 million to enhance the assistance offered to first nations, Inuit and Métis students.

[English]

Students would be able to begin applying for the CESB in May via a simple online form on the CRA website under My Account.

Finally, I would like to highlight what our government is doing to address the concerns of students with disabilities during this pan-

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demic. We recognize that some groups are significantly and disproportionately impacted by this crisis. For some Canadians with disabilities, underlying medical conditions put them at greater risk of serious complications related to COVID-19. Others face discrimination and barriers in accessing information, social services and health care.

We know that students with disabilities as well as students with dependants could have additional expenses during this public health crisis. As such, Canadian students with disabilities and students with dependants would be eligible to receive an extra \$750 per month on top of the basic CESB benefit.

The uncertainty may feel overwhelming for many students, but in Canada we look out for each other. We value education, service and hard work. These measures will help Canadian students get through these difficult times so they can build their career and future they have been working so hard for.

Putting forward this legislation is a key step in our delivery of support for students. I thank all the members of Parliament who are providing feedback and bringing forth the thoughts and concerns of their constituents.

• (1455)

[Translation]

The passage of this bill is a key step in the government's offer of assistance to students. I thank all members who gave feedback and shared their constituents' ideas and concerns.

[English]

May is fast approaching and students are counting on us to help them get through these trying times.

Together, as members of Parliament, we have the opportunity to support Canada's students in a way that will be felt for years to come. On the other side, when the economy comes back, they will define our path forward, a path toward a better, more equal society.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the minister for acknowledging that students are hurting right now.

People think of my community of Oshawa as an automotive town, but it is quickly becoming a student town, with three post-secondary institutions: Ontario Tech University, Durham College and Trent University.

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As we work through this as a Parliament, Conservatives are putting forward some ideas to improve the government programs. I was wondering if the minister could comment on the idea we brought forward of expanding a program, doubling the Canada summer jobs program and positioning it so that students be matched, through a job bank, with jobs in our agriculture sector, especially now when there are super concerns about disruptions in our supply chain. Employers need the labour and students can be available. Is the minister open to considering our positive enhancement for supporting students?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Mr. Speaker, the short answer is yes, absolutely. I look forward to working with all members to enhance our opportunities for young people to work, including adding additional jobs to our existing programs.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. minister for the good work she has been doing. Part of the problem we are seeing with students, though, is that we have a patchwork of programs that is not quite working. I love the Canada summer jobs program, but it is very often taken up by high school students.

The minister is aware that a northern Ontario medical school has offered to put medical students on the front lines in northern hospitals, yet the only option we have is to take the Canada summer jobs program and to try to fit them into it, when it would be a game-changer for all of our northern communities if the minister would agree to get northern Ontario medical students into hospitals in northern communities to help in those rural regions. This would give them the employment they need. It would also ensure that the Canada summer jobs program does the job it is supposed to be doing. This would be a game-changer for our front-line medical services in the north.

Is the hon. minister willing to work with us on this?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Mr. Speaker, I was very excited when the member put forth his proposal to me in recent days. In fact, just this morning I met with my officials to move that proposal forward so we can indeed respond to the needs of northern Ontario through the use of medical students and not in any way encroach upon the Canada summer jobs program.

Absolutely is my answer. I believe I will have a solution for him within hours, if not within the next days. I am very excited about this proposal.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I want to highlight what a great exchange that just was. It was a great idea from the member for Timmins—James Bay and a great response by the minister. Let us see that happen.

My concern is a gap that we are seeing that affects tens of thousands of international students in Canada. We know that an international student can apply for the CERB, but if that international student did not earn \$5,000 last year, they cannot apply, so we have a gap. For anyone watching and wondering why we are worrying about international students, thinking they can go home, many of them cannot go home right now for quarantine reasons. Moreover, they bring over \$20 billion to our economy every year. The international students program employs over 170,000 Canadians as a re-

sult of our having international students. Therefore, I am looking for a solution here.

One solution would be to change the definition under the Canada jobs program to make it open to those who are not Canadian citizens. Another would be to change Bill C-15 to say that an international student is included. Yes, international students can apply for CERB, but they are really not being taken care of in a comprehensive way.

Will the minister have any proposals for us in the coming days?

• (1500)

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Mr. Speaker, that again is another example of our collaboration as we have been going back and forth on the issue of international students.

One of the things we made sure of when we created the CERB was that the criteria would include the requirement that someone had to be resident in Canada, so international students as well as temporary foreign workers could apply. When we embarked upon our process of thinking of how we could support students, we looked at our existing student policy, which focuses on Canadian citizens and permanent residents. Mirroring our existing policy around Canada student loans and Canada summer jobs, the current Canada student benefit is focused on Canadian citizens and residents of Canada.

What we have done for international students is to relax the restriction on the number of hours they can work, which is particularly important for international students studying in medical fields right now.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented crisis. Our government knows that Canadians and businesses are going through very trying times. That is why we acted so fast. We have implemented programs to support all Canadians affected by the pandemic.

[*English*]

This unprecedented crisis demands an unprecedented response. Canada's COVID-19 economic response plan is among the largest in the G7. We have introduced measures for workers, parents, students and for businesses, large and small. We are making sure that no one is left behind. Let me provide a few examples.

The Canada emergency response benefit is a major part of the government's COVID-19 economic response plan. It is meant to help stabilize the economy by supporting Canadians as they pay for essentials, like housing and groceries, and will help businesses across the country to pay their bills and keep their doors open. The emergency response benefit provides \$2,000 a month for up to four months for workers who have lost their incomes because of COVID-19. More than seven million Canadians have already received money through this essential benefit.

[*Translation*]

We are also boosting the Canada child benefit by \$300 per child for over three million Canadian families. That is an extra \$550 per family on average. We are supplementing the GST credit with a special payment for low- and modest-income families averaging about \$400 for single people and \$600 for couples. Many people have already received their money.

We are also continuing to work with the provinces and territories to share the cost of a temporary wage top-up for low-income workers deemed essential in the fight against COVID-19. That includes Quebec and British Columbia, where the provincial governments have already implemented direct wage support for those workers.

We are also helping Canadian employers and employees deal with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. With the Canada emergency wage subsidy, the government hopes to prevent further job losses and encourage employers to rehire workers previously laid off because of COVID-19. The idea is to ensure that Canadian businesses are well positioned to fully resume their operations after the crisis. The emergency wage subsidy covers 75% of employees' earnings, up to \$847 a week, for employers who suffer a drop in gross revenues of at least 15% in March, or 30% in April or May.

In addition, the Canada emergency business account provides up to \$40,000 in interest-free loans to small businesses, including non-profit organizations. Since the second week of April, small business owners have been able to apply for assistance through the Canada emergency business account at their bank or credit union. Businesses can access this account through their primary lender, with which they already have a business relationship.

• (1505)

[*English*]

Small and medium-sized businesses are the backbone of our economy and, really, of our society. They give our communities their character, provide good jobs and support families across the country. That is why I am pleased to report that the Canada emergency commercial rent assistance will give eligible small businesses affected by COVID-19 another break. It will lower their rent by 75%. We are able to offer this support thanks to an agreement in principle that our government reached with all provinces and territories last week. That is team Canada at work.

The Government of Canada is taking strong, immediate and effective action to protect Canadians and Canadian businesses from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The measures I have outlined today will help Canadian employers retain or re-hire their employees, as many have done already. This is the key to our response

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plan. By being able to hold onto their workers, Canadian companies will be in a better position to bounce back quickly after the crisis and many more Canadians will have the security of knowing that they still have a job.

Another aspect of our response that is really important is that we have not and will not hesitate to make adjustments to enhance our programs. We want to make sure that everyone is protected and we are working to ensure that people and businesses do not fall through the cracks. Our response has been guided by principle that speed trumps perfection and that making useful modifications as we go along is a feature and not a bug.

[*Translation*]

That is why we are offering assistance to students and recent graduates affected by COVID-19. A few weeks ago, hundreds of thousands of students across the country were getting ready to start a summer job. For some of these young Canadians, this would be their first opportunity to take on challenges and succeed in the workplace. For others, this job would be a bridge to their career.

Today, these same students are having a hard time finding meaningful employment. Many are worried, and they are wondering how they can pay their rent and save for school.

In March, the number of post-secondary students who were employed dropped by 28% compared to February 2020. Some of these students are eligible for the Canada emergency response benefit. These young people are at a pivotal time in their lives and we must do what we can to give them a promising future. The government intends to do something about that.

We are proposing the new Canada emergency student benefit as part of Canada's COVID-19 economic response plan. This benefit would provide eligible Canadian students with \$1,250 a month from May to August. Eligible students with dependants or disabilities will receive a higher amount.

[*English*]

The government also intends to launch the Canada student service grant to encourage students to volunteer. This service grant will provide up to \$5,000 to support recipients' post-secondary education costs in the fall.

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We also need to look beyond this summer and improve existing financial assistance programs available to students. That is what we intend to do. Our plan includes doubling Canada student grants for all eligible students in 2020-21 to \$6,000 for full-time students and up to \$3,600 for those studying part time.

The government recognizes that many families will have a tough time setting money aside in 2020 to help their children go to school, and we want to support the next generation of Canadian leaders. We plan to enhance Canada student loan programs by increasing the maximum weekly amount available from \$210 to \$350.

Overall, the measures I have just described represent nearly \$9 billion for post-secondary students and recent graduates.

• (1510)

[*Translation*]

During these unprecedented times, we will continue to carefully monitor all COVID-19 related developments. Protecting Canadians' health and meeting their immediate needs remain our priorities. Once this crisis is over, we will be ready to work with Canadians and kick-start the economy in order to build an even stronger country.

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the question I am going to put to the minister comes from a woman in my riding.

We are often asked where we get our questions from. In this case, the manager of a fruit and vegetable store wrote to me on my Facebook page. After the government announcement concerning financial assistance, that is, the Canada emergency student benefit, she contacted a former employee, who is a student, to ask her if she wanted to return to work. This employee told her that she did not want to work more than fifteen hours a week because she wanted to be eligible for the new Canada emergency student benefit.

This woman asked me to ask the government how it intends to solve this problem. This is a problem that business owners, farmers and companies will have to deal with in the summer months. It is a major issue.

Therefore, I am passing on this question to the government. All MPs, whether Conservative, NDP, Bloc Québécois or Green, are receiving many questions from their constituents. I am certain that is the case for the Liberals as well.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

I would like to start by sharing a personal experience. As the daughter of a farmer, I worked on the family farm during the summer. Obviously, I worked without pay, because it was the family farm. I am well aware that it is in the interest of farms to hire students, as this benefits both farm owners and students.

We firmly believe, and I think all members would agree, that Canadian students want to work. The problem is that many students will have a hard time finding work because of COVID-19.

That is why this program is so important. We also need to make sure that it does not act as a deterrent to students. We will keep a close eye on that.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank the Deputy Prime Minister.

I cannot resist the urge to mention that I put myself through school by working on a farm. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge my boss, Robert Corriveau, and his daughter, Mylène, who took over the business.

The government and the opposition parties are looking for the right formula to balance students' need to access a basic income with the jobs available considering the number of foreign agricultural workers that will be allowed into Canada.

I understand that finding the specific wording for a formula requires more time than we have at our disposal today. In the spirit of co-operation, will the government commit to considering measures for Quebec and Canadian students to ensure that the net income of students who do find work will be adjusted based on the number of hours worked, and that this measure will apply to recipients of the existing CESB and CERB?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his excellent question and observation.

The answer is obviously yes. The government analyzed the structure and the short-term impact of the CESB on students, to ensure that the measure meets its objectives while still encouraging students to work. Students are encouraged to work so that they can earn an income, and adjustments will be considered, as required.

• (1515)

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to split my time with the member for Kenora.

Thank you for giving me a chance today to speak about this new measure, the Canada emergency student benefit. As a political lieutenant, I would like to state that this is an important measure that will help students across the country and across Quebec. Sadly, for various reasons, these students are also being affected by this pandemic, along with workers and seniors.

The government has announced this important measure, which will provide \$1,250 a month to students affected by COVID-19. This bill shows the government's desire to also support young people who will be doing volunteer work to help people who are directly or indirectly affected by COVID-19. We look forward to getting the details in order to find out how this measure will be rolled out and how the number of hours will be determined. Checks will have to be done to prevent abuse. However, the government's intentions are clear. I also commend the idea of enhancing loans and grants for more vulnerable students who have a harder time making ends meet.

However, people are very concerned about the process of re-opening the economy. Some people are downplaying the important role students will play in the labour force as we reopen the economy. During a press conference, I heard the Prime Minister answer a question from Philippe-Vincent Foisy about why he did not set up incentives like Quebec did to help and motivate young people to go out and find jobs instead of handing them cash directly. Some students might decide to stay home so they can collect the benefit.

The intent is there. We all want to help students and not pigeon-hole them. We want to help them and all other Canadians. Earlier, I spoke to the minister about one of the dozens of cases that have been brought to my attention and to the attention of members of all political stripes. The owner of a fruit and vegetable store said that she had called a former student to ask her to come work, as she had every year. The student told her that she was able to come back, but not full time, as she had all of the other summers. This is a busy time for merchants. The student would be penalized because she would earn more than \$1,000 a month. She would have made too much money to receive the \$1,250 benefit. In some cases, these measures deter students, and we still have not received specifics from the government. What will be done? What will be the measures, the criteria and the oversight to ensure that students are not deterred from working?

I would like to draw my colleagues', Canadians' and Quebeckers' attention to what the Prime Minister told a journalist who asked why there were no incentives in the Canada emergency response benefit to encourage young people, and I would add adults to that as well, to join the labour force. The Prime Minister said that, after analyzing the situation, it was determined that, unfortunately, there are not enough jobs for all young people.

I did a fairly simple calculation and I would like to tell everyone here about a measure that the government could put in place fairly quickly that could help many young people earn money to pay for their university or CEGEP tuition, their books, their rent, and their groceries, or in other words, all of the basic necessities that every student has to pay for. I called my Conservative colleagues from Quebec, the nine other members who work with me, to talk about the following.

As part of its student employment program, the government decided to give subsidies of 100% rather than subsidies of 50% as it did in the past and to allow farm, business, NPO and municipal employers to apply for funding. Contrary to what the government is suggesting, the budget has not increased. It is the same budget. That means that, if jobs are subsidized at 100% rather than at 50%, then fewer jobs will be created.

● (1520)

I talked to all the Conservative Party members from Quebec so I could calculate the number of applications submitted by businesses and farmers in our ridings. The federal government's current summer jobs budget will not meet demand.

Quebec's 10 Conservative members alone reported 1,442 applications for existing summer jobs. Those applications were submitted by businesses, farmers and non-profits when the government was offering a 50% subsidy. Now the government is offering a 100% subsidy. I have a B.A. and a master's degree in administration

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and math education, so I applied the rule of three to that data to extrapolate the results for all 338 MPs here in the House.

According to my calculations, some 48,740 jobs will not be covered by the Canada summer jobs program. These are existing jobs for which employers have submitted applications, but they will get no help from the government even though these jobs would enable young people to work rather than collect the \$1,250 CESB on top of income from part-time jobs. Also, students will steer clear of full-time minimum wage jobs because they do not pay enough.

Canada has 48,740 job openings for students. Officials told us that subsidizing each of those summer jobs would cost about \$4,000, which adds up to \$194,960,000, or a little less than \$200 million.

Compare that to the \$9-billion overall envelope the government is providing to help students through loans and bursaries, the Canada emergency student benefit and the service grant, if a paid service can still be considered volunteer work. The total amount of \$194,960,000 represents roughly 2% of the government's total \$9-billion aid package. That amount would allow the government to immediately meet the needs of businesses without having them compete with one another and would not require new programs to be created. What is more, students would be able to make a living and pay their bills while at school.

If the opposition parties could have worked proactively, that is the type of solution they would have proposed. I hope the government will seize this opportunity. It could increase this envelope without changing anything else. That way, roughly 50,000 students in Canada, in every single riding, could have a job instead of receiving the CERB, which could be used to help people who need it even more.

The Conservative Party is pleased to see that the government agreed to make changes to the bill to make it more acceptable, fairer and more equitable and to ensure businesses do not have to compete as much. It is rather impressive to see the number of emails, calls and comments on social media relaying to MPs the adverse effect of this measure on recruiting employees. That is the sense we are getting on this side of the House and we get the impression it is a bit ideological.

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We are pleased that the government agreed to require that all applicants contact Employment and Social Development Canada to obtain information about available student jobs. We are pleased that the government agreed to our request for parliamentary review of the bill and the Canada emergency student benefit in order to find ways to mitigate the unintended disincentives to work that we are currently seeing. Finally, we are pleased that the government agreed to a deadline so that it cannot unilaterally extend this benefit through regulations. We are pleased to see that the Conservative Party's efforts have enhanced the bill to help students across the country.

I encourage the government to stop with the empty rhetoric. While it says that it wants to help everyone, the fact remains that this measure also has unintended consequences. Even though this measure is intended to help students, it will nevertheless hurt the economy if controls are not put in place. If the government were to demonstrate political goodwill, jobs could be quickly filled, just like that.

• (1525)

[English]

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Conservatives are proposing that the government create a new program to match student and youth employees with jobs in the agriculture and agri-food sector, and we heard that was part of the unanimous consent motion that we adopted earlier.

Could the member tell us what impact, if any, this will have in his own riding? Will this be a welcome program?

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her excellent question.

The Conservative Party did indeed propose an amendment calling on the government to match students looking for work with employers in the agriculture and fishing sectors, specifically. I am thinking of Maritimers who are suffering the consequences of this decision, which many employers might not welcome.

I think this proposal just makes sense. I would like to point out that it aims to help students. We all want to help students. It would be wrong to suggest that any member from any political party does not support students.

In this recovery, we must work hard to help our economy. This is a public health crisis, yes, but we are also experiencing an economic crisis at the same time. Depending on the government's decisions, we will also face a public finance crisis in the future. It will be a huge challenge for the next government, which I hope is Conservative, to get our public finances back on track before the next crisis hits, whatever that may be.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my hon. colleague a question.

He mentioned that all MPs have been fielding a lot of questions from their constituents since the start of this crisis. My office has heard about the needs of workers who have lost their jobs and the multiple needs of business owners, and I was very pleased and reas-

sured to be able to address those needs through the measures announced by our government every day and every week.

I would like to know whether my colleague has had similar comments from his constituents. Have they appreciated or had any comments about our government's measures?

Mr. Alain Rayes: Mr. Speaker, we have gotten a lot of questions.

My office alone has seven employees, including me. We are spending nearly 12 hours a week answering questions. Most other members are experiencing the same at their offices. We are getting these questions because even though the information is good, it unfortunately is not making it all the way to our ridings in a transparent way.

That is one of the big problems. We informed the government of this problem through officials. Although we get daily teleconference briefings at 4:30 p.m., we are not given any documentation that would enable us to answer questions afterwards. I should point out that on these briefing calls to assist all MPs, there is often no official or staffer from the Minister of Finance's office to answer questions about the key components of the government's assistance.

Naturally, the people who are really affected and who need the CERB and the CESB are happy to receive that assistance. There is a reason why we all passed this legislation here in the House.

However, there are some unintended consequences, which were quickly felt in the hard-hit business sector. It is no joke. Every day, in one of our ridings, a business or industry is shutting down. The money offered to help has not yet made it to them. Unfortunately a lot of people are unhappy, even though the government announced billions of dollars in support.

• (1530)

[English]

Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to be able to rise in the House today and speak to this important topic in the midst of a global pandemic and an economic crisis that has occupied us all over the last months. It is so important that Parliament is able to meet so that we can discuss and improve legislation to ensure support reaches all Canadians who need it.

Government Orders

The COVID-19 pandemic has no doubt taken a toll on all Canadians. Business owners, non-profits and charities are struggling to stay afloat, and many Canadians have lost their jobs. Additionally, Canadian students are facing an uncertain future. Summer jobs are valuable opportunities for Canada's students to learn new skills, to meet new people and to prepare for their careers. More than that, countless post-secondary students rely on summer employment not just to fund their education, but also to afford the basic necessities of life.

I have lived this experience very recently, perhaps more recently than any of my colleagues. I wrote my final university exam last summer before heading straight back home, on the campaign trail for the 2019 election. Therefore, I can say that I fully understand the challenges that are facing students during normal circumstances because I lived them; these challenges are being amplified by the crisis that is before us right now.

Students face a tremendous amount of financial pressure and mental stress, and are stretched for time commitments during the school year. That is part of the reason why many students choose to leave their summer employment when school comes around, with the expectation that a job will be available for them when they return, just the same as for any seasonal employees across Canada.

Many students are unable to attend school locally, like many in northern Ontario, including me. Therefore, we have had no choice but to leave our jobs behind to move away and start the school year. As we know, students are now finishing up their school year and they are attempting to enter the workforce just as many businesses are laying people off and closing their doors entirely. High school students who are graduating this year and looking forward to entering the workforce are in the same situation, as are new university and college graduates. Students have bills to pay, just like everyone else. They have to pay for rent, groceries and tuition. Now, through no fault of their own, many are in a position where they may not be able to find any job for the foreseeable future.

In my riding of Kenora, some of our biggest job creators, especially for students, are tourism operators who are dependent on visitors who, this summer, will likely not arrive. Other businesses are fighting to avoid laying off the staff they already have and are not in the position to hire anyone else. This scenario is playing out across the country right now in different ways. The details may be different, but the results are the same: Thousands of people who are counting on finding jobs this summer may not be able to.

That is why I was taken aback when students were initially left out of the government's initial response to COVID-19. That is why, on April 7, I co-signed a letter along with three of my Conservative colleagues, the member for Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, the member for Kildonan—St. Paul and the member for Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon. We asked whether the government intended to rectify its mistake. I am glad that after weeks of pressure from me, my Conservative colleagues and other members of the opposition, the government has finally introduced legislation to support students who cannot find work due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I am happy to see that the government has worked with the official opposition to improve the legislation that is before us today.

Conservatives know that no government benefit can replace the experience of having a job. Simply put, we believe that everyone who is able to work should do so. However, we also recognize that in some areas, there are simply no jobs to be had.

Canadian students need to pay for their rent and their tuition, and they are trying to save for their future. If possible, they need the opportunity to learn new skills and meet people in their fields. I can say that no students or new grads want to have a months-long gap in their resumé, when they could have been gaining valuable work experience. I know I would not have wanted that, and I might not be standing here today if that had been the case.

Right now, students need support, but they also need creative solutions to incentivize as many students as possible to gain that valuable experience. Conservatives have been vigilant in making sure that new government benefits do not inadvertently disincentivize employment. We have successfully advocated for the government to allow people earning up to \$1,000 a month to collect the CERB, so that Canadians who are able to perform some work will still be able to do so without losing their support.

• (1535)

In that same vein, we are fighting to loosen the eligibility criteria for commercial rent supports so that more businesses will be able to keep their doors open. We know our economy will recover much more quickly if our businesses can remain open and our workforce can remain activated.

We also know that even as many businesses are laying off staff, there are also many that are having difficulty finding staff, such as agriculture businesses, restaurants and the hospitality industry. I have spoken with the chamber of commerce, business owners and economic development agencies, and it is no secret that there are many businesses struggling to find workers. Canada brings in 60,000 foreign workers each year for the agricultural sector alone, and many of the essential businesses that are currently operating are having difficulty and struggling even more throughout this pandemic.

Government Orders

That is why the Conservative Party proposed new programs to match students and youth employees with jobs in the agriculture and agri-food sector. Many agricultural producers are facing labour shortages right now because of their inability to hire temporary foreign workers, and we believe students who are struggling to find work could potentially fill those gaps. This would be a great opportunity for students to gain work experience and earn some income while stabilizing our food supply and contributing to Canada's COVID-19 response. We hope to be able to work with the government to make this program a reality.

I was happy to hear that the government has accepted our proposal to ensure that students who apply for the benefit will be connected with the job bank at the same time. This will ensure that available jobs are filled first and that students do not miss out on potential job opportunities. It is a win-win for students looking for work and for employers looking for staff.

The government has also agreed to put a sunset clause in the legislation and to provide a parliamentary review of the impact of this legislation. This is basic due diligence to ensure that this bill will not outlive its purpose and will be useful, rather than having unintended negative impacts on the labour force.

At the end of the day, until we go back to normal, there will still be some students who, through no fault of their own, cannot find jobs. We recognize that reality, which is why we support the principle of the Canadian emergency student benefit. With the addition of our reasonable proposals, this benefit will ensure students get the support they need while not missing out on employment opportunities.

We are facing an unprecedented economic crisis as a result of this worldwide pandemic, and many hard-working Canadians from all walks of life have suddenly found themselves in need of emergency support. Canada's economy has no doubt gone through a major shock, and we know it will be much worse if suddenly this summer we find ourselves with hundreds of thousands of students who are unable to pay their rent. The long-term impacts of students being forced to delay or discontinue their education would also be considerable. The spillover effects of leaving students without support at this time will be simply devastating, and that is why we know this support is so important.

I would urge Parliament to give students the best chance to succeed, to support our economy and to get help to those who need it most. I also urge the government to continue working with the opposition to advance solutions that would allow as many students as possible the opportunity to earn a living wage and support the sectors that are being hit so hard during this pandemic.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for his very thoughtful speech about the legislation that we are considering. I appreciate his reminiscing about his recent academic career, because that is the kind of thing I have been hearing from the students in my riding. This is the most pivotal point in any student's academic career or for anyone who is starting a professional career. The shutdown of the economy due to COVID-19 was completely unexpected. The students I have been hearing from have seen job opportunities dry up overnight.

Does the member opposite feel the same way as some members, who have already commented that students, in fact, are not looking for work or are not interested in working? This emergency benefit is really to help students get through this difficult period, as is the case with many others in our economy.

Does the member think students will just take the money and take a free ride?

● (1540)

Mr. Eric Melillo: Mr. Speaker, I know all members of this House are focused on helping Canada get through this crisis as best as possible. We know there are many students who have lost their jobs or are struggling to find work this summer. That is why this benefit is so important. Whether it is businesses, not-for-profits or charities, there are many organizations that are struggling to find work.

However, I also believe we should have innovative ways to help our students find work if it is available, and that is what we have been advocating.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a great respect for my hon. colleague.

I have noticed one thing in the Conservative talking points. We are in the midst of the worst economic crisis since the Depression, with hundreds of thousands of students economically devastated, yet we hear language of the kind we saw in the National Post yesterday, saying that if we give them support, they are going to sit on their duffs and hang out in their hammocks, and that we need to incentivize them. I find it shocking to suggest that students who have \$30,000 or \$50,000 worth of debt are going to take the summer off, hang out and goof around, and that we have to make sure they go to work.

I was surprised that my hon. colleague said he knows of many restaurants that are looking for workers. It must be bustling there. The restaurants I know are struggling to survive. They have shut down. They have nobody working. They cannot bring people in to work. That is employment that students normally take, so I am very concerned about this coded language about making sure that they are incentivized to go to work. They want to work, but have been stopped from working by COVID. Maybe there are restaurants in other parts of Ontario or Canada that are searching everywhere for employees, but they are not in my region.

Mr. Eric Melillo: Mr. Speaker, obviously we are working through this crisis together. We are making sure that students have the supports they need and the opportunities that are available to them.

Government Orders

There are many industries, businesses and organizations I have been talking to that have been struggling during normal times to find workers and are continuing to do so during this crisis. These are essential businesses that are continuing to operate, and many need staff in order to do so. As a caucus, we are working to provide support to those businesses and make sure the work is there, but we also understand that many businesses are in a different situation and are laying staff off, and we have to provide students and all workers with the opportunity to have an income and to maintain their lives.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it will be my absolute pleasure to share my time with the brilliant member for Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia.

Over the past few hours, we have seen that the clarity of the wording of a motion can be a crucial issue. A motion can turn into a word salad that will be interpreted five different ways by five different people. For that reason, we must all strive to make the meaning of each word clear, because that is the only way to achieve equal clarity with respect to the intent. What was the intent of the lawmaker who introduced a bill, as well as a motion to get the ball rolling? All of us, or nearly all of us, can agree that the intent was to provide students with financial assistance that will essentially serve two aims.

The first is to give students the necessary financial resources to get through the summer and the current period. Under normal circumstances, they would be living on wages from part-time jobs, often in the restaurant, entertainment or tourism industries. Those jobs simply do not exist in the current context.

The second is to enable students to save a little money to live on next year. That is how I paid for most of my education, and I am sure many of my colleagues did the same. That is the point of the exercise. A few voices have been raised regarding this exercise. Because nuances are not always possible or understood, people have divided into two camps. One camp staunchly believes that students need help. That is the camp I fall in. Hundreds of thousands of students, perhaps as many as a million, will miss out on the jobs they would normally get, and that is a conservative estimate. These people need help to protect their purchasing power and continue their studies.

The other camp holds what I would humbly call the less refined belief that, as my esteemed colleague said, students will suddenly turn into lazy deadbeats who just hang out in the basement smoking pot. That is not true. Students are the same this year as they were last year, the year before and even back in my school days. I do not believe that people back then smoked less pot, myself excluded.

Of course, a balance had to be struck so that businesses, municipalities and farmers who need workers do not have to deal with a measure that serves as a disincentive to work. A measure was needed that does not make it preferable for students not to work. Obviously, a way forward needed to be found and that was not so simple. However, this is a red herring. Forgive me for my candour, and my friendship with or affection for students, but I think they want to work. The ones in my riding, and there are many, all want to work. They are happy to work. I worked, their parents worked and no one regrets it.

The \$1,250 per month could help during the summer and fall. Of course, this will not last until the fall, but this money would help students continue to go to school. I would like to come back to that quickly, because it is critically important. We must not put ourselves in a position where students are in debt up to their eyeballs at the approach of the next school year, which we hope will be as normal as possible. They must not be worse off financially than before, especially since there is reason to believe that the economy in general will not be doing so well. It will be a time of economic recovery, an upturn where things are improving, but we will be starting out from such a low point that we will all still be experiencing economic woes.

• (1545)

We found—or rather, since I do not want to get into who gets credit for what—helped to find three elements that the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons read in the motion that seem fundamental to us. I imagine that every opposition party discussed every comma.

The first was to ensure that this measure did not breed uncertainty among agricultural entrepreneurs, entrepreneurs in general, municipalities and anyone else hoping to hire students. I believe the fourth point does that quite nicely by clarifying the support to agricultural producers because that is where the debate began. The government did not dare go quite that far in the wording, but if this support took the form of financial aid to improve student wages, that would not be such a bad idea.

The wording of the motion does not do justice to the intention of the motion. Indeed, the second element is that the wording of the motion seems to only reference the creation of an incentive to work. There is a sort of imbalance and I spoke to my colleague from Thérèse-De Blainville about that. It is as though the presumption was that the average student does not really feel like working as there is no reference to the fact that this is above all a measure to support the economic needs of students. Paragraph (e) is worded in such a way as to imply that, above all, students need to be compelled to work. That does not sit well with me.

That is why I asked the Deputy Prime Minister a very specific question. I asked her whether the government did in fact plan to ensure that the process did not penalize students who receive the benefit and who want to work.

The basic amount is \$1,250, and students should be able to earn \$1,000 without being penalized, but a student earning \$1,010 should not lose that \$1,250. Students should not be put in a position where they will choose to work just 20 hours instead of 21 hours so they do not lose that \$1,250. Students are quite capable of figuring that out. We have to make sure that does not happen. That was the point of my question to the Deputy Prime Minister, and her answer was, “obviously yes”.

Government Orders

Will the government introduce measures to ensure that students who work more hours will earn more money? The Deputy Prime Minister's answer was yes, and she gave other details. I believe that that amounts to a clear commitment on the government's part.

In the last part of the motion, the government committed to examining measures to increase seniors' buying power, perhaps by boosting old age security and the guaranteed income supplement. Note that it is both one and the other, not either or. We would not want to see the government focus on the guaranteed income supplement, which benefits only 40% of seniors, considering that the cost of groceries has gone up for everyone. That is an issue for us.

I have lost count of how many times the Bloc Québécois has spoken out on behalf of seniors over the past few weeks, and we are not done. We will not stop until we get what we want. In Quebec, 19% of the population is over 65. We need to see an increase in their spending power, an essential tool in increasing or improving the economic conditions in Quebec's regions.

Despite the dithering, I am pretty happy with today's results. Of course, we must remain vigilant. We will remain vigilant, and we will always work in the exclusive interest of Quebecers, while being constructive and positive. If this helps others, that is even better.

• (1550)

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate this opportunity to discuss this with my colleagues today. I thank the hon. member opposite for his speech. We can supply a bit more information that would explain why we chose one amount over another. It is really hard to strike a balance when we want to help people during this crisis while also taking other programs into account and meeting other needs in our society.

I think we have a real opportunity here. Young people back home want to be able to work, especially in essential jobs. For instance, there is a company in my riding that is hiring a lot of staff because it produces essential goods. Can my colleague comment on that? Has he had any similar experiences?

• (1555)

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Mr. Speaker, I thank my esteemed colleague for her question.

There are several cases that could be studied one by one. Unfortunately, in an emergency situation, programs are created, as collaboratively as possible, that need improvements later because they were created in a few months rather than in a year and a half. Several such cases require our attention and we are receiving many inquiries.

Today, three improvements that we have asked for have been made. The first is that any employer, whether a municipality, farmer or tourism business, needing student labour will be assured that there will be incentives, particularly in the form of financial assistance. Second, we are pleased to have the clarification that the more students work, the more net money they will have in their pockets. This is fundamental because students want to work. Third, we see that the government is clearly open to increasing our seniors' old age security.

Thus, we are already seeing progress. There will have to be measures introduced in the coming days, in particular for research and public finances. Today, however, I feel that we have made progress.

[*English*]

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one of the things I find frustrating about all of this is that the CESB provides 40% less, on average, to students. The government has said it is providing a whole suite of programs that students can access: the service grants that they can get through volunteering or the access to student loans and grants later on, when they start school. However, students' needs, their payments, rent, grocery bills and all those things are due now, so all of these things are just forcing them to take on more debt and more loans, whether they are in debt to the federal government, a bank or a credit card company.

I would like to hear the member's thoughts on that and how frustrating that can be for students, particularly in his riding.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Mr. Speaker, I thank my esteemed colleague for her question.

The benefit, in the form that will probably be approved today, will not increase student debt, yet that is still a major concern. Taking on debt in general, at a time when things look like they are about to get even tougher, is always a major concern.

I will say that we should be having a discussion about lowering tuition fees; in my opinion, there is no limit to how low they could go. In the same vein, I am also seeing a proliferation of new programs that compete with one another and overlap. I think that is a normal consequence of having to be developed so hastily. However, once all this is over, we will have to clean house and be very strict, yet also compassionate. It may take an open mind and some creativity to implement more general programs.

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. leader for sharing his time with me today.

Before I begin, I want to say hello to the people of Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia and thank them for the remarkable resilience they have shown during this crisis. The situation is relatively stable for the time being in the Lower St. Lawrence and the Gaspé thanks to their compliance with the measures put in place by various public health authorities.

Government Orders

As the Bloc Québécois youth critic, I am pleased to be here today to debate this bill bringing in support measures for students. Not wanting to leave students behind, the Bloc Québécois has been urging the government to act. Our demands have been heard.

The government listened to us and brought in the Canada emergency student benefit to provide support to students and recent graduates who are not eligible for the Canada emergency response benefit or employment insurance and are unable to work because of COVID-19.

It is a benefit of \$1,250 per month for eligible students or a benefit of \$1,750 for those who care for a person with a disability. Let me be clear: that is very good news for young people who are unable to go back to their regular summer job for various reasons. Perhaps they are sick, perhaps they have to care for someone who is sick, or perhaps the business they worked for last year cannot reopen. Regardless of the reason, this emergency benefit is welcome.

It is welcome as long as it is seen for what it is: an emergency benefit. Having been a student myself not that long ago, I can only assume that students will be the first to want to lend a hand as soon as the situation allows them to do so. They are already doing just that.

I was talking about this yesterday with the presidents of the Quebec Student Union and the Fédération étudiante collégiale du Québec. They told me that many of their members had already sent out hundreds of resumés to work for Quebec's long-term care centres, farms, and businesses that offer essential services.

The Bloc Québécois recognizes the contribution young people make to our society. We know that most of them will not apply for the benefit until they have tried to find a job.

People have criticized this measure recently. Businesses in Quebec are concerned that students might not make much of an effort to find work before collecting a cheque from Ottawa.

We know that the regular Canada emergency response benefit has, in effect, created two classes of citizens, several even, because it has different eligibility criteria, which is why there is now a benefit specifically for students.

The thing is, students are citizens like everyone else. They have bills to pay too. A student who moves from Gaspé to attend the Université du Québec à Montréal ends up spending about \$3,600 in the first month and about \$1,200 a month thereafter for fixed costs such as rent, food, transportation, Internet and phone. Costs can be even higher for students in other Canadian cities.

Of course, some of them get help from other people, such as family members, but many of them need us. They need help from the government.

Earlier the minister spoke about Felix. I want to talk about Thomas. Thomas called my office the other day. Because of his course load, he is unable to work during the school year. Yesterday he wrote his last exam of the semester, but even though that stressful experience is over, his anxiety level has only increased instead of decreasing.

He knows that the day after tomorrow, he will have to pay his rent, phone and Internet, but he does not know how he will manage. He was supposed to start an internship on Monday, but that has been cancelled because of the crisis. We all know that Thomas is not the only one in this situation. Felix is not the only one either. Thousands of students across Quebec and Canada are in the same situation.

For many students, summer is a time to earn money for the upcoming school year. However, it is not just about money. Sure, these summer jobs are about earning income, but they are also about gaining experience. For others, it may simply be an educational requirement. This crisis is also an extraordinary situation for students.

I come back to these people who over the past few days have expressed their dissatisfaction with the government's benefit for students. The main argument for some is this myth that students in Quebec and Canada are lazy.

To bust that myth and change what might be perceived as a disincentive to work, the Bloc Québécois wanted to propose a compromise. That compromise would be good for everyone, but most of all it would increase the purchasing power of students and allow the government to save the public purse a lot of money.

• (1600)

We proposed a change that would let young people keep more of their pay before being penalized. We made this proposal because we believe that the CESB is somewhat unfair. It is unfair to students who will make the effort to find a job but will not receive the benefit if they make more than \$1,000, the ineligibility threshold.

We know that the CERB was created in the context of a lockdown. The student benefit will be introduced in an entirely different context, at a time when we presume we will be emerging from that lockdown. This is a fundamental change in the measure's implementation in that many businesses will be reopening their doors to the extent possible, with some opening in a more restricted manner. I am thinking of restaurant owners who decide, for example, to open just in the evenings on weekends instead of at lunch and dinner every day. This means that there will be many strictly part-time jobs. Neither employers nor employees will benefit when a student has to refuse working a few extra hours because they are afraid of losing access to the benefit or, as my colleague said, losing the entire \$1,250. We simply find it unfair that those who want to work should be penalized.

Government Orders

The crisis is affecting the health of our economy in particular, and several sectors, including the agricultural sector, are experiencing an urgent labour shortage. In my area, many farmers are having to seek additional help because they will not be able to count on temporary foreign workers this summer, for reasons we can all guess.

We believe that students' courage in the face of a crisis is not the issue. The Canada emergency benefit is necessary to support students, but it could certainly use some improvement. I salute the negotiations that took place over the past few hours to address our demands in order to pass this bill, namely for the government to implement financial incentives and support measures for students and young people for the various jobs available, including jobs in the agriculture and agri-food sector, to ensure the economic stability of the regions and maintain food production during the crisis.

What we all want is for the government to ensure that the financial measures it is putting in place are offered in a manner that fulfills their primary objectives while encouraging employment in all circumstances.

● (1605)

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

The co-operation among all the political parties in the House has paid off. The bill will help students. It has been a long time since I was a student. There was a recession in 1981 when I graduated from the Université du Québec à Chicoutimi, where I learned French. Like many students and new graduates, I had to take lower-paying jobs that were not necessarily related to my career. Later on, everything went back to normal.

Does my colleague think that this situation could serve as an opportunity?

I know that people's lives are being disrupted, but does she see any opportunities for the young people who are living through this situation?

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

I believe that our job as parliamentarians is to improve the various programs that are being implemented. We know that months of preparation did not go into this program before it was implemented. The benefit was implemented as an emergency measure. Everything can be improved and it is our job to do just that.

Like my colleagues, I get questions every day from my constituents who are concerned and who are falling through the cracks in the various programs. We are here to improve these programs, and that is what we did with the Canada emergency student benefit. I think that students were somewhat overlooked in this crisis.

We are very pleased to see that we can work together to offer students financial support.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia and the Bloc Québécois for the proposal. I completely agree that it is good for students to be allowed to work part time instead of being unemployed.

How can we, as members of Parliament, show our support in the unanimous consent motions?

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure that I understood the member's question and whether she is wondering if we can agree with the motion passed earlier in the House.

I think it is up to all opposition parties to work with the government to improve the Canada emergency student benefit. It will be implemented rather quickly.

There were a number of concerns from student associations in Quebec, which were asking when the benefit would come and whether the adoption of the bill would delay the money. The CERB arrived rather quickly, so I hope things will go just as smoothly with the CESB.

● (1610)

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise twice in a row.

I just want to say how grateful I am. Indeed, I had not realized that this had been added to the motion that we passed.

I realize it now, and I am very pleased with my colleague's response.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Mr. Speaker, I would just like to make a small clarification

After the Deputy Prime Minister's speech, the member for Beauce—Chambly asked a question. It was then that there was confirmation that our proposal would be implemented.

[*English*]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, from the beginning of this crisis, New Democrats have said there are three things that Canadians need. They need to have the money to be able to pay their bills, the confidence that they will have a job to return to and a safe place to live. Throughout this crisis, we have seen that the government has acted too slowly and, in many cases, with too little to help Canadians get through this crisis.

We have said from the beginning that the simplest and most effective way to ensure that no one is missed or left behind is to send support directly to all Canadians. Absent that, we have said that if the government is not willing to have a universal basic income for Canadians during this crisis, then at least make the CERB universal. Make the CERB universal so that anyone who needs help right now can access that help.

Every step of the way, instead of a simple solution that prioritizes making sure Canadians who need help can get it, the Liberals have preferred a complicated approach, one where they are constantly changing and upgrading it. Contrary to the Deputy Prime Minister, I do not believe that is a strength when there is a clear solution that they have completely avoided. It would have been a strength if we had a universal program and then had to modify it to expand to other things not expected in terms of businesses and other groups. If there is an easy solution to provide help to all Canadians and the Liberals are ignoring that option, only to have to return to Parliament to update and continually change it because we push them to close the gaps, that is not something they should be proud of.

In fact, what the government is doing is making a choice. The government is choosing to deny help to those who need it most. It is choosing to deny help to those desperately in need. The Liberals' position is this. They would rather deny help to those who need it most than risk people getting more help than they need. That is really the choice they are making. They are so afraid there may be some people who do not need help and might end up getting it, that they are willing to risk people in desperate need falling through the cracks. That is a choice they are making.

However, New Democrats have a solution to that. We can easily tax back those who get extra help and do not need it. We have a year until the next tax season. In that time, I am confident that, if it were a priority of the government to ensure Canadians got the help they needed, those who received extra help could be taxed back very easily. We are in a crisis. We are in a pandemic. The priority should not be excluding or denying people in need and then trying to catch up and find solutions. The priority should be that they do not want people falling through the cracks and they will tax back those who did not need the help. That should be the solution. This is not the time to deny help; this is the time to deliver help as rapidly as possible to everyone in need.

[*Translation*]

This government is making a choice. It is a choice. It is choosing to leave some people behind, to deny help to people desperately in need. It would rather deny help to those who need it most than risk people getting help they do not need.

There is a simple solution. Give everyone the help they need now and if someone does not need the assistance, it can be taxed back.

This is not the time to deny help to people. It is the time to help people as quickly as possible.

• (1615)

[*English*]

Now I want to talk about the approach to students. We have said from the beginning that there were too many people missed by the CERB. Notably, we mentioned students as well as owner-operators, seniors and people living with disabilities, but let us focus on students.

It is clear from the approach that the Liberal government is taking that the Liberals believe that there are some students who are deserving of help and there are others who are not. The Liberals are basing their assumptions on a very privileged view of the world. In

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his announcement about students, the Prime Minister actually said to the public, when referencing this aid, that maybe students are going to have to go to mom and dad and ask for help and it is going to be harder to do that these days. What the Prime Minister did not really reflect on is that many students are moms and dads.

In their initial proposition, until we pushed them, the Liberals thought they were justified to give students with children and students living with disabilities less help. They thought it was okay to cut the help that went to moms who decided to go back to school to get an education, and that they somehow deserved less help. The government members thought it was okay to tell students living with disabilities, who already face challenges getting jobs, that they deserve less help, as if students living with disabilities have to pay less for rent or less for groceries; as if moms who go back to school have some sort of discount on their groceries or their bills. In case the government does not know this, they do not have a discount. In fact, it might be more costly and more difficult for them. It seems like the government wanted to penalize people for going to school; that it wanted to penalize students living with disabilities and parents who went on to get an education.

I want to give a clear example of what this means for a student, which provides a picture of what this decision meant. Miranda is from Victoria. She is a single mom who was in full-time studies last year. She did not make the \$5,000 cut-off to qualify for the CERB. She is now unemployed because she has an eight-year-old daughter and, as a result of COVID-19, has no child care. She has lost her child care. She does not qualify for the CERB. She is wondering how she is going to pay for the rent, food and bills. The government thinks that Miranda deserves less simply because she went to school.

What is the government's response to someone like Miranda? The Liberals initially thought that she did not need help or she did not deserve as much help or that since she was struggling before the pandemic, it was okay that she was struggling. They thought that it was okay that things were tough for her because she was used to it. That logic is simply inexcusable and it is wrong.

[*Translation*]

What is the government's general response to the students it has left behind? It says they do not need help, that they do not deserve as much help as someone who was working, that they were struggling before the pandemic and they should get used to it. That is inexcusable. It makes no sense.

*Government Orders**[English]*

I just cannot understand why the government thought it was okay to initially leave students with disabilities behind, and that it was okay to offer an arbitrary sum of money and say that it would give these students living with disabilities an arbitrary sum less than anyone else. That, to me, speaks to a callousness around its decision-making when it comes to students and perhaps a privileged world view of what it means to be a student.

When it comes to students living with disabilities, the fact that they were particularly given less funding as well really belies the reality. These are students who probably have to pay far more in costs, such as the cost of transportation for someone living with a disability and health care that is not covered. Their costs are probably higher, not lower.

We know that people living with disabilities face higher rates of unemployment, so it is probably more likely that someone with a disability is not likely to have had a job to qualify for the CERB. As students are trying to improve their lot in life, why would the government discriminate against them in that way?

However, what makes all of this even more hurtful, even more callous, is when we contrast the government's approach to students like Miranda, students living with disabilities, with its approach to wealthy, powerful businesses. Let us contrast the two. The government is not worried about the billions of dollars that we, as a country, we as people, are losing to those companies that choose to cheat our system by using tax havens. The government is not worried about that; it is okay, but Miranda deserves \$250 less. A student living with a disability deserves \$250 less because this is a student living with a disability. However, a company like Loblaw's can use, legally, a tax haven and avoid paying \$400 million in taxes, approximately.

It is unreal that the government thinks it is okay to allow a company like Loblaw's to use offshore tax havens. Again, it is legal. That is the problem here. That company is legally allowed to do that and not contribute \$400 million to our country to help with services and programs, but Miranda deserves \$250 less. That is a choice. That is a decision that the government is making. That is not happenstance. It is not a coincidence, but a thoughtful choice that the government is making, and it is wrong.

- (1620)

[Translation]

This government is so worried about people like Miranda getting more money than they deserve that it is willing to give them \$250 less per month. Meanwhile, it cannot be bothered to go after the billions of dollars that are lost every year when big corporations cheat the system by using tax havens. It is absolutely crazy. I am sorry, but it is true.

[English]

We have asked the government to commit to something really simple, and we have seen other countries do this. Denmark, France and Poland have all committed to the very same thing we are asking this government to do.

If a company in Canada thinks it is okay to cheat our tax system and put its money in an offshore tax haven, to purposefully avoid contributing to our society, contributing to the social programs in our country and paying its fair share, then that company does not deserve public help. We have asked the government to commit to that. Other countries have committed to it clearly. The Canadian government has not. The Prime Minister has not committed to this. It is a simple solution.

If a company thinks it is above contributing its fair share, or if a company thinks it is going to save billions or hundreds of millions of dollars and it is not going to contribute to the public good, then that company does not deserve the public good to help it out when times are tough, yet the government has not committed to that. To date, the government has not committed to doing this.

Again, I asked the Prime Minister earlier today. I asked the government today. There are ministers here. Will they commit to ensuring that a company in Canada that uses offshore tax havens will not get public funding and will not be bailed out during this time? I ask them to commit to that. It is a simple solution. Denmark, France and other countries are doing the same thing. Even Poland is doing this. Why will this country not do it? Why will this government not do it, when there are so many examples of other countries doing it? It is a clear solution. There are billions of dollars that we can recover. I am asking the government to do it.

More than I do, Canadians want the government to do this. People want to know that they are getting a fair share. It does not make sense that the government is going to deny a universal CERB at the same time that there are companies that are stealing, effectively, billions of dollars out of our coffers to contribute to our social good. That does not make any sense. It is beyond time that the Liberal government committed to closing these tax loopholes to ensure that we have the revenue that we can invest in Canadians and to ensure that people are lifted up in this time.

The government should not worry about nickel-and-diming students when wealthy corporations like Loblaw's can get away with not paying hundreds of millions of dollars in taxes. Single parents like Miranda are not the problem. Company owners like Galen Weston are the problem, and it is not his fault; it is the government's fault that it is allowing offshore tax havens to exist.

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I want to talk about another issue that is hurting Canadians and that people are desperately worried about. That is rent. Rent is due again on the first of the month, and that is going to be this Friday. There are far too many Canadians who do not know how they are going to pay their rent. We have urged the government to use the powers and jurisdiction that we have at the federal level over banks to ensure that there is a pause on mortgage, not a deferral. People who use a deferral end up having to pay far more in the long run. It would cost them far more. We are asking the government to use the powers we have expressly in the Constitution, section 91, and in the Bank Act to put a pause on mortgages, and then to negotiate with provinces to ensure there is a pause on rent. We know that mortgage and rent are connected. If we negotiate that pause, we can ensure that people are going to be able to stay in their homes.

We have also heard from small business owners who have said that one of their biggest concerns, one of their biggest fixed costs, is commercial rent. We were pleased that, after a lot of pressure and great work from a lot of activists across the country, small business owners and New Democrats, the government announced some help and relief for rent, when it comes to commercial properties. That is a good thing, but if the government has been able, working with the provinces, to figure out a way to put in place relief on commercial rent, I implore the government that people need that help as well. In the same way it was able to figure out how to work with the provinces to bring in place relief for small businesses, which is much needed, I ask the government to do the same for people who are worried about paying their rent.

There is no reason why we cannot extend that same relief and support to people. If these people cannot find a place to live, we are not just going to have a problem with homelessness or a lack of housing; we are also going to have a public health emergency when people who have been told they need to stay at home are no longer able to, and that would put more risk of infection and spreading the disease into our health care system.

The Prime Minister does not need to wait for a press conference. The Prime Minister can announce today that there will be relief for Canadians who need help when it comes to their rent, and that Canadians who need help with their mortgage can count on help. That can be announced today.

• (1625)

In closing, I want to point out that in every moment of this crisis, the Liberal government's first impulse or first reaction was to leave people behind. The Liberals left workers out of EI, and we pushed them to fix it. They left out workers in general who were not covered by EI. We pushed them, and they brought into place the CERB. They left small businesses behind, and we pushed them to fix that as well. Now they wanted to leave students behind. We pushed them, and they have come some of the way, but we are going to keep pushing them to make sure they go all the way.

The right thing to do now is help people out, not complicate things with different programs that have different criteria and different levels of support. What people need right now is to know that if they need help, they can apply for it and get it. The best way to help people right now is to make it easy to get the help they need, to make it quick and accessible.

I believe that if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent for the following motion: that the House call on the government to make the Canada emergency response benefit a universal benefit, such that students, seniors and anyone in need can apply for and receive \$2,000 a month to help them through these difficult times.

• (1630)

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member for Burnaby South have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: No.

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments, the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, just to put it on the record, the Green Party would have been very happy to give unanimous consent, had there been enough others to do so. The Green Party has been calling for a guaranteed livable income for two decades now, and we will continue to do so.

I would like to put it to the hon. member that I agree with the proposition that we should not be providing COVID relief to corporations that hide their money in offshore accounts, but I can see the issue with saying that their workers cannot get the 75% wage benefit.

I note that some NGOs that work in this area, Tax Fairness for example, are saying that there are other things that could be targeted besides all COVID relief programs. I suggest, for instance, that corporate stock bailouts not be allowed and that executive bonuses, golden parachutes and shareholder dividends be held off for a full year.

For any corporation that hides its money offshore but also receives COVID benefits, we could also look at an excess profits tax to recoup those benefits. Although I agree totally, on principle, that companies that hide their money offshore and evade taxes should not be able to benefit from COVID-19 relief measures, the problem is that their workers should.

I would ask the hon. member what he would propose and whether we can find another solution.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, we could absolutely solve this problem.

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First, if a company right now is registered in an offshore tax haven and wants government support, it can commit to removing its money from that offshore tax haven and putting it back into the public. It can commit to contributing its fair share. With that ironclad commitment, it can receive support.

In addition, we need to make sure that any support we deliver is guaranteed to go to workers. We do not want a situation where a company receives a blank cheque. We have seen the Conservatives do that in the past, during the 2007-08 crisis, when companies received billions of dollars of public money, only to shut down their factories and move them to other jurisdictions while jobs are lost in Canada.

There should never be, in any sector, a blank cheque given to any corporation. Corporations should be required to have ironclad agreements that the support will go directly to maintaining or creating jobs, hiring people in the country where that support is given.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am so glad that the hon. member, my leader, mentioned this. I know that this happened in my riding. Caterpillar received a significant amount of money from the federal government several years ago. Then it picked up and left, and there were no jobs left in my community under that company, so I am really glad that this was raised.

One of the key things that I am grateful the federal government has done is that it waived interest fees for students for six months. However, New Democrats have been pushing and calling for that to be a permanent move. How important would it be for the government to do that, to take that initiative, that bold step? How important would that be for students?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, I think we should start thinking about making many of the programs we are contemplating now as things to move forward with in a future that is better than the past. We do not want to go back to normal; we want to go forward to something better, a system and social programs that allow us to take better care of each another, and in that, the idea of waiving student interest is something we should absolutely do. There is no reason that the federal government should be profiting off the backs of students who are in debt. Loans should be interest-free and should continue that way. That is something New Democrats believe in and that we should do on a go-forward basis as policy.

• (1635)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to pick up on what my colleague said about the investments that we need to make. This is not just some kind of stop-gap emergency. The whole Canadian notion of our economy and our social life has broken down and the investments we make will pave the way for a stronger and more resilient Canada.

One of the areas that has always concerned me is the breach of trust with post-secondary students who have enormous debts and have come out into the gig economy. We see contract professors barely making minimum wage. When COVID-19 hit, within two weeks, many people who had post-secondary degrees, who had put so much effort into improving themselves, did not have enough money to pay for rent and to get through, and yet we have the Prime Minister saying they should call on mom and dad to help

them out. To me, it speaks to an attitude. The Prime Minister believes that this middle class exists. It has not existed for a long time. It is the gig economy, it is the precarious economy.

What steps will we take coming out of this to learn the lesson that never again should Canadians be left in such a precarious situation with so little financial support at the end of the month, particularly if they have spent so much in student debt to better themselves?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, the member for Timmins—James Bay has touched on a lot of what we need to consider when we move forward.

We have seen in this crisis a lot of the glaring inequality laid bare. It has shown what we have known for a long time and has made it abundantly clear that what happened in the past was not good enough, the precarious employment that people suffered, the lack of social programs and a social safety net that was not designed for the realities that people are facing right now. That is why we need to not only waive interest on student debt, but also need to look at supports.

People no longer have the benefits they once had. That is why we need a head-to-toe health care system that covers people when it comes to their mental health, medications or dental care. We need to make sure that we are investing in people, and we have an opportunity to do that right now. When we make choices in the following weeks, months and years, we can make choices to build a better future, not to return to normal but build a better future, where we do not see some of these inequalities laid bare again, but where we are more resilient and have a fair society where people can achieve their greatness and full potential.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is a rare opportunity to ask a follow-up question of the hon. member for Burnaby South.

As we look to the post-pandemic world, we may all agree in this place that we may not want to bounce backwards, but instead bounce forwards. Looking at where these social inequalities were laid bare, I want to speak to the ones that we now see, to our shame, with seniors homes. We have too much of what looks like the for-profit warehousing of seniors in a situation where we would have thought that our elders would be treated with greater dignity and as part of our health care system.

I would just like to ask the member for Burnaby South for his thoughts on this.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for this question because it gives us an opportunity to talk about the impact of decades of neglect of our health care system.

Decades of federal government cuts, Conservative or Liberal, to health care have resulted in health care provincial systems that have been starved of funding. The worst examples of this neglect, the horrible toll of this neglect, are the conditions in long-term care homes, where seniors who should be able to retire with dignity, safety and security, where family members should have confidence in knowing that their loved ones will be cared for are now, instead, seeing these as sites of some of the worst conditions. As the member pointed out, it is often and mostly the for-profit and privatized long-term care homes where we see some of the worst conditions.

More than ever, we need to commit to no longer allowing the for-profit model of health care, particularly for vulnerable people like seniors. We need to invest more in our health care system and make sure that workers at long-term care homes are paid a good salary so they do not need to work at multiple homes where there is an increased risk of the spread of an infection. We need to do a lot more to treat the people who have sacrificed so much, the seniors who have given their whole lives to this country. They should be able to retire with dignity, and long-term care homes should be places of security and safety, not what we have seen, places where COVID-19 has had the worst toll.

• (1640)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mona Fortier (Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by acknowledging my constituents in Ottawa—Vanier who have stayed in touch with me since the beginning of this crisis and shared their ideas and concerns. It is truly by working together in our community that we can support Canadians and especially those in my riding, Ottawa—Vanier.

I am also grateful to be able to address the House on COVID-19 and the supplementary measures we are taking to further help Canadians throughout this unprecedented situation.

During these extraordinary times, the realities of the job market change every day. The government continues to look for ways to offer programs and support that work for all Canadians, including students and young people, as we deal with this pandemic.

Through the Canada emergency response benefit, the government has created a financial aid package to support Canadians in these unprecedented circumstances. This benefit provides Canadians who are no longer working because of the COVID-19 pandemic and those whose hours have been considerably reduced an amount of \$2,000 every four weeks for up to 16 weeks.

[*English*]

Over 1.9 million applications have been processed to date under EI and the Canada emergency response benefit. These numbers are simply incredible and give us an idea of the number of people who are financially impacted by this pandemic. However, the government realized that certain Canadians were falling through the cracks and were not eligible to get the help they needed with the existing CERB criteria. This is why today we are proposing to take the next step in our approach to supporting all Canadians who need it most during this pandemic.

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It is now time to look more closely at the situation of Canadian students, because they need specific help and support. Right now, as they are self-isolating like everyone else in the country, many Canadian post-secondary students are left wondering how they are going to provide for themselves. Even students from the University of Ottawa and La Cité Collégiale in my riding have been reaching out to find out how we will support them.

[*Translation*]

Whereas they would usually ask their parents for help, they now have to face the harsh reality that mom and dad are probably having a hard time meeting their own needs during this crisis.

Some students are eligible for the Canada emergency response benefit. Students who earned less than \$5,000 in the past year and those who were working but lost their jobs because of COVID-19 are eligible, but many other students are not. More than one million post-secondary students may not be eligible for the COVID-19 CERB.

Students are facing some serious problems. Their studies have been interrupted, they have fewer job opportunities, and all of their co-op, internship and community service opportunities are up in the air. As a result, young people are worried and wondering what to do.

[*English*]

The government wants to make sure that young people know they matter and that we are there for them in these difficult times. That is why we are proposing this complementary bill to the Government of Canada's COVID-19 economic response plan, which already commits \$146 billion in direct support for Canadians and businesses through these unprecedented times. It is the next logical step.

Our comprehensive package of measures for students will allow the government to implement a range of measures designed to help three broad groups of young people: students, job seekers and youth looking for service opportunities. As the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion previously explained in more detail, the Canada emergency student benefit is the largest piece of the framework. It will provide immediate help to support students right across the country.

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• (1645)

In a nutshell, it would provide \$1,250 a month, from May to August, to post-secondary students and recent graduates who cannot find summer employment due to COVID-19. Students who care for dependants or have a disability would receive an additional \$500 a month for a total of \$1,750 a month. High school graduates entering post-secondary education would also be eligible. The government expects that more than one million students and recent graduates would benefit from this financial support.

To help students with fall tuition, the Canada student loans program would double student grants, lower expected contributions and expand eligibility for student loans and grants. This would be in addition to the six-month interest moratorium on repayment of student loans. All student loan borrowers automatically had their repayments suspended until September 30, 2020. No payment is required and interest will not accrue during this time. All of these measures will make students' lives a little less stressful during these difficult times.

[*Translation*]

Since our government rolled out the CERB, questions have been asked in the public sphere regarding the concept of a national universal basic income. We are listening. These questions deserve to be properly considered and debated in due course, but now is not the time.

From the beginning of this crisis, we have had to adapt to the changing reality of the pandemic. Given the urgency of the situation, the government had to act quickly, very quickly. Millions of Canadians needed financial assistance so they could pay their rent, buy groceries and support their families. Fortunately, many Canadians are still getting a paycheque and do not need emergency funds to pay the bills.

[*English*]

However, we needed to provide support quickly for those who needed it, and our biggest priority was making sure that the help got to those who needed it the most. This being the end of April and the beginning of May, now is the time when post-secondary studies and school terms end and when students are looking for summer jobs. Of course, that is not going to happen as easily this year and these students might not be eligible to apply for the CERB. That is why we require Parliament's approval to move forward with the Canada emergency student benefit, which is the next logical step to help more Canadians in need to get through this pandemic.

[*Translation*]

By tabling Bill C-15, our government is telling Canadian students that they are important, that their plans for the future are important, and that we are here to help them and support them. We are all in the same boat, and we remain committed to helping all Canadians in these difficult times.

[*English*]

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is Bill C-15. Bill C-13 was the first wage subsidy and first emergency bill, which the government did not get right. It listened and brought Bill

C-14 forward. I am hoping, therefore, that we might see a bill C-16 so that we can actually fix this new project.

With half of the \$9 billion the Liberals are committing overall to student relief, they could massively increase the Canada summer jobs grant and allow half of that investment to trickle down to small and medium-sized businesses and farms and provide relief for many of the front-line essential services, as well as jobs for students in return for the money. There would still be enough money left over for a \$1,000 tuition credit for all students, at half of the overall cost of this program.

For the minister in charge of the middle class and those working hard to join it, why is the government's program so structured to prevent people from working? We should incentivize work, and wherever that government investment in students can trickle down to small businesses and farms, why would we not do it that way?

• (1650)

Hon. Mona Fortier: Mr. Speaker, also as associate minister of finance, I have been looking at different ways to help students from different fields and different realities across the country, to see how our supports can help them during this summer period and also prepare them for the fall. We have developed different measures to support these students. In the youth employment and skills strategy, we are investing \$153.7 million to help youth develop the skills and gain the experience they need to successfully transition into the labour market. We are also changing the youth employment and skills strategy, Canada's summer jobs program, by extending it until next February to make it more flexible. As well, we are creating the student work placement program to support up to 20,000 post-secondary students across Canada to obtain paid work experience. We have looked at the needs of students across the country, and that is why we are proposing these measures.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when COVID hit, university students started saying that their future was in peril. Suddenly, their work disappeared, and their student debts are massive. We see that the federal government has actually started telling students who they normally hire for research that it is not hiring them this year because of COVID, and so the federal government is not stepping up. Yet, for a 15-year-old who made \$5,000 last year, he or she would be eligible for \$2,000 a month. For a full-time post-secondary student who is now unable to work, he or she would get \$1,250 a month. That makes no sense, and it speaks, I believe, to an attitude about university students that they are somehow there for a lark. When so many of them have had to go back to school, and so many of them have massive levels of debt already, to say that \$1,250 is enough to get by just does not make sense.

How does the government justify this two-tier standard in response to emergency measures, given that for other people the government has recognized that a bottom line of \$2,000 a month is the minimum that one needs?

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Hon. Mona Fortier: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for the conversation we are having today, and I believe that we have a broad set of programs and supports for students all over Canada.

The member mentioned research. I can tell him that we are increasing by \$291.6 million, through the federal granting councils, to support up to 40,000 student researchers and post-doctoral fellows. This is really important for students who are in research to continue their studies, and we will continue to support them.

Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is incredible for us to be debating this today.

Today's youth are tomorrow's leaders, and, indeed, they are the future of Canada. For me, it sort of hits to the heart, because before coming to this place I spent many years at an incredible post-secondary institution. I saw these incredible young people contribute their ideas, service, research and entrepreneurship to create that next venture and contribute to Canada's economy.

COVID-19 has been really hard. It has been hard for our young people and hard for students. I would love for the minister to talk to us about how this benefit is going to help those incredible young people and students here in Canada.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mona Fortier: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question. I will answer in French to make sure there is a balance in the House.

I would like to say that, in preparing these emergency measures for students, we consulted with student associations. We talked to students across the country to find out how we could better support them in this time of crisis. That is why we are offering this series of programs that will help them to get through the summer and prepare for the fall.

I would like to say that the Canada summer jobs program is a solution that will help many students. What is more, many other programs, such as the Canada student service grant, will help many students across the country gain volunteer experience and get experience in their field.

• (1655)

[*English*]

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know the minister has a warm place in her heart for Oshawa and I hope to welcome her there for her next tournament, perhaps when this pandemic is over. I know that she believes in students and our young people, as we do on this side of the House. I like the fact that she is reaching out for the conversation side of things because here, in the Conservative Party, we have different ideas. The hon. member for Durham put forward a good idea.

Conservatives have proposed that the government create a program to match students and youth employees with jobs in the agriculture sector. It would be like the Canada summer jobs program where the program would cover the minimum wage for the new student, but then the wage could be supplemented by an employer. Of course, the employers would look after health and safety, but this way the student would get a higher salary for their job, put

more money into their pockets at the end of the summer, but also allow employers who need that labour to get out there.

Is the minister open to supporting a program like that? I would love her answer to that question.

Hon. Mona Fortier: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for his invitation. I have been in Oshawa many times in the past year for volleyball tournaments and it is always a great honour to go to his riding. My kids were playing volleyball, of course, but I support them, I am a mom.

Let us get back to the seriousness of this. We know we need to enhance these programs and we have to identify jobs that will give these students an opportunity to work during the summer. I believe the agriculture sector has been encouraging students to go and work. We will help by encouraging students to go work in the agriculture sector during the summer.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one of the interesting comments that my hon. colleague made across the way during her speech, was that now is not the time for this benefit to become universal and maybe they would look at it again at some point. I cannot imagine any other time than now to ensure that everybody is covered and has the supports that they need.

The Liberals had four years in government before to bring forward a universal basic income, but they failed to do that. Hopefully it is something that they move forward with seriously. We come back here time after time to fix these issues that arise from the fact that all of these people are falling through the cracks.

Could the minister explain why not making this a universal benefit is the best policy?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Mr. Speaker, as I was mentioning in my speech, we think that we should have a conversation at some point, but this is not the time. Currently, we are unwavering in our commitment to support Canadians who are facing hardship during this challenging time. Rather than sending a modest amount to every Canadian, we chose to send money to those who are impacted by COVID-19. As the Canada emergency response benefit helps by providing \$2,000 a month to those who have lost income, that is one of the solutions.

We are also making sure that employers, who have been hit the hardest, will continue to pay their employees with the Canada emergency wage subsidy. We will continue to work with our hon. colleagues to make sure we can support all Canadians.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Peace River—Westlock.

Government Orders

I wanted to start off by saying that when I was younger, Oshawa was a bit of a different town. Oshawa was proudly able to support many students who were working in good summer jobs at the GM assembly plant. I remember working eight years in that plant, and it was a good wage and a great experience. Many of my friends in different programs, whether engineering, management, trades or labour, gained great experience at that plant.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, I am a chiropractor. One may ask what kind of experience I received working on the floor at GM to be a chiropractor. It has allowed me to connect with my constituents and know what they are going through when they came to see me. I always joke that it even maybe helped me in politics. I have said that I have come to Ottawa to straighten out those politicians. When one gets to work in one's community, it is a wonderful experience.

Today it is a different environment in Oshawa, and there are no longer the same opportunities. We have lost our assembly plant. There are still good opportunities in the auto sector, as well as some growth in health care and education, but students still make up a great part of my constituency and this bill hits home.

Between the Ontario Tech University, Trent University Durham campus and Durham College, Oshawa is home to literally thousands of students. In 2019, Ontario Tech University has a total of 10,348 students. Durham College has more than 13,600 full post-secondary and apprenticeship students, with more than 2,000 students from over 60 countries, along with thousands of students in part-time, professional and online studies. Trent University Durham campus has over 1,600 undergraduate students, with 41 graduate students as well. Unlike years past, I am hearing from our young people that they are hurting.

Young people want the same thing that we wanted. They want a job; they do not want a handout. They want a future, experience, a better life and they want opportunities. I love hanging around young people because they really inspire me. They know Canada is the best country in the world with the best potential and that it is the best place to live.

This bill is about students and their futures. I am hearing from the students in my riding that they are in immediate need, as are their families. I am very happy to be here today to support this bill. Conservatives have been working very hard to help the government to better these bills and make better programs available for students and Canadians who need them.

Conservatives have negotiated several changes to this proposed legislation, which includes requiring the government to connect all applicants to the Canada job bank and providing them with job availability information before applying, requiring parliamentary review of the legislation and benefit and instituting a legislated sunset clause so the benefit could not be extended through regulation and there would be accountability.

We recognize unemployment in some parts of the country is extremely high because of this pandemic and that some of these jobs just are not available, so Canadians and students need real help right now. In normal times, this would be a time when students

would be starting their new summer jobs so they could save up for the next school year and pay for their rent and groceries.

While the \$1250 that students will be receiving through the Canada emergency student benefit is a step that will help them pay their rent and buy their groceries, it will not place them in a position to pay for their books and tuition come September. They need more. Students need to be able to work in a safe, sanitary environment that will not only pay their bills but also give them experience in their chosen field or even in a field that gives them valuable experience.

What energizes me when I talk to students is that students believe in the future of Canada. Many students come here from all over the world, and a kid in Oshawa can make new friends and learn from friends who come from all parts of the world. They all understand the importance of experience and the potential that Canada offers these students.

• (1700)

Students also believe in the Canadian dream. That is why I love listening to their ideas. The government sometimes has a difficult time defining what the middle class is, but the students I have talked to know what that means. They know what they are aiming for. They want to join the middle class and contribute in a significant way to the Canadian economy. Students want to do their part. They want to contribute to Canada's future. They want to settle down, pursue their careers, raise their families, reach for their dreams and help continue to make Canada the best country in the world.

Right now students are hurting. There is uncertainty. There is fear. It is not just about the COVID virus; they are worried about their future and their families. I have been hearing from mature students with dependants. They have concerns with this ongoing crisis. This is real. They are very concerned about paying their bills while also taking care of their kids. They want to be able to graduate and get a good job in their field, and, if they want, get married, pay for their kids' hockey or volleyball, buy a house, buy a car or go on vacation once a year to get away from our famously frigid Canadian winters. Students know what they want. They understand the definition of middle class and what a Canadian dream is. Students know this.

As Conservatives, we want to help improve these government programs in these trying times. We have some really good ideas, which we have heard in the House today. We want to put them forward to help students in the long term and in an effective way. We offer these ideas for the government's consideration, and we want to help it develop and improve its programs.

Government Orders

Therefore, along with this bill, there should be a priority to expand the Canada summers job program and create a central database to ensure that these critical jobs are filled and students not only receive valuable experience, but limit their student debt by making more money during the summer. This program should focus on jobs in the agricultural sector, because we are hearing more and more concerns about our critical supply chains and the difficulty people in our agricultural sector are having in getting the labour they need. At the same time, we want to put our students to work in a helpful and meaningful way that gives them practical life experience, which can also be valuable for their future careers.

When people think of Oshawa, they think about cars. I am really proud of that history, but many people do not realize that the Durham region adds \$300 million every single year to Ontario's farm production. In 2017, there were 3,400 jobs in the forestry, fishing and hunting sectors. There are over 200 farms in the Durham region. These farms produce high-quality food for Canadians. Whether it is beef, lamb, honey, cider, fruit, vegetables or wine, we are very proud of the products we produce in the Durham region.

We have been hit with hard times before, but sometimes the hard times have a silver lining: They bring people together. I think our Conservative idea will really help benefit employers who are looking to give those students the experience they need but maybe cannot afford it right now. It will give students more money so that when they get back to school in the fall of 2020, they will have fewer loans and more money in their pockets.

In the end, although the Canada emergency student benefit provides assistance to students in the short term, it is important that our young people and mature students are able to get the supports they need so they can be prepared for the opening of the fall 2020 semester, whether it is online or in a slightly modified environment. This can be done by expanding the Canada summer jobs program so employers can get the help they need and supply chains can be secure, all while putting more money in the pockets of students and giving them experience that will last a lifetime.

What the Conservatives want to do is offer Canadians a win-win-win. The program we are offering gives students a win, businesses a win and Canadians a win. When Canadians, students and businesses win, it ensures we all have a future we can be proud of.

I anticipate some great questions from my colleagues on this.

• (1705)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, we all look forward to seeing young people find work in their chosen fields when this is all over. I am pleased the Conservative Party is supporting this emergency aid to young people.

However, I am concerned about the sunset clause. I preferred the bill before the change that was just advocated by the Conservative Party, because allowing that change to be made by regulation could help us avoid coming back into Parliament to change the legislation, given that the pandemic may have a second wave that impacts our workforce in the fall.

I wonder if my hon. colleague from Oshawa could reflect on why the Conservative Party felt that the benefits of that sunset clause

outweighed the downside of our having to come back and re-legislate if we need the benefit to last longer.

• (1710)

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mr. Speaker, this is an ideological argument on which we could have a back-and-forth. We are talking about accountability and transparency. By not having a sunset clause, the government could go on and on with program spending. Although we hear about this team Canada approach from the Prime Minister, in reality it is not quite there yet.

As a parliamentarian, I see what we are doing through virtual Parliament and particularly what we are doing here in the House. We have people from across our country coming together because they believe in our democracy and believe in how it functions.

As we saw with the first bill, which the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands remembers, the government wanted unlimited spending and taxation power until 2021, for 18 months, which was unprecedented in the Westminster system.

With regard to the sunset clause, we do not mean to put any hardship on any student, but I would be happy to come back into the House to perform what we are doing here. This is not optimal, but it is working for Canadians. It is our job to make sure that the government has the best programs out there, because things could change in four to six months and the Conservatives want us to keep that moving forward in the—

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments, the hon. member for Yellowhead.

Mr. Gerald Soroka (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I really appreciated my colleague's story about being a chiropractor and understanding the auto industry.

Because of what they are proposing for agriculture, my concern is that some youth are now a second or third generation away from the farm and have no idea where their food production comes from, except that it comes from a local grocery store.

Could the member touch on how this experience will help this young generation build a better understanding of agriculture and where their food comes from?

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mr. Speaker, I talked about my experience, and in my community I was able to really relate to the people who were coming to see me when I was serving as a chiropractor.

Government Orders

The member is correct that people seem to be disconnected. This is an opportunity to connect. This is an opportunity to do something even bigger with this program so that we are not just giving a hand-out; we are giving people a hand up. We would be able to not only let them have hands-on experiences about where their food is coming from each and every day, but also help them understand the importance of the Canadians who do that job day in and day out. We are talking about our farmers, who are happy to wake up at five o'clock in the morning, go out, do their job and supply Canadians with a solid food supply, in one of the safest food supply chains in the entire world.

What I am talking about is allowing our young people to experience this, in a way. We should not just be looking at this pandemic as a negative. This can be an opportunity to bring us all closer together. My colleague who asked this question gets it, and we hope the rest of our colleagues in this wonderful chamber get it as well.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in keeping with what my colleague said, before I came to this place I was an auto mechanic. Cars are running in the vein today. My friends always said there was not a wrench big enough to fix Ottawa, but I said I had to give it a try anyway, so here I am.

COVID has upended all of our lives. We have taken to social distancing and significantly changed the way we live our lives. For me, the largest change is not getting to gather on Sundays with my local church congregation. That has probably been the biggest challenge for me. We have all changed our lives significantly due to COVID.

Many people have come to me to ask when we will be returning to some semblance of normal and when we can gather together, particularly for church. These are big questions in my community. These are legitimate questions.

We have a lot of questions about how we got here. We seem to have based our decision-making on a number of models, but that is a fuzzy kind of science. Models are only as good as their inputs. Who creates these models? Where do these models come from? What models are we using? These are valid questions that people are asking me, and I do not have the answers. I do not know what those models are, I do not know who the author of them is and I do not know what the inputs are. It seems to me that over time we should be questioning whether the assumptions we made at the beginning of all this are still holding. Did we use the correct inputs in the models?

Today we are discussing a benefits program for students. That is for sure far down the line, in my opinion. Each and every time we make another move in addressing the COVID crisis, we should go back to see if the basic assumptions we made at the beginning of all this are holding. We always say hindsight is 20/20. Now that we have a bit of hindsight, we can look back to see whether the assumptions we made in January are holding true. Is this disease as contagious as it was? Is it having impacts? I know we are seeing deaths across the country, but are the things we are doing to prevent them working? How do we know they are working? Those questions are being asked of me, and I have not necessarily seen them being answered effectively by the government.

Every day the government makes an announcement on how it is dealing with COVID, but we rarely look back. The government could say it made an assumption on January 3 and was right or made an assumption on January 3 and was wrong and things are actually worse or better. I do not see a great deal of that, and I think right from the onset we should address this. I would like to know what the models are, who the author of these models is and what the assumptions of these models are so that average Canadians, wherever they are in Canada, can say that they make sense.

We are asking Canadians from across the country to put their lives on hold. The restaurant owners in my area have been particularly tied to two-twenty, I would say. They have all been reaching out to me, asking when they can open again and telling me they are going bankrupt as we speak.

The other thing they mention often to me is that the goalposts seem to be moving. They said that over a month ago all they were hearing about was flattening the curve and today we are talking about stopping the spread. Those are both valid things, but they seem to be different. There was a subtle change in language, and there has never been an explanation as to why we changed from flattening the curve to stopping the spread. I agree with both of those things, but there was no explanation as to why we did those things. People are saying to me that we seem to have flattened the curve and are asking when they are going to get to reopen their restaurants again. When will they get to go back to work? That is very significant.

• (1715)

Another major concern that people have is that all of that government intervention, with the \$2,000 a month from the CERB and even the proposed benefit for students, is going to change our economy. There are no ands, ifs or buts about it. It is going to change our economy. Does the government have models that it can share with us as to what the expected change to the economy is going to be?

We have seen from other places that when the minimum wage has been increased, for example, rents went up in proportion. Do we know those kinds of things about what we are doing today by handing out \$2,000 a month? Where will that money flow through? It will not just stay in a particular person's bank account. He or she will spend it on things like rent and food. What kind of impact will it have on rent and food? There are all these kinds of things. Have we seen those models? We are looking to the government to explain to us some of the impacts of these benefits that are being brought forward.

Government Orders

We mentioned our concern that this system of payments to students may create disincentives to work, and then the NDP said that we were accusing people of being lazy. I would not suggest at all that anybody is suggesting that anyone is being lazy. We were merely saying that people are people, and they will do a cost-benefit analysis. Therefore, if someone can go to work in a local factory and make \$1,000 or else stay home and collect \$1,200 a month from the government, the person will do a cost-benefit analysis. There is nothing lazy about that. It is just a cost-benefit analysis, and we do not want to put an incentive into our economy to suggest that people should stay at home.

It was interesting as well that they seem to agree with us on the incentive part of the benefit and that a person should be able to make money while also accruing the student benefit.

We, as Conservatives, are happy to support this measure, although there are many things that need to be improved. We have seen the government listen, particularly on the first round, with regard to the 10% wage subsidy. When we said that it was not going to work, the government came back with a 75% wage subsidy that should work well.

It was also interesting to hear the leader of the NDP question why these systems seem to be so tailored rather than broad. Perhaps I could suggest an answer to that question, because I remember the 2015 election. I suppose I can forgive the hon. member, because I do not think he was here in 2015.

During the 2015 election, the Liberals ran around accusing us of giving cheques to millionaires with our child tax benefit. The first thing they did when they were elected was to change that program so that cheques would not go to millionaires. We had said, however, that if we were to make the benefit taxable, we would collect it back in taxes. If we were to give it indiscriminately at the front end, we would collect it back from wealthy people on the back end. That was our rationale in 2013-2014 when we introduced that benefit. It seemed to be a logical rationale for me then, and I am happy to see that the NDP is catching on to that rationale as well in their debate around the benefit for students.

With that, I am happy to say that we will be supporting this bill, but we look forward to some significant changes to ensure that the disincentives for work can be taken out of it. We would like to see a system of registration so that if students are applying for this benefit, their skill sets would be registered so that hopefully we could match them with a job opening somewhere in the world, particularly in the agricultural sector.

Where I come from, right now many of the farmers have their seeders out. They are putting new shovels on it and getting ready to pull it through the ground to seed this year's crop.

• (1720)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I join my friend from Peace River—Westlock in saying how much we long to get back to worshipping together in our places of worship.

In the member's speech, he asked if the government could point us to a model of what economic recovery could like. I was reassured by a fascinating review by the parliamentary budget office on

March 30, which I recommend members have a look at. There really are not road maps or models for what we are going through when we voluntarily shut down our economy in the pandemic. It is quite different even from the 2008 financial crisis, wherein I note parenthetically that the Conservative prime minister of the day actually prorogued Parliament and shut its doors so we couldn't be here to discuss anything, so we will take it as absolutely genuine that the Conservative Party wants democracy with us meeting face to face now. That was not the case in 2008.

My point about the parliamentary budget office report is that it points to World War II as probably our best sense of something like this. What the parliamentary budget office points out, and I am just going to double-check the report, is that there were massive deficits for Canada at the peak of the Second World War, averaging 21% of GDP year over year, from 1942 to 1945, and yet because the spending and the deficits were temporary in nature, we had the largest surplus ever in the history of Canada following the war, a budgetary surplus in 1947 of 5% of GDP. I am sharing that background from the parliamentary budget office.

Because this spending is not permanent, because it is temporary in nature and because we want to keep people and businesses afloat, the hope is that we have a road map here, but it is looking to history, not to the current—

• (1725)

The Deputy Speaker: I would like to try to get a second question in during this five-minute slot.

The hon. member for Peace River—Westlock.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Mr. Speaker, no doubt the Second World War gives us a good model for coming out of this. My question is more about the models of the pandemic spread and what we could anticipate with that. That was all very murky, I thought, in January, when we were making the decisions to shut down Parliament and the Canadian economy. We were basically going on the recommendation of the government. I did not get to see the modelling around the COVID virus in particular, and those are the questions that I would like to have answered and have more clarity on. Are the assumptions we made about COVID and the spread of this virus holding true now?

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was listening to the leader of the Green Party with bewilderment. I was following the debate she was having with the NDP about making all of these benefits permanent, but now she is suggesting that all these deficits are temporary and are going to go away when the economy recovers. It does not seem that they know that they have been pushing for turning all of these into permanent benefits. At the same time that they are working against the resource industry, working against forestry and working against people having jobs, they want an annual income with magic money that just descends from heaven.

Government Orders

In 2009, when Prime Minister Harper ran a budget deficit, there was a plan to get back to balance. Has the member heard one word from the Liberal government articulating a desire at any point in the future to get back to balance? We all know a \$200-billion deficit means future tax increases.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Mr. Speaker, the last time the Liberal Party talked about balancing budgets was when it guaranteed Canadians that the budget would balance itself in 2019. Since then, we have not heard hide nor hair of balanced budgets coming from that side of the House. It is quite worrying.

The member called it magic money coming from heaven. That would be a miracle, and I would take it.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for La Prairie.

I want to once again salute the people in my riding. Earlier my colleague spoke about the resilience of our constituents. I want to acknowledge their courage and shows of solidarity during these difficult times. Something positive during this pandemic is how people are banding together.

Today we are debating a motion to pass a bill that would create the Canada emergency student benefit. The Bloc Québécois is obviously in favour of financial support for students. This measure is necessary and essential, which is why we asked for it.

Make no mistake: students are also being hit hard by this crisis. Some colleagues in other political parties have raised concerns about this benefit. They think that students will not want to work because they will figure out they can make more money staying home. The Bloc Québécois could not disagree more.

We recognize that students need financial support because, from the outset, students who had completed their education or who will be going back to school made the effort to come to our riding offices and tell us that they did not know if or when they would find a job. We had to find a solution and identify the measures needed, and that is just what we did. This crisis will be deemed to be historic, but no one must be left behind or fall through the cracks.

I would also like to remind members that the motion asks for measures to be implemented without delay to provide additional support for seniors. We called for these measures and we are still waiting for them because they are necessary.

I spoke about fairness and about those falling through the cracks. I would like us to think about that. The current crisis has taught us that we must respond, sometimes on a case-by-case basis, to situations that require urgent support.

Furthermore, as parliamentarians, we must ask ourselves whether our social safety net and our social programs, such as employment insurance, have failed us. The Bloc Québécois has already called for a major overhaul of the system. To date, more than eight million workers have lost their jobs, and we must ask ourselves whether they should have been eligible for employment insurance. Clearly, we have our work cut out for us. We have to face the facts and completely overhaul the system.

The purpose of the bill is twofold, namely to provide financial support to students and to do so in a way that encourages them to find a job. With respect to the latter, we can say that the bill is less than perfect, considering certain obstacles.

The first obstacle has to do with the language around jobs, job creation and job opportunities. The minister talked about a program that will create more than 60,000 additional jobs, but we do not know what sector they will be in, what kind of jobs they will be, or under what conditions. It would have been better to do more to coordinate and align efforts with the provinces.

● (1730)

Secondly, and this is very important, the situation has changed. There was a crisis six weeks ago and we may now be starting to re-open. People are wondering whether there will be any jobs. With the Canada emergency student benefit, as with the Canada emergency response benefit, it is all or nothing. Those who earn \$1,000 or less will be entitled to a benefit of \$1,250 or \$1,750. Those who earn \$1,001 will lose the \$1,250 monthly benefit. In the current context, that causes an imbalance, which is why it is important to support the motion before us to determine as quickly as possible how this will be handled. The CERB and the CESB have to be provided in such a way as to meet the objective of supporting students while providing an incentive at all times. We proposed some measures. We still have other proposals to make and we think they should be implemented.

No student wants to sit around doing nothing. Having a summer job is a valuable experience. Summer jobs give students a chance to hone their skills in their chosen trade or profession. They also get to earn money that they can live on during the school year. Accordingly, I think we need to move forward without losing sight of the fact that we absolutely need to work on measures that will incentivize work. I would add that the jobs need to be quality jobs. These measures will be a major basic support for students.

People have mentioned the changing context. In 48 hours, it will be May 1, which is International Workers' Day. During this crisis, we have saluted many essential workers, the heroes who work in many different sectors, including food, transportation, student jobs, health care and community social services. We just happened to become aware of what they do. We realized the value of their work. We recognized essential workers who are the most vulnerable workers and who have the most precarious working conditions and wage conditions. When we talk about incentivizing employment, we need to remember that the jobs we want to fill must be well paid for anyone who wants them, including students. We have some work to do on that score as well.

Government Orders

• (1735)

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I really enjoyed that lovely speech by my colleague opposite. It goes to show that collaboration in the House has enabled us to introduce measures that will help students.

I would like my colleague to comment on two things. First is the reason why we had to look at what is happening with students. Not all students in Quebec have had the opportunity to work in the past year. That includes high school graduates who want to go to CEGEP. They probably have not had a chance to earn \$5,000 in the previous year and qualify for the CERB. I would also like to know what the member thinks of the fact that the federal government has offered to help the provinces provide a subsidy to essential workers. As she pointed out, we are now realizing how crucial the work they do on the front lines really is.

Ms. Louise Chabot: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her question.

Yes, it is possible for high school students to find a job in Quebec. There are jobs available for young people. What is at stake this year is jobs as counsellors at day camps and all the great jobs in that sector. There is still a lot to sort out before things get back to normal.

Some students were unable to earn \$5,000. We need to remember where we are starting from. First, we are talking about students who are not eligible for employment insurance. Second, there is the CERB for students who earned \$5,000. However, some students were unable to earn \$5,000, depending on their work or their level of education. Some do not qualify, which is why the emergency student benefit is so important.

This cannot be a half measure; it must be a comprehensive measure. Students need to be given support, but they also need to be given job opportunities without losing that support. That is the direction we want to go in.

• (1740)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Thérèse-De Blainville.

My question is about international students who are studying in Canada but who are citizens of other countries. Does the Bloc Québécois believe the government should support young people who are neither Canadian citizens nor permanent residents?

Ms. Louise Chabot: Mr. Speaker, I believe the question has to do with which students will get the benefit. The point is not whether this is important or not. International students have always been important to us. We agree with the motion and the criteria that have been set.

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today to speak to the bill on support for students during this pandemic.

As members know, from the beginning, the Bloc Québécois has been a very constructive opposition. We always try to improve bills. I think that, in general, the other opposition parties also worked with that goal in mind. It is therefore not surprising to see that there is unanimous support for this bill.

However, I must say that the bill does have its shortcomings. Obviously, there are some minor flaws, little things that are wrong and that we would have liked to work on more had we had more time. Unfortunately, we did not have as much time as we would have liked.

For two or three days, we pointed out the problems to the government and we were prepared to work together to fine-tune this bill. It is not completely perfect, but unfortunately, that sort of thing happens.

One of the basic principles of this bill is financial support for students. We are on board with this. We agree that we must help students. Since there may not be any tourism, and since festivals will be cancelled, students may have a hard time finding jobs. We all agree on that. Students need some kind of financial assistance to help pay their expenses and to allow them to return to school in the fall with some savings as they pursue their education.

This bill also needs to include an incentive for young people to work. I am not saying that young people are lazy, but the bill must allow for young people to want to go out and find a job, to actually find one, and to believe that the CESB is designed in such a way as to encourage them to stay on the job because, in the end, it will be in their best interest to do so.

Unfortunately, this bill has a major flaw. As my colleague from Thérèse-De Blainville mentioned, the problem is that students receive \$1,250 or a big fat zero. It would seem that the only option is \$1,250, and that after \$1,000, the default is zero. A student who works about 18 hours a week at a minimum wage job earns \$1,000 a month. When you add the \$1,250 CESB, that works out quite well, but what if their boss asks them to work one more hour a week?

What will be their answer, Mr. Speaker? I know I have your full attention and that you know the answer. They will say “no”. They will not want to lose the \$1,250 for one extra hour of work. Everyone understands that.

Then why are we leaving this in the bill? Students might work no more than 18 hours. Will there be any students who work full time? Perhaps, but there will be no encouragement, no incentive, for them to do so.

I taught economics for a few years. In my intro to market economics, I would explain to my students that the more hours one works, the more money one earns. That is a basic rule, but this bill breaks the rule: the more one works, the more money one loses. That makes no sense.

Government Orders

During negotiations, the Bloc Québécois pushed for simple common sense: work more, earn more. Unfortunately, the government told us it could not do that because that would be too complicated and it would have to review every individual student's case. For example, the government would have to make it explicit that a student who works 19 hours would not lose the whole \$1,250, just a little bit of it. That way, the student would want to keep working.

• (1745)

The Canada emergency benefit will simply be phased out to ensure that students realize that they would be better off working and that they have a little nest egg waiting. That is what we asked for, but we were told that the public service could not get into those kinds of details, because it would be too complicated and there was not enough time. We had reached a dead end.

In the end, we got a commitment from the Deputy Prime Minister. Indeed, although it could not be made official and standardized, because the public service apparatus would not allow it, the government committed to doing it. The Liberals said it was a good idea. We knew it was a good idea, and we have many more where that came from.

The government said it was a good idea and that it would try its best to move in that direction with its measures in the future. It committed to respecting that approach. Obviously, we very much welcome the Deputy Prime Minister's comments, for they give us a little hope.

During the negotiations, the Bloc Québécois considered the importance of having a committee look at issues related to agriculture. That has been included in the motion. We managed to get that across to the government, but I admit that it was not very hard. The government quickly agreed that it was a good idea to have a committee on agriculture because there is a lot going in that sector. We need to get answers to our questions and that is the right tool for the job.

Also, the motion proposes that the government offer subsidies to employers who hire students, but it specifies that this is for the agriculture or agri-food sectors.

The Bloc Québécois members wondered whether the same opportunity should be offered to more people, not just producers. For example, this opportunity could be offered to municipal employees and to people who want to hire students and who would be entitled to these subsidies.

I was apprehensive about how the government might respond to the Bloc's request, but the government said yes. It said that this was a good idea. The Bloc managed to make improvements to the motion.

Lastly, we have our seniors, who are being so breezily discussed. For over a month, we have been telling the government that it is neglecting seniors and it needs to do something to help them. Our proposals would cost \$1 billion, which is paltry compared to the \$73 billion going to wage subsidies. Seniors are always overlooked, yet they are the ones being hardest hit by the COVID-19 crisis. They built our country, our society. We need to show them

respect through positive actions. The motion mentions this. I see daylight at last.

According to the motion, we need to help seniors who are struggling to make ends meet because the current situation has increased the cost of living. We asked the government to amend the motion to say that it would strongly consider and ensure that the old age security and guaranteed income supplement pension mechanisms could be activated through those two tools. This mechanism already exists, and the government can control it as it sees fit. This was another Bloc suggestion that was heard by the government.

We are not entirely satisfied, but nothing is perfect. The government listened to us and accepted some of our proposals. There is one last proposal and it is a very important one. There must be an incentive for students to work.

• (1750)

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to have some good discussions with my colleague, who used to teach at a CEGEP.

I would like him to comment on this because I believe he is still in touch with the student community. How are students reacting? Are the measures we discussed today being well received by Quebec students?

Mr. Alain Therrien: Mr. Speaker, I commend my neighbour. In another life, I used to be an MNA in Quebec City. The member and I had the same constituents. I know her well and I want to recognize her. I really like her.

I taught at the CEGEP and university levels. Students are happy that we are thinking about them, so yes, I would say that they are happy with this. They appreciate it.

As I said, let us try to improve the incentive to help students who want to work more than 18 hours a week and be compensated for that. I would say that these people are very pleased with this bill.

On a side note, I heard from a university economics professor. He wrote to me to sound the alarm and to say that there are problems with the bill with regard to the incentive, which we discussed at length. We must therefore ensure that the two objectives are clearly linked in the government's future actions.

[*English*]

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today on Bill C-15, an act respecting Canada emergency student benefits. I am also pleased to split my time with my hon. colleague, the MP for Timmins—James Bay.

Yesterday was the National Day of Mourning to remember and honour those who have lost their lives or been injured due to a workplace tragedy, and also a day to collectively renew our commitment to improve health and safety in the workplace and prevent further injuries, illnesses and deaths. With the COVID-19 crisis, this is a unique time for many workers in Canada, including front-line workers, who are often women, the marginalized and young.

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The most recent statistics from the Association of Workers' Compensation Boards of Canada tell us that in 2018, 1,027 workplace fatalities were reported in Canada. Among these deaths were those of 27 young workers between the ages of 15 and 24. On top of these fatalities, there were over 264,000 accepted claims for lost time due to a work-related injury or disease. This figure includes 33,000 claims from young workers aged 15 to 24. The sad reality is that these statistics only include what is reported and accepted by compensation boards. There is no doubt that the total number of workers impacted is even greater and, of course, in this new COVID reality, these numbers will skyrocket.

The government has a responsibility to protect front-line workers and essential workers to make sure that safeguards and legislation are in place so that every worker is safe and can return home every day uninjured. This is even more so the case for young workers, who often have less experience and are less able to defend themselves against their employer. They need strong legislation to back them up.

Many young people at this time are unable to enter the workforce or have been laid-off because of the coronavirus. New Democrats are glad that the government is finally turning its focus to help these young workers and students, but another complicated system is not what students asked for, and it comes weeks too late.

Since the Liberals' roll-out of the Canada emergency response benefit program, New Democrats have called on them to lift the restrictions put in place and to make this plan universal. Again, we are asking that they extend these benefits to students, as the Canada emergency student benefit program that we are debating today will still leave many students behind, including international students.

Week after week, New Democrats return to Parliament to highlight the people being left out of the government's response to COVID-19. It is because of our advocacy that we have returned once again to fix the holes this government has created. New Democrats fought for and won increases in the emergency benefits, we won an increase in the wage subsidy from 10% to 75%, we won help for small businesses with rent, and now we are debating legislation to help students.

In today's unanimous consent motion, the government admits that additional help is needed for students with dependants, seniors and people with disabilities. I have to think that there must be members in the government caucus who are quietly thinking, "Wouldn't it just be easier and fairer to make the program universal rather than create these patchwork programs?" I certainly know that many of my constituents are confused by the daily changes to programs and simply need to know that their government supports them.

With the creation of a new and separate program from the Canada emergency response benefit, the Canada emergency student benefit shortchanges students. I find it difficult to understand why the government has decided that someone who earned more money before COVID-19 can apply for the CERB and get \$2,000, but a student who earned less and is ineligible for the CERB will get 40% less support. Whether one is or is not enrolled in a post-secondary institution, the cost of paying one's rent or covering one's bills and services is the same.

The government has said that students will receive less through the student benefit than the CERB, because there will be other supports through service grant systems, but those will not address their needs now but at the end of the summer. In the meantime, the government has expanded loan programs so that students can be in debt with it instead of banks and credit card companies. Call me crazy, but would it not be more helpful for students to not have to go into debt in the first place?

Today, the average student with debt owes \$27,000 at the end of an undergraduate degree. Because of interest fees, a student who has to borrow to pay for their education will end up paying over \$10,000 more than a student who is lucky enough to be able to graduate without taking on debt. That is not fair, and it is an inequality that sets young people up to fail.

I do recognize that the government from the outset has offered to waive interest rates on student loans for six months. My concern is for students taking on additional debt loads with the government. With a lack of support, what will students' finances look like after this pandemic? The government was set to make \$1 billion from student loan interest this year before the COVID pandemic. We now need to ask the question, how much will the government make now with more students taking on larger debt loads? Are students' futures the kind of business the government wants to profit from?

● (1755)

The government should cancel all interest on student loans, as it should never make money off the backs of students. Consistently, people have reached out to my office to tell me how they are worried because they do not qualify for any of the emergency benefits and are in desperate need. Many women fall short of the \$5,000 minimum for CERB and the government does not recognize the unpaid work that many take on.

Women are now more than ever having to find ways to juggle work and care for their families as the home has become the workplace, schools, child and daycare centres have closed and services become even more stretched. The government's initial response to a mother who is receiving help from the Canada emergency student benefit is that she just had to justify her family obligations and to jump through more hoops to be worthy of less supports than those under the CERB.

That is why New Democrats have pushed to close the gap of \$250. More money going into the pockets of some of the most vulnerable students over the course of the summer represents a significant victory. We are also proud to push the government to commit to implementing measures without delay to improve supports for seniors and persons with disabilities who are dealing with extraordinary expenses incurred as a result of COVID-19.

Government Orders

Even with this victory, there are still holes in the system. For example, a woman whose child support dried up because her ex-spouse lost his or her income due to the pandemic does not qualify for the CERB. Her main source of income has been lost and the government is refusing to support her. It is not fair. This is on top of the countless women who are being denied the emergency benefits because they are pregnant and are being forced to apply for maternity leave early. This is another issue that could have been avoided if the government had made its emergency benefit universal.

There are some good announcements in this package that the Liberals have put forward. New Democrats welcome the government's announcement to temporarily double student grants. New Democrats have been pushing for this for over a decade. We would like to see this grant increase be made permanent. The government needs to move away from loans and to offer more grants. Accessing financial support for post-secondary education should not be a debt sentence.

Accessible and publicly funded education is a great opportunity for everyone in our society. It can transform lives and open new horizons for people of every background. That makes education an amazing gift that we can give to each other, our children and to the next generation. However, students have seen tuition increases across Canada on average and are paying 4% more just this year.

New Democrats believe that access to education should never depend on how much money one's parents make or how much debt one carries. If one has the grades and the drive to study hard, one should be able to get the education one wants at any age and in every community. The government needs to work with provinces to address the rise in tuition costs.

New Democrats are also echoing the call on behalf of the Canadian Federation of Students and CUPE for the government to put forward a post-secondary education act. The government needs to establish criteria and conditions in respect of funding for post-secondary education programs to ensure the quality, accessibility, public administration and accountability of those programs.

When thinking about the rising costs students are facing, I must bring up how disappointing it is to see the government completely abandoning international students. The government is leaving them with no supports. International students contributed \$21.6 billion to Canada's GDP last year. They have become important members of our communities and contribute to Canada's innovation and research. The government cannot and should not leave international students behind.

Sadly, even before COVID-19, post-secondary education was out of reach for too many people. People are being forced to give up their dreams because they cannot pay skyrocketing tuition fees and cannot find work and because the government supports are coming up short.

New Democrats are committed to addressing these inequalities. We will continue to push to make the Canada emergency benefit universal so that seniors, people with disabilities, mothers, students, workers and everyone who continues to fall between the cracks will get the support they need. New Democrats will continue to push for the elimination of tuition fees and the establishment of a national

post-secondary act. We will continue to push to make the doubling of student grants permanent. We will continue to address and tear down the barriers that too many Canadians faced before COVID-19 and will face afterwards.

• (1800)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, one of the things that was announced and that I am still searching for details about, and perhaps the hon. member has seen more of them, is the benefit that could be given to young people for volunteer work. This seemed like an excellent idea. What I understood from the initial announcement by the Prime Minister was that it would be cumulative: One could keep one's emergency student benefit that we are voting on today with Bill C-15 and also get between \$1,000 and \$5,000 for work done as a volunteer. Has the hon. member heard any details on that?

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: Mr. Speaker, I did hear that same announcement. I do not have much more detail. The government has not rolled out as many details as we would like. One of the issues I had with it that is that while it could be a great initiative, we are talking about students having to pay those grocery and rent bills, and they are doing it on 40% less than what other people are receiving in an emergency benefit.

While students are doing all of this work, they will not be paid until the end of the summer. If they are struggling month to month to pay those bills, I do not understand why, in addition, they have to wait until the end of the summer months to get a payment. Not having to do so would be particularly helpful for those who are struggling now, in real time, to pay those bills.

• (1805)

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, to continue this dialogue with the hon. member for London—Fanshawe, it seems that the Greens and the New Democrats in this place continually hammer home the need for a universal income or what we call a “guaranteed livable income”. The response from some others is that we will not be able to afford it and that when the pandemic is over, these emergency measures should be withdrawn. While much of what is being announced now, particularly for the corporate sector, can be withdrawn, the support for individual Canadians should stay in place.

Would my colleague agree that there are a lot of programs that we could stop paying for and also have huge savings in other respects, such as health care or correctional services, with a guaranteed livable income?

Government Orders

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Mr. Speaker, the member said it pretty well. It is interesting how short-sighted the argument can be that we cannot afford it, when the Liberals will bend over backwards to provide billions of dollars in tax loopholes or in corporate tax cuts, which seem perfectly legitimate to them. My hon. colleague, the leader of our party, talked about no strings being attached to these huge corporate giveaways.

We know that study after study on universal basic income or guaranteed income, as I know the member likes to call it, show that it actually results in cost savings. In Canada, and certainly across the world, those studies have been done. If we eliminate the majority of those other, smaller programs and put them under one program so that people have that guaranteed income, it will cost less, it stimulates the economy and is better for all.

Certainly, New Democrats believe that being proactive in that way in providing social programs, including health care, pharmaceutical care, dental care, child care or any of those systems, is a way we can save money and do the most good.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is my first time interacting with the member for London—Fanshawe and I congratulate her on her victory in the last election. I would like to ask her about the good news of the certainty for the 2,000 families employed by General Dynamics Land Systems in London. Export permits were provided for the LAVs. That company has also provided ventilators and PPE for London area hospitals.

I would like to hear the member's perspective and whether she is glad that these jobs have now been secured in London.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate and question and congratulation from my hon. colleague. These days, I think it is interesting that we have forgotten how the election was not that long ago.

I am very proud of the people at General Dynamics. They do amazing work. I do not believe that the current and past government did them any favours by putting them in the predicament of filling such a contract for a government that clearly ignores human rights in all forms. The people at General Dynamics do amazing work and have an incredible contract coming up with the Canadian government. They can go forward with peacekeeping measures.

This is also a company that is now making protective gear in our community. They have donated quite a lot and I recognize the workers there, the workers of Unifor, are doing incredible work. They should never be penalized for the poor choices of governments in the past.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a real honour to be here today. I think of how much the world has changed since the last time I was in this House. I have just spent a little more than 40 days basically in isolation. I started to think about the term “quarantine”, which means 40 days. It is a biblical image of the 40 days Jesus was wrestling in the desert. There was 40 days and 40 nights of floods. The Israelites were in the desert for 40 years. What is really profound about it is the term “quarantine” comes from the age of the black plague, because it was one of the only tools to fight the pandemic. It is sobering to realize that in the 21st century we are having to return to the tools that were used in the Dark Ages to fight a pandemic we do not fully

understand and to realize how quickly that virus up-ended everything that our world has talked about and taken as absolute basic truths that could not even be argued: 40 years of economic and social policies overturned as quickly as the Soviet wall in Berlin fell over.

What fell over within the first week of COVID? The belief in the natural superiority of globalization, the belief that we do not need to have industry in Canada to look after ourselves because we can trust our allies. When Donald Trump seized medical equipment that was bound for Canada, that globalization agenda failed. When we were getting substandard health products from China, that globalization agenda failed. We heard people across the political spectrum talking about the need for an industrial policy so that Canada would never again be left in a lurch like that.

We learned about the whole privatization agenda, the “get government out of our way” view, that the “for profit” is so naturally superior. We saw the horrific death levels in the for-profit seniors homes that we are now having to send the army in to try and keep old people alive. We can never again be in that situation. We can never again be in a situation where we have crowdsourcing on Facebook for our front-line medical workers to have medical gear to protect them in a pandemic.

There are other things we have learned as well. We learned the incredible social solidarity of Canadians, that Canadians look out for each other, that Canadians do not believe in the race to the bottom, that Canadians do not throw each other out of the lifeboat. I arrived in Ottawa last night and my daughter told me that neighbours came up and put a sign on her door saying that they knew there were students there who may not have any family here and if they needed any help to call them. That is who we are as Canadians.

We also learned of the incredible economic power the government has. After all the degrading of federal spending and government money and the Conservatives always telling us that it was going to be the corporations, the private sector and the entrepreneurs, within a week of COVID everybody was looking for a backstop to stop the worst economic catastrophe in memory.

The steps we have been debating here have been about the power of social spending to keep our cities livable and our families afloat. I would put to the House that there is no going back to normal, that the world that was here at the beginning of March that we were debating is gone. The choice we need to make is where we are going to go as a nation. The idea that the market is going to miraculously come back is obviously a myth.

Government Orders

What is going to get us out of COVID is going to require intense public investment over the next few years. If we are going to be spending those public investments to get our economy back up, then the fundamental question we have to ask ourselves is what kinds of investments should we be making, because it is public money and it is about the public good. The steps we take every step of the way, whether it is supporting university students or supporting people with the \$2,000 a month basic income that we have supported, must be the new floor to ensure that we are never again left in a situation as precarious as we were in and that our health care system is never again left in that situation.

• (1810)

I think of Ontario. I congratulate Premier Doug Ford. He has certainly shown some passion on this issue, but just before the pandemic they were shutting down all the public health units because they did not think we needed them, and these public health units have been the front lines of defending us and saving us right now. We are not going to go back to nickel-and-diming health care into the ground. That is not going to happen on our watch.

Regarding the idea of the \$2,000 minimum, we can hear from the Conservatives, their right-wing think tanks and the National Post that people are going to sit on their duffs and hang out in their hammocks. It is like the Conservatives just cannot wait for the moment when they get to decide who gets thrown out of the lifeboat.

The reality is that we have seen that millions of Canadians, within one week of COVID, did not have enough savings to pay their rent. It is a staggering indictment of an economic system that has not made sure that we live to the standard that we should be able to live to. That \$2,000 a month certainly did not come from the Conservatives; they were too busy making a tax on people of Asian origin. The \$2,000-a-month minimum wage idea came from the New Democrats, who said that this is the new base, and we got the support of the government because it recognized that.

How do we go back and say that now people are going to go back to lousy jobs and lousy contracts in an economy that is not going to have a lot of those jobs for a long time?

The new normal is about ensuring that the investments we make from now on build a better society. It gives us an incredible opportunity. What are we going to do in terms of the billions of dollars that we will need in infrastructure to make cities more livable, more sustainable and to make our society more inclusive and fair? That is our opportunity. We could just give it away to the corporate sector, as we have done year in, year out, but I think that would be a terrible failure, given the fact that we have left Canadians in the situation they have been left in.

These are the issues that we have brought forward as New Democrats, compared to the Conservatives on this issue. We said \$2,000 a month was the minimum, and then we realized that the government was still not working with us on making it universal. They wanted to have limits on it. We asked, what about someone who is earning some money? Are they going to be kicked off? What about people in the gig economy who have a bit of money coming in? To have the \$2,000 plus the \$1,000 has been a fair move, and the government has recognized it. It was the New Democrats who said that the wage subsidy at 10% was not enough

and that it had to be 75%. While the Conservatives were all demanding that we start this new cold war with China, and they were all waving their flags and pumping their fists, we were speaking about small businesses and saying that we needed to make this fair to them, and we got those changes.

• (1815)

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. We are not in question period, so a point of order is allowed.

The hon. members who are heckling the member for Timmins—James Bay are making it more difficult for me to appreciate the brilliance of his remarks, but, beyond that, the hon. members who are heckling right now are making the case that Parliament on Zoom is more courteous than Parliament in real life.

The Speaker: The point of order is well taken.

I will let the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay continue.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I certainly know that for my colleagues on the other side the truth hurts. It hurts a lot, and it should hurt, because of the disinterest they have shown for people facing the worst economic crisis in memory.

The fact is that, as a nation, we need to work together to make sure that we maintain the social solidarity that Canadians are showing. When we come to Parliament to push the government on the support for post-secondary, it is not about suggesting, as the Conservatives do, that there should be a cost-benefit analysis of whether students sleep in all day or try to find jobs. That is how they see university students. What we see in university students is people burdened down with debt, trying to make a better life for themselves.

When we push the government for change, it is because it is doable. We can do this, at this time, with the kind of federal investments that will be required in the coming years to build a better, fairer Canada, a Canada that is more sustainable, a Canada in which we will never, ever, again leave ourselves so precarious as we were with our work, our savings and our health care system.

This is an opportunity for Parliament to work together to make that happen and to make that new normal, the better Canada, because there is no going back to the old normal.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do enjoy hearing my colleague from time to time. I particularly appreciated his praise for the response by Premier Ford. I have not been in the House in a little while, so I do not know if he has been praising Premier Ford consistently over the last number of months or whether that has just been recent, but I am glad to see that all-party approach.

Government Orders

My question for the member is less about this competition between the Greens and the New Democrats on having a universal basic income. He is in a party that has been consistently against oil and resource development and consistently against most jobs in the corporate sector. We hear that message frequently from the New Democrats. My question is sincere. If we have no private sector in Canada, how do we pay for all those programs that the New Democrats like to list in this House?

Not everyone can work for a level of government. Not everyone can work for a non-profit or a charity. How will we pay for our universities, our health care, the \$200-billion deficit we will see as a result of this crisis? How are we going to have a V- or U-shaped recovery, or does the member not want a recovery? Does he want that “L” that just drops, and we are going to be permanently impoverished, or is he willing to turn the NDP position around and start supporting resource workers and start supporting companies like GDLS that build things in this country? Will he change the New Democrats' fundamental aversion to the resource economy?

• (1820)

Mr. Charlie Angus: Oh my god, Mr. Speaker, this is the man who would be king. This is the state of the Conservative vision for the country.

We have one Conservative leadership candidate who has been promoting fake medicines based on doctor Trump. That was one. We have Peter MacKay, who was so enraged that COVID interrupted his leadership race that the Conservative Party had to stop the leadership race to keep Peter MacKay from self-destructing. We have the despicable character, still in the Conservative caucus, who made racist attacks against Canada's chief medical officer, and we have not heard of that man being kicked out. He is still a leadership candidate.

This leads me to my colleague, whom I actually really like. I think he is putting on this sort of angry guy appearance to get the Conservative base. However, the idea that he believes that we have to agree with shipping arms to the Saudis or we are against private industry shows that this is a man who is not ready for prime time.

I am urging the member to understand that to get our economy back up is going to require public investment. He should be working with us. Public investment is going to be required. We hear the Conservatives whining that they want a lot more money for the oil sector, after we spent billions. They are not looking at private money; they are looking at public money, and with public money, the public has a say, so I urge my colleague to drop that grimace, show some compassion and show he cares.

This man could do it, but he has to get a smile. He should just put a smile on and say that Canadians are hard-working and we are in this together. He should stay away from those other loonies in the leadership race and he will do well.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member for Timmins—James Bay is on fire today, so I thought I would just add a bit to that fire.

He has talked about not going back to “the old normal”. Let us not go back to normal; we need to go forward to build a better

Canada. Maybe the member could talk a bit about what that better Canada would look like.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, let us talk about the economy. Let us talk about building a better Canada.

We have enormous capacity here, but we have given it away, year in and year out, in trade agreements. In the case of our IT sector, we need an IT investment through the federal government, because that is where it is going to come. When we are starting to talk about the job recoveries, it is going to require social investment. Nobody figures we are going to get out of this by just turning a switch and having the private economy come back on. When we make public investment, it will be like after the Second World War to make sure we have a proper pension plan, proper health care, proper infrastructure and sustainable cities.

Let us do better than we did in 2008, when they ran around with a bunch of paper cheques and white hard hats and cut ribbons all over the country, and we did not even get high-speed rail. Let us do it right this time.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise today.

[*Translation*]

I am pleased to rise to speak to Bill C-15, an act respecting Canada emergency student benefits. This is another bill in response to the urgency of the COVID-19 crisis, the great pandemic. It is an unparalleled and unprecedented situation.

[*English*]

We have never been through anything like this before, and we are seeing level after level and aspect after aspect of debate taking place in this place on different pieces of legislation as we rush to fill the gaps.

There are a few things to say about this, but before I do, I want to acknowledge that I am honoured to speak today on the unceded territory of the Algonquin nation and express to it our enormous thanks for its patience and generosity. *Meegwetch*.

We are in the midst of something that we can say is unknown to us, but I was very taken with the analysis by the parliamentary budget office, and I want to speak to that for just a moment.

I am hearing from some constituents who are saying, “Yes, we need all the help we can get right now in this pandemic, but who's going to pay the bills for all of this? What are we going to do when the bills fall due?” I think it's important to take a moment there.

Government Orders

I have been privileged to participate in the finance committee meetings and to ask questions of the Bank of Canada governor, Stephen Poloz, who with his team has done an amazing job; to have an insight into what governments all around the world are doing; and to let Canadians know that we are certainly not alone in this. I think it is obvious that we are not alone in fighting the public health crisis that is COVID-19, but we are also not alone in deciding that there are certain prescriptions for an economy that will help us all.

I do not think Canadians have noticed the absence of certain things, but let me just say that there is an absence of things that we would not want to see, such as runs on the bank. We are not seeing people lining up, saying, "I better get my money out right now. I don't trust the system." We are not hearing people say, "I can't make my credit card bills because of usury levels of interest rates that have been hiked up." We have seen that rates are supposed to be going down. A lot of these things we are seeing are the result of very specific prescriptions that are being followed not just by the Bank of Canada but by central banks around the world.

To colleagues and friends here, I recommend the International Monetary Fund review of what is going on. The trillions of dollars that are being spent by governments around the world are, in a sense, backstopped by monetary policy that says we can get through this, but we have to do a couple of things. We are going to ramp down interest rates to as close to zero as possible, so that the cost of borrowing goes down. We are going to introduce more liquidity into the system with a number of measures, including the Bank of Canada's purchase of federal bonds and provincial bonds in the billions and billions of dollars. Bond purchases by our central bank do not add to debt or deficit. They increase liquidity and keep cash in the system so that we do not have a credit crunch.

It is important to note that we have been through situations when things were much worse for our financial picture than now. Even when we get through this, after all the money that is planned to be spent, our debt-to-GDP ratio will not be nearly as bad as it was in the early 1990s.

We have the International Monetary Fund report and the report from the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer. No one is sanguine about this, but if we read the International Monetary Fund reports and the report from the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, as Canadians we are left knowing this: We are not in this alone, and the measures taken by the central bank and by the finance minister and the government are so far not putting us in financial peril.

One of the things we do not mention enough is that we are in a very privileged position. An analogy used by Stephen Poloz when he was speaking to the finance committee is that just as COVID-19 will be much harder for people who have underlying health conditions and do not go into this situation in a healthy state, so too are nations states more at risk when they do not go in healthy. However, we are in a privileged position. Our debt-to-GDP ratio was the lowest in the G7 when this crisis hit, and we had historic levels of employment. Certainly in my living memory, it is the closest thing to full employment that I have ever seen in Canada. This is what the Governor of the Bank of Canada meant when he talked about fiscal firepower, and the finance minister has used the same term.

• (1825)

That is not to say that this is not a deep economic crisis that has befallen us, along with a big deep public health care crisis that has befallen us, but just to say that it is not piling on debt, while being a deficit for sure.

The PBO suggested that when spending is temporary, such as it is now, we would most likely expect to bounce back as we did at the end of the Second World War with a large surplus in 1947, but only if certain conditions are upheld. One is that we need to hold the country together. I am so grateful to every province when I hear the deputy prime minister say that there are weekly calls with every premier of every province and territory with the Prime Minister. That is a very healthy thing.

I think it is very important that no matter how much sparring is going on today while we are meeting in person, behind the scenes there is tremendous collaboration and no one party can claim credit for things. Yes, the Greens advocated that 10% was not enough and we had to have 75% in the wage subsidy, and that was done. I think that is a credit to all of us in this place, those who came to it more slowly and those who advocated first. We have to work together or we will not get through this.

Back to where we are in terms of our financial position, I am hoping we do not bounce back in the sense that we go to an economy such as we had before, which had glaring inequities. I hope that we bounce forward and that when the pandemic is over that we look at an economic prescription for the country that is consistent with the urgency of the climate crisis, that is consistent with getting people back to work, but doing things like retrofitting our buildings to make sure that we maximize energy efficiency, even that every building could produce more energy that it uses. That is doable. Also, that we have an electricity grid that works as a national energy corridor east to west, north to south, and it is 100% renewable energy.

There are things that we can do so that we can come out of this crisis with, again, closer to full employment and with less social inequity, with clear action to ensure our seniors are well housed and well cared for, with clear action to make sure that we do not have a social safety net full of holes but that it is repaired, and that we move toward guaranteed livable income.

I just made a note of the most recent book title that came to my attention. I commend it to my friends in the Conservative Party because it was written by a Conservative. Senator Hugh Segal's new book is out and it is called *Boots Need Boots: One Tory's Lonely Fight to End Poverty in Canada*. I would love to see that fight be less lonely and I thank our former parliamentary colleague, former Senator Hugh Segal, for bringing forward a book at a time when the topic of guaranteed livable income, or universal basic income, has never been as hot a topic.

I will pause parenthetically because of my recent exchange with the hon. member for London—Fanshawe about the fact that I say guaranteed livable income and others say universal basic income. We have adopted, as Greens, the term “guaranteed livable income” because if we want to make sure that the amount that every Canadian receives actually creates a situation in which they find their situation livable and not beyond some level of poverty from which they are moderately better off than they were before. That is a debate for another day.

We are here to look at Bill C-15. It is coming again, as we have seen, in waves, in response to the pandemic. We can look at it and see that first the government looked at people who did not qualify for EI. What did we do? The Canada emergency benefit, CERB, came in first and then we had to make sure that that amount of money was improved upon by looking at things like reducing student loans. Bill C-13 in this place had 19 different parts and was dealing with the impacts on individual Canadians. There was not enough there for small business. We have been pushing harder on that. Bill C-14 gave us more, looking at programs to help small business with access to loans to cover their rent.

New announcements are made almost daily and we still have people falling through the cracks. We still have small business falling through the cracks. However, some of the people falling through the cracks who are helped today are our students. It is terribly important to recognize that for many students who did not earn \$5,000 last year, they will not qualify for the CERB. For some other reasons, they certainly cannot expect to find jobs this summer in their chosen field and the Canada summer jobs program cannot absorb the number of people who need the income supports right now and who need enough money to live on.

Many students are, as we have heard today, people living as a married couple with children, or a single mom with children also going to school. Currently, the benefit provided in this piece of legislation is not adequate to help all of those people with their bills because the amount of money in the initial offering is \$1,250.

• (1830)

However, I note that under this legislation the minister may make changes by regulation to improve that. That of course is the minister of employment and social development. This piece of legislation requires that the minister receive approval by the Minister of Finance to make changes to the amount received or the weeks it is available.

Personally, I would have gone in the other direction with this legislation. The Conservatives have made it more restrictive. I would have made sure that the minister for employment and social development could make those changes without permission from the Minister of Finance because they make so much sense.

I want to pause because I note the minister for employment and social development has been with us all day today. I want to thank her for her hard work. I know she has been working around the clock like many ministers. I know she is a mom with kids at home. Like all of my friends with kids still at home, keeping the kids occupied while also being on a computer and the phone day and night to make some of the most massive changes in that portfolio and in living memory is daunting. I want to thank her for her diligence.

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The missing piece in this that still concerns the Greens greatly is what we are doing for international students. This legislation applies to a person who is a Canadian citizen, it certainly applies to indigenous Canadians, it applies to permanent residents as found under the definitions in the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act or a protected person under the meaning of that act as well. What do we do about our international students?

We have something in the order of potentially half a million international students in this country now. The international students program contributes over \$20 billion to our economy and leads to the employment of 170,000 Canadians. As we all know, international students pay far higher fees. They come into Canada and of course contribute to our economy by paying their rent and buying their groceries.

I do not know how many members saw on CBC a few nights back a young woman being interviewed about her experience as a foreign student in Canada. Her landlady was telling her not to worry and that if she could not pay the rent, she would not charge her. She was also giving her groceries. That is a really wonderful Canadian moment. It brought tears to my eyes to hear this young student saying that if it were not for her landlady, she would have neither a roof over her head nor food.

What about the international students who do not have a landlady like that? So far here are their options. If they made \$5,000 last year, they can qualify for the CERB, but if they did not make that amount of money, they will not qualify. If they are an international student and also a permanent resident, they would qualify under today's bill for the emergency benefit for students. However, if they are not a permanent resident, if they only have their student visa to be in Canada, they would not qualify.

We still have a problem. It has been identified by the Canadian Federation of Students, which is asking for improvements to this bill. It has two asks. One is that it be \$2,000 a month, which is something the minister can do by regulation after this bill passes, but we would have to come back here and re-legislate this to change the definition of “student” in order to allow it to apply to an international student, unless we tinker with one of the other programs such as the Canada summer jobs program. There is still a deep concern for people who are falling between the cracks.

For the simplest way to avoid falling between the cracks, I go back to my earlier reference to a guaranteed livable income. That would be one way of making sure there would be no one in Canada so economically insecure they would be pushed out of the place they are living, unable to afford food, and unable to find a job and not fitting any of the existing programs.

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I am grateful for the effort of everybody in the cabinet who have been working so hard, as well as all the civil servants who clearly have been working. As members of Parliament, we are on the phone with them on Saturdays and Sundays. If Canadians do not know, everybody I can find within any government department is working really long days seven days a week.

• (1835)

I have worked with them on rescuing Canadians stranded in other countries. It is extraordinary. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the whole team at Global Affairs Canada seem to have converted themselves into what I have been doing at home myself, part-time travel agent, but to rescue over 20,000 Canadians from over 144 countries is a monumental feat. However, I see the same level of hard work happening when we have Sunday phone calls and my questions are being answered by officials in the Department of Finance, correctional services or indigenous services.

By thanking everyone involved, I am not saying everything is perfect, but for Canadians watching or listening to this now, they need to know that thousands of people are working in ways that I have never seen a government work ever in my life. It is important to say to them, as we say to our front-line health care workers, to the people in our neighbourhoods who are still stocking the grocery store shelves, who are driving the trucks, who are planting their fields now so we will have food in this country, to everybody who is doing the work while most of us are locked up at home, we are deeply grateful, including all of the civil servants who I know have been knocking themselves out.

I heard a story from a friend about a family Zoom call and the husband of one of the people on the family Zoom call mentioned that his wife was working in the federal civil service. He started to say “my wife”, broke down and started crying. There is a level of strain on families working in the federal civil service and I want to pause to say thanks to everyone who is working so hard.

When I mention the gaps, it is not to say this is not good enough and I am angry with the government. It is to say we have to keep working. Maybe, in hindsight, we can agree it would have been better to bring in one measure, as we have been advocating, but I am not angry the Government of Canada has failed to do that so far. What we need to do is help each other as much as possible. I think that means being kind toward those who we see are falling short of what needs to be done, recognizing that nobody has ever worked this hard ever. If we hold together as a country and keep our partisanship to a bare minimum, though I would actually like to see it erased into a nothingness that says we are all in this together, there is plenty of time when it is over to try to get a gotcha point in to try to score something for television, but right now we need to be deeply grateful that we are in this country.

We could be anywhere around the world and trying to rescue people. Knowing what is going on in places like Ecuador and India, knowing what might happen in the continent of Africa, knowing how hard people are working and knowing how relatively safe we all are, I know every single person in this place recognizes how very fortunate we are as a country and as a people.

I also ask us to think in this moment about whether we cannot do more for the developing world, if we cannot do more to avert famine, if cannot see ourselves stretching ourselves a bit more. However, for now, I will be voting for this legislation, but with a very strong plea that we do more for our international students, that we figure a program out where it is needed, so that no student falls through the cracks.

• (1840)

Mr. Kenny Chiu (Steveston—Richmond East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands for her passionate advocacy for international students.

In the House, I do not know how many members would fit in that category, but I was a foreign student a couple of decades ago, and that is what we were called back then. We, like the member said, appreciated what Canada provided us, but we realized we were foreigners in this country and appreciated the generosity of allowing foreigners to come to this land to get educated and receive services equal to all other Canadians. We appreciated that.

We also appreciated the opportunity given to us to be self-reliant individuals in this country. That is why when we applied for student visas to come to Canada, we had to prove we had the ability to support ourselves in this country and we are proud of our self-reliance, the ability to rely on ourselves and not be a burden on Canadians or Canadian society.

That is why we as parliamentarians in the House are not just responsible for doling out compassion but are also accountable for the financial implications. The compassion that we dole out is not without cost. It is borrowing from the future and burdening the next generation, higher taxes or the cutting of some services. There are only three ways this would fit.

While I appreciate the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands advocating for international students, I personally do not believe it is a responsible way or would get much support from international students.

• (1845)

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, the member for Steveston—Richmond East is a perfect example of what we always hope for when wonderful international students come to Canada. They have sometimes been dubbed ideal future Canadians. I have had so many international students in my own riding who have stayed, contributed to society and become Canadians.

It is true that they have to show they can support themselves, but there has never been a box to tick to say they can support themselves in a pandemic when there are no jobs and they have to stay home. The situation is extraordinary, and on that basis I think our response should be extraordinary.

The Speaker: Pursuant to order made earlier today, it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the second reading stage of the bill now before the House.

[*Translation*]

The question is on the motion.

[*English*]

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time, deemed considered in committee of the whole, deemed reported without amendment, deemed concurred in at report stage on division, deemed read a third time and passed on division)

The Speaker: Hon. members, these past few weeks have certainly been a time of firsts in our parliamentary community. Today, for the first time, the special committee on COVID-19 met here in the House of Commons chamber following a successful virtual meeting that was held yesterday. It was good to see you all face to face. Even as we continue to observe social distancing, we have

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continued our work during the recalled sitting of the House that is now concluding.

[*Translation*]

We would not be here, in the House, without those who have worked non-stop to set up our meetings.

I would like to thank the members who are here, their staff, and all of the dedicated employees of the House Administration, the Library of Parliament and the Parliamentary Protective Service, who certainly sacrificed many hours of sleep to make sure this sitting was successful.

[*English*]

I thank all those who made today possible and those who are keeping us safe during these difficult times. We would not be able to do this without them.

I now go to the moment we have all been waiting for.

[*Translation*]

Pursuant to order made on Monday, April 20, the House stands adjourned until Monday, May 25, at 11 a.m. pursuant to Standing Orders 28(2) and 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:49 p.m.)

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