



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

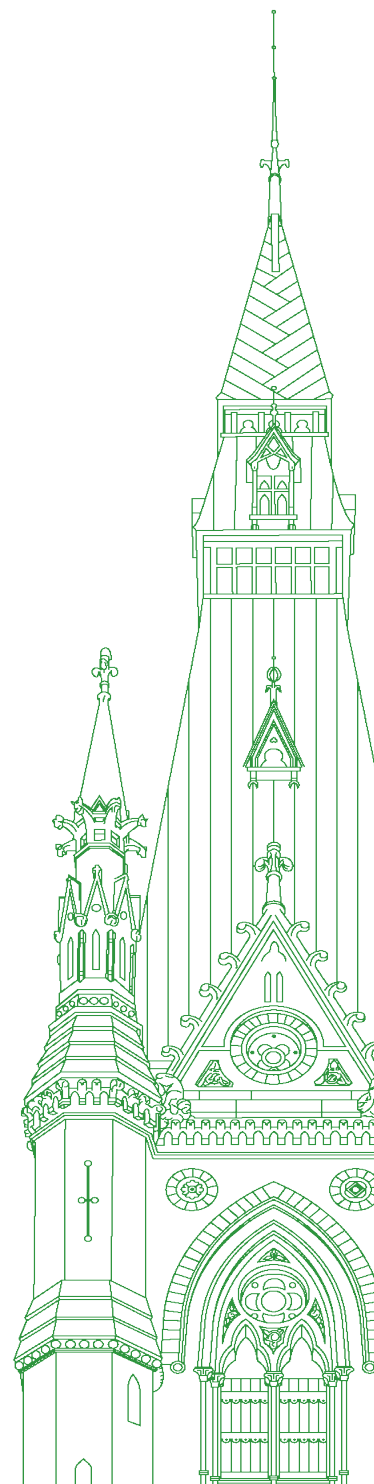
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Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, September 28, 2020

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayer

• (1105)

[*Translation*]

ORDER PAPER

The Speaker: I wish to inform the House that, in accordance with a representation made by the government pursuant to Standing Order 55(1), the Chair has caused to be published a special Order Paper giving notice of a government bill.

[*English*]

I now lay upon the table the relevant document.

[*Translation*]

The hon. member for La Prairie on a point of order.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

PRODUCTION OF PAPERS FOR STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on September 24, the member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes raised what I thought was a very relevant question of privilege. I have a few words to add to that question. I will start by recapping the facts, namely what the Prime Minister and his government did when various committees launched investigations into the WE Charity scandal.

The fiasco involving the Prime Minister, his government and WE Charity is the most serious scandal in history. It is so big that the Prime Minister's Office, cabinet, the former minister of finance, who resigned, and the Prime Minister himself went to inordinate lengths to conceal the facts from the opposition parties, Quebecers and Canadians.

By proroguing Parliament as he did on August 18, the Prime Minister was attempting to divert attention from the investigations being conducted by no less than four parliamentary committees. The Prime Minister claimed that the pandemic warranted a new recovery plan and a new Speech from the Throne to address issues stemming from the pandemic.

In light of what the Prime Minister actually announced last week, there is every reason to believe that he is using the current public

health crisis as a diversion, at the cost of human lives and economic hardship to Canadians.

This situation raises an important question of privilege because the government failed in its duty to comply with the Standing Committee on Finance's order. The government was required to produce documents and communications exchanged among ministers, senior departmental officials and WE Charity from March 2020 without redacting any of the information.

The motion adopted by the Standing Committee on Finance stated:

...any redactions necessary, including to protect the privacy of Canadian citizens and permanent residents whose names and personal information may be included in the documents, as well as public servants who have been providing assistance on this matter, be made by the Office of the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel of the House of Commons.

Words are important. However, much of what is in the approximately 5,600 pages the government submitted before prorogation was blacked out and redacted, which is contrary to the committee's unanimous motion. The law clerk of the House himself said that the documents submitted by the government did not comply with the committee's motion.

By redacting the content of almost 1,000 pages of information, the government has failed to meet its obligation to be accountable for its actions. It has violated the committee's right to order the production of documents in the course of investigations related to its mandate, and, in this specific case, to an order of reference from the House of Commons.

I refer hon. members to section 18 of the Constitution Act, 1867, which extends parliamentary privilege to the right to conduct inquiries, to compel witnesses to testify, and to order the production of documents. This constitutional principle is extended to the various standing committees in Standing Orders 108(1) and 108(2).

My colleague from the Conservative Party also raised this issue. The power to order the production of documents is “a broad, absolute power that on the surface appears to be without restriction.” This quote is from chapter 20, page 984, of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, edited by Marc Bosc and André Gagnon.

Privilege

A previous ruling made by Speaker Milliken on April 27, 2010, concerning the Special Committee on the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan, beginning on page 2039 of the Debates of the House of Commons, said that only the House has the power to decide whether information or information contained in the documents ordered to be produced must be protected.

In that same ruling, the Speaker explained that:

The right of Parliament to obtain every possible information on public questions is undoubted, and the circumstances must be exceptional, and the reasons very cogent....

Therefore, the government does not have the power to decide what information to redact in this case. If the government wants to hide information, it must prove to the House that the reasons for which it wants to redact this information take precedence over the public interest, which in this case is the administration of money belonging of Canadians.

• (1110)

In keeping with Speaker Milliken's analysis, the fundamental right of the House of Commons to hold the government to account for its actions is an indisputable privilege and in fact an obligation for the government.

He argued that the only limitation, which could only be self-imposed, would be that any inquiry must relate to its legislative competence for reasons of national security, national defence or international relations, but that is not at all the case here.

As indicated at pages 152 and 153 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, Bosc and Gagnon, custom dictates that questions of privilege arising from committee proceedings will be heard by the House only upon presentation of a report from the committee, except in the most extreme situations.

I believe that the current situation justifies direct intervention on your part, given the extreme gravity of the consequences.

Mr. Speaker, I think you would agree that, since the Prime Minister bizarrely dissolved the Standing Committee on Finance, it cannot look into this matter and report to the House.

In the middle of a pandemic, with numerous concerns threatening public health and impacting the financial security of many individuals and businesses, this House has a duty to work effectively for our citizens.

This question of privilege has to be dealt with quickly to prevent other political manoeuvring aimed at delaying the work of the committee to the detriment of the urgent needs of the public.

Partisan strategies to distract from the We Charity scandal involving public funds and the urgency of acting to restart the economy are extremely serious circumstances in the current context of the pandemic.

Mr. Speaker, I invite you to determine whether this is a question that affects parliamentary privilege and undermines the dignity of the House so that the House may debate it.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for his submission. We will come back later with a response.

The hon. member for New Westminster—Burnaby on another point of order.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend my colleague and parliamentary leader of the Bloc Québécois for his submission. It has been four days now since the hon. member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes made his presentation, along with the leader of the Bloc Québécois, and myself on behalf of the NDP. All three of us said that this required a quick decision. The government has had four days to make its presentation and I presume it will do so now. If not, I ask you, Mr. Speaker, to quickly—

The Speaker: Order. I am grateful for this advice. We are working very diligently on a response.

The hon. member for Banff—Airdrie, also on a point of order.

[English]

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thought you had notice, but if you seek it, I believe you will find unanimous consent for the following motion, that the membership of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs be amended as follows: Ms. Vecchio for Mr. Richards; Mr. Lukiwski for Mr. Brassard; and, Mr. Doherty for Mr. Duncan, Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry.

The Speaker: Normally when there are requests for unanimous consent, the Chair asks in the affirmative whether members agree.

[Translation]

This being a hybrid sitting of the House, were the Chair to proceed in this fashion, if there were any dissenting voices, particularly for members participating via video conference, they may not be audible.

• (1115)

[English]

Therefore, for the sake of clarity, I will only ask for those who are opposed to the request to express their disagreement. In this way, the Chair will hear clearly if there are any dissenting voices, and I will accordingly be able to declare whether or not there is unanimous consent to proceed.

All those opposed to the hon. member moving this motion please say nay.

An hon. member: Nay.

The Speaker: I believe we have a nay. We do not have unanimous consent.

We will continue.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS NO. 1

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.) moved:

That the bill standing on the Order Paper, entitled An Act relating to certain measures in response to COVID-19, be disposed of as follows:

- (a) the bill be ordered for consideration at second reading later this day;
- (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 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;
- (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, and deemed read a third time and passed;
- (d) until the said bill is disposed of at second reading or read a third time, whichever is later, the House shall not adjourn except pursuant to a motion proposed by a minister of the Crown; and
- (e) no motion to adjourn the debate may be proposed except by a minister of the Crown.

He said: Mr. Speaker, this a momentous time in our history, and we must all act accordingly.

[English]

We are gathered here today at a momentous time in our history. Indeed, the last six months have changed our country. More than 9,000 Canadians have died from COVID-19. Many thousands more have contracted the virus. Millions of Canadians have seen their jobs disappear in the economic crisis caused by the pandemic. So many people are still worried about how much longer their jobs will last, and we all know so many of these people.

As the days grow shorter and the autumn leaves begin to appear, we are at a crossroads. We can ignore the challenges that remain before us and blindly walk down a dark path with dangerous consequences, or we can walk together on a second path with our eyes wide open, and prepare our families and our country for the twists and turns that lie ahead.

Our government is committed to responsibly leading Canadians down that second path.

[Translation]

We must continue to be honest with Canadians, as we always have been.

The second wave poses serious risks. We must not take it lightly, on the contrary. Over the coming weeks and months, we must do everything we can to protect Canadians. That is what is most important to us. In fact, as elected members, it is our greatest responsibility; it is the greatest responsibility. Canadians know it, all my colleagues in the House know it and we know it: We are facing the gravest of threats. It continues to weigh on all of us, our families,

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our friends, our neighbours and our colleagues. We are all at risk, with no exceptions.

Canadians know how to do their part by staying home, washing their hands, wearing a mask and following public health guidance.

As a government and as parliamentarians, we also have a duty to do our part. First, we need to help the most vulnerable Canadians, especially those who are struggling to make ends meet. There are many of them. This crisis is affecting all Canadians. Many people have lost their jobs, and others worry they are next. Some people are starting to pull through, while others now need to stay home to care for a sick father, mother, son or daughter. Some need to stay home because they themselves are sick.

Canadians are worried, as are we all. They have valid questions. How are they going to pay the bills? How are they going to feed and clothe their families? How are they going to pay the mortgage or rent?

From the beginning of this crisis, our government has been working day and night to meet the needs of Canadians. We do not want to leave anyone behind. We want to be there for everyone. At times like these, we need to assure all Canadians that we will be there for them, that we will never let them down, that we will keep helping them, that we will get through this crisis together, and that, together, we will come out even stronger on the other side. The key word is “together”. We have to do this “together”.

• (1120)

[English]

This is a message that I hope all parliamentarians will reflect on as we discuss the motion before the House today. It is a simple message. It is time for action. It is a time of urgency. It is not a time for members to slow walk their way toward inaction. It is definitely not a time to play political games.

Canadians need our help now and this is exactly what the motion is meant to accomplish: quick action. Canadians need members of the House to recognize the urgency of the situation and to work together. They are watching us. Can we work together for the benefit of all Canadians?

I hope that all members from all parties will leave politics aside and work with us. We must move forward to provide millions of Canadians with the financial support they need and we must do it now.

[Translation]

The government presented a Speech from the Throne last week in which we clearly stated our plan for the coming weeks and months. We are going to show some leadership; guide the government through this crisis; guide the government and the country to economic recovery; and rebuild the foundations of our society to make it stronger, more just and more humane.

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In its throne speech, the government promised to help each and every Canadian, and Canada is in a sound financial position to do so, compared to other countries. That is why we did not hesitate to use our financial resources to help Canadians, through programs such as the Canada emergency response benefit and the Canada emergency wage subsidy. We did not hesitate to use the tools at our disposal or to create new ones in order to help Canadians. Canadian workers and employers must have the support they need to weather this fierce storm.

Madam Speaker, if I may, I would like to quote a passage from the Speech from the Throne: “Canadians should not have to choose between health and their job, just like Canadians should not have to take on debt that their government can better shoulder.”

Every member of the government is working as a team to support Canadians. I commend the thousands of public servants and thank them from the bottom of my heart for their dedication and the extraordinary work they have done. They continue to work to make a positive difference in the lives of all Canadians. Members of cabinet, like all members of the Liberal caucus, have never lost sight of the fact that the most important thing to do is to help the people we serve.

Canadians elected us. We are here because they made that choice. They are the reason we are here in the House. They are the reason we are standing up and working together to develop policies that will make a difference for the men and women of this country, for the young and not-so-young, for our seniors and our businesses.

• (1125)

[English]

Among those who have worked the hardest is my colleague and friend, the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion. For months now, right through recent days, I would say all the time that she has adopted an open and collaborative approach. She has listened to Canadians and has collaborated with her fellow parliamentarians. I would say her door is always open. She is always ready to discuss and accept ideas from all others. Sometimes good ideas or better ideas come from the other side. She is totally open to that.

She and her team have worked hard and have come forward with a proposal to create three new benefits.

First, there is the Canada recovery benefit. This would help Canadians who have stopped working because of COVID-19 but do not qualify for EI, and Canadians who are employed but have seen their income reduced.

Second, there is the Canada recovery sickness benefit. This would assist Canadians who are unable to work because they must stay at home.

Third, there is the Canada recovery caregiving benefit. This would support workers who need to take unpaid leave to care for family members as a result of COVID-19.

[Translation]

When my colleague announced those benefits in August, she said she would monitor the development of the pandemic closely, and that is what she is doing. She has been keeping a close eye on the situation since schools reopened. She is also monitoring the number of jobs created in the country. She is keeping tabs on what is happening in every province and in every region of the country. She made it very clear that she would be flexible with respect to details of the benefits and that she is open to collaboration. She always works collaboratively.

Everyone is aware of the urgency of the current situation. Canadian workers and their families are counting on us to provide the help they need to pay their bills and buy groceries. They need our help to get through this crisis. Objectively speaking, this motion puts forward a reasonable way for the government to fulfill its responsibilities and help Canadians. Crucially, in our opinion, the motion gives all parties an opportunity to speak to the motion. It enables the House to do what needs to be done to study the proposed legislation without delay.

• (1130)

[English]

I ask members to join us in support of the motion. This is not a time for delay. It is time for action, and Canadians are counting on us. We must not let them down.

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Speaker, we will have an opportunity to get to the bottom of things a little later.

Does the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons think it is right, fair and balanced for parliamentarians to spend barely four hours examining a bill that will involve nearly \$50 billion in spending?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question and commend him for his work.

This motion takes a number of things into account and strikes a balance between the urgent need to act, which is very real, and allowing all parties to speak to the issue. This motion makes both of those things possible.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Speaker, we begrudgingly support this motion.

The reality is that, as of midnight last night, there is no more support for people who are experiencing COVID-19-related financial difficulty. That situation is a direct result of government decisions. Because of the prorogation of this Parliament, the closure of this Parliament, today, people are distraught. It was irresponsible of the government.

[English]

Since midnight last night, Canadians who are suffering, who are trying to put food on the table and keep a roof over their heads, find themselves with no supports at all because of the government's actions. The government prorogued Parliament. The Prime Minister basically shut it down and now, as people have absolutely no supports to turn to, we are forced, with the motion, to try to put back in place supports that were taken away by the government.

My question to my colleague, whom I respect a lot, is very simple. Why did the government not allow for the sitting in August that would have put this legislation in place, and why did the Liberals take millions of Canadians right to the precipice before acting?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Madam Speaker, I respect my colleague a lot, and I thank him for his support and the support of his party. It is the responsible thing to do. I think the motion strikes a balance between the urgency of the situation and the capacity for all parties to be able to debate the motion.

[Translation]

I would remind everyone of what we already know: We are living in a pandemic. The government has struck this balance.

Over the summer, we sat several times. We were here, and members could ask us questions for hours. That was crucial, and we were in favour of it. We have always tried to strike a balance between moving and acting quickly to meet the needs of all Canadians and ensuring that we act democratically by allowing our colleagues from different parties to ask questions. That is why we were so insistent on having a hybrid model, which our Conservative friends opposed for so long for who knows what reason.

• (1135)

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, I have a little trouble believing what I am hearing.

It seems that our friends in government are avoiding the question raised a few minutes ago. It is September 28, the clock is ticking, and we must act before September 30.

This summer, the House was prorogued. The main reason for the prorogation was to put a lid on the WE scandal. Today, we are hearing emotional speeches. Canadians need help, Quebeckers need help, and employers need support. Employers in particular needed the CERB to be incentivize work over the past few months.

I would ask the hon. government House leader to explain why the government waited until two days before the deadline. A real debate definitely takes time. Now we have to move quickly because Parliament was shut down to avoid a scandal.

How does the leader feel about that today? What does he have to say to Canadians?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question, even though it was a bit partisan.

The last thing we should be doing right now as parliamentarians is addressing these issues with such partisan rhetoric. That is one thing I would never do, as my colleague very well knows.

Government Orders

We are here to debate things that are fundamental to Canadians. This motion includes measures for people who do not currently have these supports, like people who are self-employed, whose income has been reduced or who have to stay at home.

For their sake, on behalf of those individuals, if we can set partisanship aside, will the Bloc Québécois support them?

[English]

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we have just had the worst results in Ontario since the beginning of the pandemic, with 700 cases reported on Monday morning. We are looking at closing our constituency office again.

In light of where we were in April, and the fact that we have never had this bad a result in Ontario, could the hon. member comment on how serious this is right now?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Madam Speaker, my colleague asked a very responsible question. He is absolutely right. We are right in the middle of a second wave. It is not a theory, and there is no “maybe” or “if”: We are there. We see the cases increasing pretty much everywhere across the country. In my own province, the numbers are extremely high. I see that in Ontario it is the same.

We have to act responsibly. We have to act as leaders, which we all are. We are all leaders. We are the government, and all members of Parliament were elected. We all share this responsibility. The responsibility is not only on the government's side. It is the responsibility of all members of Parliament.

Are we going to show up and support Canadians or decide instead to be political?

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Madam Speaker, let us not be fooled by what is going on here. The government is putting itself in an angelic position by asking us to just get this done.

In fact, there was an opportunity to get it done. The member for New Westminster—Burnaby spoke about it a month ago. In fact, last Friday it was the Conservatives who proposed a motion to allow weekend sittings of the House, including this past weekend, so that we could work on this on behalf of Canadians. It is a \$57 billion bill. There is no question that Canadians need help.

Would the government just stop playing these games? Its intent is to make the opposition look bad. The government needs to realize that Canadians not only expect us to work together, first and foremost, but also expect the opposition to be able to scrutinize what is, in effect, a \$57 billion bill. Maybe we can make it better by sending it to committee. Maybe we can make it better by having more debates and interactions in the House.

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Instead, the government is rushing this through, painting the opposition as the bad guys on this if we do not agree with it. The government had a chance a month ago, but the Prime Minister prorogued Parliament to save his political skin from the WE scandal.

Why will the government House leader not just admit that now and let Parliament do its job on this bill?

• (1140)

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Madam Speaker, I want to be very clear. The Conservatives do not need me to make them look bad: They can do that on their own. I can assure members of that. The other thing—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. leader of the government is answering a question.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Madam Speaker, as I said before, it is time to act. We can debate and look at this and that, but the important thing is that so many Canadians are waiting for this. So many Canadians need our help. So many Canadians will benefit from what we are doing today.

If it is so important to the Conservatives, are they going to support this motion?

[Translation]

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Salaberry—Suroît, BQ): Madam Speaker, the bill currently before us requires a number of very significant administrative changes.

Can the government House leader explain why Parliament was prorogued for five weeks? Does he not get the impression that time has been stolen from the democratic process, in other words, from the debate needed for this very important bill?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

When this pandemic hit, we moved quickly, always seeking to strike a balance between acting swiftly for the good of all Canadians and allowing members of Parliament to meet and debate with a hybrid system. My colleagues from the Bloc Québécois opposed that. I wonder why they did that, when we wanted to encourage everyone.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Speaker, all Canadians want Parliament to function properly. All Canadians care about what is going on with health care. All Canadians, particularly folks in Quebec and Ontario, are seeing an increase in COVID-19 cases. We need measured, worthwhile, relevant action, but we believe that must happen through healthy democratic debate. What we are seeing now is anything but.

The government is about to introduce legislation that will result in \$57 billion in spending, and it is reducing the time parliamentarians have to speak on the bill to barely four and a half hours.

This is anything but parliamentary democracy. As elected officials, we have a duty to hold the government accountable. We were elected to ask the government what it is doing, how it is doing it and why. With four and a half hours of debate, we cannot hope to understand where the \$57 billion is going. Unfortunately, that is

what the government is forcing us to do, and we condemn it in the strongest terms.

[English]

Why are we here today? We are here because we are concerned about the health situation of Canadians. We are concerned about the survival of Canadian businesses. We are concerned about Canadian workers who are out of jobs because of the pandemic. We are concerned because the Liberal government tabled some ideas, proposals and policies that created a lack of manpower and businesses were forced to close.

In my riding, many restaurants and other businesses closed their doors because they needed workers but instead people preferred not to work and to use what we call in French the *PCU*.

[Translation]

The debate is serious, which is why we must take the necessary time to study the measures the government is proposing.

[English]

All of us on this side want to help Canadians. All of us on this side want to help the business community. All of us on this side are concerned about the health of Canadians and want to help everybody on that issue. All of us on this side want to work hand in hand with the provinces. On this side, we are not going to say what is good for the provinces but rather ask how we can help them. That is the Conservative view, not the Liberal one.

What we have today in front of us is a government that acted at the last minute. The government decided to have just four and a half hours of debate for \$50 billion in taxpayers' money. This is unparliamentary, and we strongly disagree with the approach of the government.

• (1145)

[Translation]

We are here today because the government has acted in an unfortunate way in recent weeks. We should remember that when the pandemic broke out, we had urgent action to take. We worked with the government, but we also took the government to task on a number of occasions. I will come back to that later. We wanted to work together. That is why we agreed to have the hybrid Parliament and why we agreed to have committees. We were doing our job, which is really relevant.

Some senior members in our party, including the hon. member for Carleton, the hon. member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles and the hon. member for St. Albert—Edmonton, just to name a few, asked questions that were very relevant to the WE scandal, but awkward for the government. The government had decided to give \$900 million to friends of the regime without a call for tenders. Once it started really feeling the heat, the Liberal government decided to kill parliamentary democracy by proroguing the session.

Let's keep in mind that, in 2015, these paragons of virtue said that they would never use prorogation and that they would never prevent parliamentarians from expressing themselves, but they did at the first opportunity.

We would not be where we are today had the government allowed parliamentarians to continue doing their job, yet that is exactly what the government is encouraging us to do. For six weeks, we were unable to do our job as parliamentarians, a necessary job.

The government recalled the House with a throne speech last week. The very next day, it introduced Bill C-2, which includes budgetary measures to help Canadians.

We understand that time is running out because of the sunset clauses on government measures. Because of these sunset clauses, the House has to vote on certain issues before October 1, but the government is the one in charge of the calendar. It is the government that decided to shut down committees and close Parliament six weeks ago. It is the government that decided to recall the House last week when it could have easily done so earlier. The government could have easily allowed Parliament to do its work in committee, but no.

These people who really enjoy controlling Parliament and the situation have made it so that we have just a few hours before the sunset clauses take effect. They bear all the responsibility for that.

[English]

It is very funny to hear the government House leader saying that Liberals want to walk together and work together and that there is no time for political games. This is exactly what they are doing. We are not working together. They want to work all by themselves. They say they do not want to play political games. That is exactly what they are doing right now. We have \$50 billion in front of us that we have to debate and they are letting parliamentarians talk about it for only four and a half hours. This is a big joke. This is everything but parliamentary democracy. We need to work together, obviously, but we need the tools to do that and what the government is tabling today does everything but give parliamentarians the right tools to do the work.

Conservatives are here for Canadians. I can assure everyone that we will stand by our guns in this situation because we need to work correctly, and that is exactly what we intend to do.

[Translation]

Last week the government introduced Bill C-2. We saw millions of dollars' worth of spending on the horizon. After question period last Thursday, the government House leader told us that Monday and Tuesday, so today and tomorrow, would be dedicated to Bill C-2, which was fine.

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Even then we realized that we might not have enough time to really get to the bottom of things. Acting in good faith and to avoid partisan games, we proposed something that we thought was entirely fair and appropriate and that, above all, would mean that we could get the work done. We proposed meeting on Sunday in committee of the whole for over six hours to allow four ministers to appear before us and answer questions from the opposition and the government, in order to get to the bottom of the matter in relation to Bill C-2. That is our job as parliamentarians.

● (1150)

[English]

That is the way Conservatives are working. We have to hold the government to account. We are here to ask questions and the ministers are here to answer questions.

[Translation]

Being in cabinet is a privilege. If the gods and my leader are willing, maybe one day I myself will be in cabinet. Who knows? At any rate, being a minister is certainly something.

The ministers we hoped would answer questions before this committee were serious ministers, senior ministers who are responsible for billions of dollars. We wanted to hear from the Minister of Finance. We wanted to hear from the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, as well as the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development and the Minister of Labour. These four ministers played a central part in the discussions surrounding Bill C-2, which represents more than \$50 billion in spending. They could have answered the committee's questions. However, our proposal was declined. We were fine with that, because it is part of the democratic process.

A few hours later, however, we found out that the government and the NDP had hammered out an agreement on Bill C-2. That agreement was negotiated in a proper democratic fashion. We are not going to raise a fuss over it.

We will see how the debates go. What points will people raise about the bill that is about to be introduced? What are members going to be able to say in a mere four and a half hours about \$57 billion in proposed spending?

*Government Orders**[English]*

This is the key element of this debate today. The government is asking taxpayers to spend \$57 billion and we, the representatives of Canadians, will only have four and a half hours of discussion and debate. That is absolutely not enough, and there is no partisanship in that. Those are the facts. Technically speaking, we need to go deeply into this bill. We need to know exactly what the intention of the government is. We have a job to do, but the government, which killed the parliamentary process this summer and dodged the responsibility it had to work with other parties, decided to kill our responsibility to go deeply into the bill.

When the Liberals are attacking us on that, they are not attacking us; they are attacking Canadians. Canadians deserve answers. Canadians have elected us to ask tough questions. I know them. I know they are ready to answer that. Let us do our jobs. The government is not doing that right now.

[Translation]

It might come as a surprise to some of us that the government would treat parliamentary procedure so grievously.

I have had the privilege of representing the people of Louis-Saint-Laurent for almost five years now. I cannot thank them enough for electing me twice. This is not the first time in the past five years that this government's approach to the rights, privileges and responsibilities of all parliamentarians, including those in opposition, has been a little too authoritarian.

Members will recall the infamous Motion No. 6 tabled in May 2016. It gave the government extraordinary powers to ram through bills that should have been given more serious attention.

Sadly, we all remember how that led to a deeply unfortunate and disgraceful incident: the Prime Minister left his seat, grabbed an opposition member—our party whip—by the arm and marched him across the chamber like a crook.

[English]

This was called “elbowgate”. The Prime Minister crossed the floor, grabbing a political adversary and using it just like that. That was everything but good. That was a shame. I have never seen an act so disgraceful, and it was coming from the top, the Prime Minister. Why? Because we were asking to have a friendly debate, and Motion No. 6 was anything but that. The Prime Minister was not happy with our position and he did something very wrong. Obviously, he excused himself the day after. He did what he had to do.

● (1155)

[Translation]

We were then able to proceed. However, the government's main intention with Motion No. 6 was to hinder the work of parliamentarians, especially opposition members.

A year later in May 2017, the government did exactly the same thing. It once again proposed measures aimed at limiting parliamentary work, especially that of the opposition and particularly in committee. Thanks to a vigilant opposition and our tireless work at committee trying to block this measure, the government realized that it made no sense.

A number of bills were introduced in May 2019. The government wanted them to pass after just minutes, never mind hours, of debate. It was unacceptable.

Hon. members will also recall that in the winter of 2019, when another Liberal scandal, the SNC-Lavalin one, had just erupted, the government decided to put an end to the parliamentary committee's work. That was also unacceptable.

This Liberal government's first Parliament ended with 63 time allocation motions. Yes, the current government imposed 63 gag orders. That was also unacceptable.

[English]

As I said earlier, during the campaign, the Liberals said that they would be very frank and very honest with all parliamentarians, that they would make Parliament work, that they would not prorogue the House. However, that is what they did. They also adopted 63 time allocation motions. This is anything but parliamentary freedom and this is everything but good parliamentary attitude.

[Translation]

We ended up with this new Parliament following the election. When the COVID-19 crisis began, all members from all parties worked in good faith for the good of Canadians. Obviously we had to give the government certain powers, as the situation was unforeseen. Nevertheless, the Liberals gave themselves powers that were excessive, to say the least.

Let's not forget that the first version of Bill C-13 would have allowed the government to take measures and write cheques at will until the end of 2021. They were very ambitious, not to mention greedy. That was not what needed to be done. Our vigilance, and that of the other parties, ensured that the government backed down.

That was a good indication that the government was very ambitious. When it came time to say that this was an extraordinary situation and that Parliament could not sit in its usual fashion, the government decided to give itself all sorts of powers until December 2021.

[English]

How could we accept the fact that the government was ready to have full power for more than a year and a half? That is not parliamentary democracy. Canada deserves better. We understand and recognize that we to address some situations if some emergency arises, but we shall respect the responsibility of parliamentarians. Again, this morning the government is so happy to shut down the parliamentary system and this is unacceptable to us.

[Translation]

We are very sad to see that the government wants to muzzle parliamentarians once again. The Conservatives are well aware that we need proper measures for Canadians and that these measures have to correspond to the needs of Canadian families, that we must take into account Canadian businesses that are facing tough challenges, that we must take into account Canadian workers who lost their jobs, and that we must take into account the men and women with children who are worried.

Indeed, we have measures to bring in. Indeed, we must work together. Indeed, we must put partisanship aside in order to act for the good of Canadians. However, we have a job to do, and when the government is getting ready to spend \$57 billion, we think parliamentarians should do their job. Four and a half hours does not leave enough time for us to do our job properly.

Therefore, I move the following amendment:

That the motion be amended:

(a) in paragraph (b), by replacing the words “not be deferred”, with the words “be deferred until the expiry of time provided for Oral Questions at the next sitting day which is not a Friday”; and

(b) by replacing paragraphs (c) to (e) with the following:

“(c) if the bill is adopted at second reading, it shall be referred to a committee of the whole and the House shall, when the orders of the day are next called after the bill has been read the second time, resolve itself into a committee of the whole on the said bill, provided that:

(i) the committee be subject to the provisions relating to virtual sittings of the House,

(ii) the Speaker may preside,

(iii) the Chair may preside from the Speaker’s chair,

(iv) the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, and the Minister of Labour be invited to appear,

(v) each minister shall be questioned for 95 minutes, provided that:

● (1200)

[English]

(A) the chair shall call members from all recognized parties and one member who does not belong to a recognized party in a fashion consistent with the proportions observed during Oral Questions, following the rotation used for question by the former Special Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic;

(B) no member shall be recognized for more than five minutes at a time which may be used for posing questions;

(C) members may be permitted to split their time with one or more members by so indicating to the chair, and

(D) questions shall be answered by the minister or another minister acting on her or his behalf,

[Translation]

(vi) notices of amendments to the bill to be considered in committee of the whole may be deposited with the Clerk of the House at any time following the adoption of this order until the conclusion of the second hour of debate in committee of the whole,

(vii) at the conclusion of time provided for questioning ministers, or when no member rises to speak, whichever is earlier, the Chair shall put forthwith and successively every question necessary to dispose of the committee stage of the bill, including each amendment deposited with the Clerk of the House pursuant to subparagraph (vi);

(d) once the bill has been reported from the committee of the whole, the Speaker shall put forthwith and successively every question necessary to dispose of the

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report and third reading stages of the bill, provided that no recorded division shall be deferred; and

(e) the Standing Orders relating to the ordinary hour of daily adjournment shall be suspended while the bill is being considered under the provisions of this order”.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):
The amendment is in order.

The Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen’s Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened to the opposition House leader and a major aspect is missing from his speech. In order for the House to proceed in a fashion where there is a great deal of constructive debate, we need the co-operation of opposition parties.

It does not take very much to filibuster a bill, let alone in any important message that comes out of the House of Commons. We all know that. If an opposition party wants to prevent something from taking place or cause frustration, it only takes a few members to do that. The Conservatives have demonstrated over the last five years that their priority is to make the House look dysfunctional. During the coronavirus pandemic, we are looking for a higher sense of co-operation from the Conservatives and opposition parties. We would like that higher sense of co-operation.

If it were up to the opposition House leader and he could wave his wand, when would he want this measure to pass? How many hours of debate would the member want in order to allow it to pass? Would he strive to achieve that within the next 24 hours?

● (1205)

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Madam Speaker, I would not say “arrogant” or “funny”, but I would try to find a word between the two, because what we are seeing now from the government is a total lack of responsibility. We also see the government’s intention to kill the job we have to do here.

Why did I use the word “kill”? It is because that is exactly what the government did six weeks ago. It decided to kill parliamentary procedure by proroguing. Had it not done that, we could have worked hand in hand this summer to reach an agreement. We could have worked correctly as parliamentarians.

This was shown to us last week. The government decided to have a throne speech at the end of the month of September, which is its choice, even though it knew all this reassurance would be coming at the end of September. It calls the shots.

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Seeing that, what did we do as parliamentarians? We acted responsibly. On Friday morning my colleagues and I tabled a motion offering the government the opportunity to go deep into Bill C-2. We called for a committee of the whole on Sunday for six full hours, with four senior cabinet ministers answering questions. That is what parliamentarians are all about. That is what we asked for, and the Liberals refused.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to begin by congratulating my colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent on his appointment as House leader. I also look forward to hearing from his party's new Quebec lieutenant, the member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, who is a very outspoken individual.

I would like to ask my colleague what he thinks was the reason for the prorogation. We know that, during a pandemic, people want swift and pragmatic action. The government decided to put the House on hold for six weeks. We could have passed this bill much sooner and we could have focused on things that are a little more important, such as a real recovery plan. The Speech from the Throne was a pretentious petition that many thought was lacklustre. We lost six weeks. That is a lot of time.

I would like the House leader of the official opposition to tell me what he thinks was the reason for the prorogation.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Jonquière for his kind words. I really appreciate it. We are going to continue to work for the good of Quebecers and Canadians.

The reason the government decided to kill off Parliament two months ago is perfectly simple: it was stuck in a quagmire of its own making with WE Charity, and it desperately needed a way out.

Let's not forget that at the very moment when the government or the Prime Minister announced the prorogation of the House, we, the Conservatives, had just received 5,000 pages of documents about the WE Charity scandal, 1,000 pages of which had been redacted. It is easy to see why the government wanted to keep parliamentarians from doing their job. It is precisely because we were doing our job, the job we were elected to do, namely asking questions and holding the government accountable.

The Right Hon. Prime Minister of Canada once made a shockingly dishonourable remark that may have revealed his true mindset. He said he had a level of admiration for China's dictatorship.

Unfortunately for him, we are not a dictatorship like China. We are the Parliament of Canada, and all Canadians need to work together for the good of the entire country.

• (1210)

[English]

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague the opposition House leader talked about the government's prorogation of Parliament, something we are also deeply concerned about, and that the Liberals waited until today, the day after the end of CERB and the end of supports for workers and for businesses that closed their doors for public health. These people are vulnerable right now. Many of them are suffering from

mental health challenges because they are worried about how they are going to pay their bills. That is something we agree on.

I am wondering where the Conservatives sit regarding paid sick days. The member talked about the NDP working with the Liberals to move this forward because of the desperation that is going on right now. We know many workers are going to the workplace while sick. In fact, low-income workers are more likely to take unpaid leave than are their high-income counterparts. Only 14% of workers earning less than \$16,000 took paid leave, compared with 70% of those earning more than \$96,000 a year; this is from the Huffington Post. Workers are going to work sick. They are putting their colleagues at risk and they are putting businesses at risk. These businesses could be brought to their knees if people get sick and the virus spreads.

Do my colleague and the Conservatives support increasing workers' sick days to 10 working days so that people can stay home when they are showing symptoms of the virus? This is not just important for workers. It is also important for the economy. I wonder if the Conservatives and my colleague support our efforts in pushing for this and making sure this happens.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from the NDP for his important and passionate question. I do recognize his passion for those issues. That is what democracy is all about; we have to share our positions.

This is why we totally disagree with what the government is doing right now. The government wants to kill that kind of debate. The government does not want to see us asking tough questions or tabling where we are so that we are sure that our position is well known.

This is why we had the proposition to have a committee of the whole. We were ready to sit here in the House of Commons as a committee of the whole on Sunday just to be sure that we were doing our job. The government did not agree with our proposition, but, more than that, it decided to have only four and a half hours of debate. The question raised by my colleague is quite important. This is why we need to debate this correctly in the House, not only for four and a half hours.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to go back to the beginning of this crisis when all of these pieces of legislation were being proposed by the government. I am going to give credit where credit is due, not just to the Conservative side but to all sides of this House, for the work that was done to make those bills better and to recognize that in many cases they were woefully inadequate.

To use a couple of examples, the wage subsidy initially proposed a 10% wage subsidy, but it was the opposition, all of us, that spoke to the government because we were hearing from our constituents that it was woefully inadequate. There were changes made to the CERB, changes made to the CEBA and changes made to rent relief because all parliamentarians worked with this team Canada approach. We went to the government and said, “These are the changes that need to be made”.

When these pieces of legislation were first introduced, a lot of the deficiencies in them were not known until after the bill had been rammed through Parliament. What is the value of having committees? What is the value of having parliamentarians deal with these pieces of legislation to improve them for Canadians and for the businesses that employ people?

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Madam Speaker, my colleague from Ontario has detailed quite clearly why we need to have good parliamentary debate. This is exactly why we are asking the government to let us do our job.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Madam Speaker, naturally, I rise to speak to Bill C-2, an act relating to economic recovery in response to COVID-19.

Sometimes the saying “better late than never” applies, but not here since it is too late for the bill before us. In fact, the three economic support benefits in this bill, which affect thousands of workers and were announced by the government on August 20, are still not in place, while the CERB ended yesterday. Why is that?

The reason is that this government, which was involved in another major scandal, the WE Charity scandal, deliberately chose to prorogue the House for petty political considerations. If that is not partisanship, I do not know what is. It has left thousands of people in the lurch, in a state of distress and uncertainty. It is scandalous.

Long before now, long before the crisis started, we knew that the EI social safety net was torn and needed a complete overhaul so that it could fulfill its purpose. The eligibility criteria, coverage, duration, benefit amount and funding arrangements all needed to be reviewed.

Without going into details on the regular EI program, I want to remind all members that only about 40% of workers are currently covered. Among women, youth and seasonal workers, that figure is even lower. Self-employed, part-time and contract workers are not eligible at all. That is why action is needed, and we knew that long ago.

At the height of the crisis, nearly nine million workers became unemployed. It became glaringly obvious that our EI regime was unable to do what it was designed to do and insure and protect workers in the event of unemployment. That is why the government implemented the CERB.

On April 11, the current President of the Treasury Board said the government knew that the EI safety net had a few too many holes in it and did not provide sufficient coverage. However, the government did not move forward with its reform quickly enough, even though in 2016, during the previous Parliament, the Liberal govern-

ment had promised to conduct a broad review of the EI system and modernize our income support system for unemployed workers, since this social safety net was failing too many of them.

It is even more troubling, and indeed downright outrageous, to see in the throne speech just how quick the Prime Minister was to interfere more and more in areas of provincial jurisdiction while being so agonizingly slow, so lax, in taking care of the federal government's own social programs for workers and seniors. We therefore join the consensus among politicians in Quebec and call on the federal government to mind its own business and look after its own affairs.

As we know, strong measures to help workers and support employment must be the cornerstones of the economic recovery. In fact, it was the Bloc Québécois that proposed that the Canada emergency response benefit and the Canada emergency student benefit include employment incentives. Our hope was that these benefits would support two objectives, namely to provide support while creating jobs. Despite the government's firm commitment to the House on April 29 to attain both objectives, nothing has been done.

● (1215)

Furthermore, the government knew that many workers who had lost their jobs because of the crisis would not qualify for EI when the CERB ended. For that reason, the government decided to relax the EI rules and make the program more accessible.

We welcome these adjustments. However, there is more work to be done, because even with less stringent rules, not all workers in need qualify. Today, more than 900,000 workers are wondering whether they will qualify for EI and, if not, whether they will be eligible for the measures we will be voting on.

Today, self-employed workers, workers in non-standard jobs and seasonal workers need help more than ever before.

This state of uncertainty—

● (1220)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Order. Could the hon. member repeat her last sentence? I think the mic cut off. I am sorry, I moved.

Ms. Louise Chabot: No problem, Madam Speaker. At worst, I will repeat myself.

Today, self-employed workers, workers in non-standard jobs and seasonal workers need help now more than ever before.

Leaving our constituents in this state of uncertainty is unacceptable, and we must do everything we can to prevent these workers from slipping into poverty.

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We could have passed the new measures sooner, but the government decided to prorogue Parliament, thereby delaying passage of the necessary measures in Bill C-2. Once again, we condemn this government tactic.

Let's not forget that in June, the Trudeau government was making headlines with its inept mishandling—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Order. I would remind the hon. member that the use of members' names is not permitted.

Ms. Louise Chabot: Madam Speaker, I will try not to do it again.

The Liberal government made headlines for mishandling the Canada student service grant program by asking WE Charity to manage it. The government did everything it could to keep this quiet, and it put protecting its image ahead of helping workers and managing the crisis.

Why did the government prorogue Parliament for five weeks when it could have taken action in July? We sat during the summer, and the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities could easily have been called upon, because it was sitting to discuss these matters. The government could have prorogued Parliament for just 24 hours.

We believe that the prorogation of Parliament was just another Liberal tactic to draw a red herring across the trail. It is another example of the government's ineptitude. The Liberals were more concerned about protecting their image than giving priority to workers in need. What is more, this approach is a blatant example of this government's lack of respect for the work of Parliament.

We could have taken the time to study the bill properly and hear from witnesses in order to fix any problems, but now we are being forced to adopt it right away. That is unacceptable.

We are in favour of using a more flexible EI program to transition away from CERB. That is what we asked for. We are also happy with the three economic benefits in the bill we are debating even though we condemn the government's way of doing things.

However, we must remind the House and the government that this new flexibility and Bill C-2 are only the first step toward true employment insurance reform.

I would also like to point out that these new measures will be in effect for just one year. What happens 12 months from now? As we said, employment insurance needs real reform and has for quite some time. I think this is the time to decide what the future looks like.

A number of unions and groups advocating for the unemployed have already expressed their enthusiasm for the measures that are going to be adopted. However, all these groups have also insisted that the new measures lay the groundwork for a future overhaul. We stand with Quebec workers in calling for these changes.

I would also point out that the adjustments made and the measures introduced today do not solve all the problems with EI; far from it. Let me remind hon. members that I myself presented a mo-

tion to the House that was unanimously adopted, to increase the special EI sickness benefits from the current 15 weeks to 50 weeks. The situation is critical for these individuals, too. We do not have a minute to waste. Why did the government not use this as an opportunity to address the matter of sickness benefits and extend them immediately?

In closing, I would like to reiterate that we want this bill to pass. We owe it to Quebec's workers and to everyone whose CERB ended yesterday. We cannot leave anyone in the uncertainty and anguish they are feeling today.

Our hope today is that this government will finally decide to take a serious look at the EI reforms that are needed and not let any future scandals distract it from this crucial objective.

I ask today, is the government prepared to go ahead with a long-term reform of the EI system?

• (1225)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, indeed, the minister responsible has done an incredible job in terms of the amount of effort. I suspect if we were still giving out those awards, I would be nominating her for the hardest-working member of Parliament, especially over the last eight months. Virtually day in and day out, seven days a week, there has been a tremendous amount of consultation and working with Canadians.

The member made reference to the bill and that it is there to help and continue to provide the support that is absolutely essential to Canadians, which is why it is so very important that we see the legislation passed.

However, the member had concerns in regard to the manipulation of Parliament. I would ask her to provide some comment and indicate the last time the Prime Minister and the ministers made themselves available right here on the floor of the House of Commons during the months of July and August, when literally hundreds of questions were asked by opposition members and answered. I can't recall that happening in the last 30 years.

Can the member opposite tell me the last time that happened in the House of Commons and questions were put forward?

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Chabot: Madam Speaker, the government is not answering questions from the opposition or from parliamentarians. We need to get back to the bill before us today.

Earlier, I heard the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons say that we need to act now. He said that we need to leave politics aside and work together to help all Canadians. He said that Canadians need our help.

How disappointing. We had plenty of time to work on this between June and August, when we had a set schedule and already knew that the Canada emergency wage benefit would be coming to an end. They prorogued the House on August 18 and announced the three new measures on August 20. That seemed shift to me.

If the government is wondering when we were last consulted, the answer is “never”.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member raised some very important points in her remarks, such as the right of parliamentarians to do their jobs. She did a fine job illustrating the fact that the government was caught red-handed in the WE Charity scandal, so it decided to shut down Parliament. Two days later, it presented some financial measures that are included in the bill. For six weeks, we were unable to do our jobs as parliamentarians.

Why does the member think that the government decided to muzzle opposition members?

• (1230)

Ms. Louise Chabot: Madam Speaker, we did not get time to discuss it. We could also use some forward planning. It is not always possible to manage things as if it is an emergency.

In my speech, I wanted to show that even before the CERB was introduced, we knew that the main social safety net, the EI program, would not meet needs in the event of a crisis. The program has been slashed repeatedly by government after government over the past 25 years. If we had taken the time to have this conversation, we would not be in the situation we are in today, neither when the CERB was active nor today.

[English]

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, here we are. The benefits of the CERB ran out last night at midnight, and we are rushing through legislation right now to get people help. I agree with my colleague that the government prorogued Parliament at a time when people needed help the most.

Right now, we are seeing people fall through the cracks, such as those who have closed their businesses and workers who do not have a job to go back to. They need help. In my riding, many people did not qualify for the first fish harvester benefit and grant program that the government rolled out. We have a crisis with our wild salmon right now. Fishers are not on the water fishing when they should be, and this is impacting them right now. It is so important that we get support for workers.

Does my colleague support the idea that benefits should not be cut? The government proposed cutting CERB payments from \$2,000 to \$1,600. Does my colleague agree that it should stay at \$2,000? Even with that, it will be difficult for many families to survive this pandemic and get through it, especially with the second wave hitting our country particularly in Quebec right now.

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I wonder if my colleague supports standing up for workers and the people who need the support, such as business owners and those collecting the CERB as we walk toward this new EI. I am very grateful to hear the member speak about the need to reform EI. Clearly, that is evident in this crisis.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Chabot: Madam Speaker, I hope this answer is clear: The Bloc Québécois supports EI reform.

Currently, 3.5 million workers are still unemployed. The more flexible employment insurance system will therefore pay at least \$500 to those who qualify for EI.

The new Canada recovery benefit targets those in certain age groups or working in seasonal industries or other economic sectors such as accommodation and tourism. These folks have nothing in front of them. They do not qualify for EI. They should have received the new benefit we are considering, not the day after tomorrow, but yesterday.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Madam Speaker, my question is for my colleague from Thérèse-De Blainville.

For years, the Bloc Québécois has been calling for EI reform to help workers who experience the spring gap, who are not eligible for EI, who are self-employed or who do not have access to sickness benefits.

Since the COVID-19 crisis, the government has woken up and realized that the EI system is not working. There is a problem with it. We are unable to help all those who are losing their jobs. We are seeing that all of the cuts that have been made over the years by Liberal and Conservative governments were not a good idea.

The government rushed to create the CERB during the crisis. That caused problems because it disincentivized work. Rather than holding a meaningful debate, the government created the CERB. Then the WE Charity scandal broke out, and the government decided to shut down Parliament.

Is that something that frustrates my colleague?

If the government had dealt with it from the beginning, perhaps the EI problem would not be as serious as it is today and we would be in a better position. Perhaps the government would not have created programs that disincentivize work, or any other hastily designed programs that ultimately fail to solve the problem.

• (1235)

Ms. Louise Chabot: Madam Speaker, I thank my esteemed colleague for his question.

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It does not make me sad. It makes me mad. Civil society groups in Quebec and across Canada have been demanding change for 15 years. There have been no significant changes to EI in 15 years.

The purpose of EI is to protect workers who lose their jobs, to protect the unemployed. That is all it is supposed to do. The system has not been changed in 15 years. Actually, it has been changed for the worse, whittled away little by little. It is outrageous.

That is why I am seizing this opportunity. We have time to really undertake a complete overhaul of the EI system. We do not want to find ourselves in another economic crisis or health crisis, wondering if the program is doing what it is supposed to be doing.

I think there have been a lot of missed opportunities, even though this has been pointed out plenty of times.

[English]

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, what an honour it has been to have the opportunity to represent the people of Elmwood—Transcona throughout the course of a very challenging time in our history.

I was elected not quite a year ago with the general mandate to defend the interests of working people here in Ottawa and to try to make Parliament work for people. That has been foremost in my mind and in the work of the NDP throughout the course of this pandemic, which could not have been foreseen at the time of the last election. Nevertheless it is our responsibility as public office holders to deal with it, in the best way we possibly can.

Many things have been called into question about the way we did things before the pandemic. There are many urgent questions about how we deal with the particularities of the pandemic and the challenges it presents.

We have heard a lot from other opposition parties today about the challenge to parliamentary process. Is that the main thing that the people we represent are concerned about? It is certainly something that is important. It matters how things work here. It matters that we are able to hold the government to account, but is it the main thing that ought to preoccupy us on a day when the income support program that has been sustaining Canadian households throughout this pandemic expired yesterday at midnight? I think not.

I think it is incumbent upon us to be a little flexible in our understanding of parliamentary process at this time. We can continue to talk about the role that the government played in creating this situation, where Parliament has not had more time. Nevertheless, we find ourselves here and have to respond to that situation. I hope Canadians will have been paying attention to the way that the government manufactured this sense of urgency and judge its members appropriately at election time.

We can talk about the economic crisis. It was severe. There is a lot that Parliament and the government need to do to avoid the economic threats that the pandemic presents. Of course, the CERB has been a very important part of heading off those threats to the economy. It has helped the economy continue as best it can in very difficult circumstances by ensuring that people have money to pay their landlords to stay housed, by ensuring that people have some money to put food on the table, and by ensuring that people have some

money to spend in their local economy to help businesses that are struggling.

Those are all things that are very important, but first and foremost what we are called to respond to is the very real story of human tragedy that the pandemic has given rise to. We know that what people are struggling with, and what is top of mind for them, is a sense of fear because they have lost their jobs. In some cases people have gone back to work, which is great.

For other people, their entire industry has been called into question, with the future of their industry being on the ropes. Not only are they not back to work, but they are not sure if there will ever be work to go back to, in the industry that they worked in before, in the way that they knew it prior to the pandemic.

We know people have been overtaken with grief at the loss of loved ones, particularly in personal care homes. They were not able to go to visit someone at the height of the first wave. We are concerned as we enter into a second wave that families will find themselves in that position again, or that families will be limited to one visitor or none at all for a relative in a hospital. It may not be that someone is sick with COVID-19, but because they have another issue that has landed them in the hospital, concerned family members are challenged by not being able to see them.

We can think of people living in indigenous communities who have been abused for far too long. They worry about systemic problems that have led to overcrowded housing and a lack of clean drinking water, and what it will mean for their communities, families and loved ones if the virus enters their community. There have been travel bans put in place. It has made life hard for people.

These are the things that people are really worried about and they have been foremost in the minds of the NDP members and our work.

● (1240)

What can Parliament and government do to support Canadians as they deal with all of those consequences of the pandemic, on top of the challenges that they already had in their lives? As they try to manage that stress and they try to show compassion and care for the people around them, what can we do to ensure that we do not pile additional unneeded stress, particularly financial stress, on top of all those many concerns?

That is what the Canada emergency response benefit was meant to do. It was something that we had to fight for, initially. I remember sitting here, in this very place, prior to the initial lockdown, listening to the NDP leader question the Prime Minister about what they were going to do to support families as we headed toward lockdown. I remember, very distinctly, the Prime Minister talking about tinkering with the employment insurance system, a system that has long been broken and not serving Canadians well who have paid into that insurance program to support them when they are out of work. We knew that was not going to be enough. We knew that playing at the edges of that broken employment insurance system was not going to support Canadians through it.

New Democrats pushed for a basic income for all Canadians during this time that would be taxed back from those who did not need it at the end of the fiscal year, as a way to get help out as quickly as possible to as many Canadians as possible. We negotiated with a government that was determined to have an exclusionary approach to income, to decide who was deserving and who was not deserving. That is how the CERB was born.

Then, in the subsequent months, we spent a lot of work championing the cause of many different groups of Canadians who were left out by that exclusionary approach. I am thinking especially of persons living with disabilities, because we did, through multiple rounds of negotiations, finally convince the government to make some income support available for persons living with disabilities. It was not the kind of support we wanted to see. It was to be a one-time payment. It is shameful that that money has not yet been delivered. It was meant to be an emergency support payment, and people living with disabilities in Canada are still waiting.

Seniors were left out. It could be that the income of some seniors who have the good fortune of having a defined benefit plan did not change, but their circumstances changed. The support networks that they knew, the friends and family who would come and help them to do laundry and get groceries, were now being asked not to go to their parents' place or their grandparents' place. That meant that in order for seniors to replace the work that was done in that support network, money was required for laundry services, for grocery delivery, for whatever it may be.

We fought hard to try to get support for seniors as well. That payment was made, but it was only a one-time payment. We know that this pandemic is going to last a long time. That is why we need better solutions that build towards a better Canada that supports its seniors and that supports its people living with disabilities.

We fought for students who were left completely out of the CERB, notwithstanding the fact that we all knew that their summer employment prospects were not going to be the same as they had been before and that finding a job that could support them in paying their tuition in the fall was going to be impossible. Also, not every student is a kid living in their parents' basement. That is the impression we got from the government, while negotiating for the student benefit. That is simply not true. A lot of students are supporting themselves and supporting families as they go to school. They have to pay rent and put food on the table, and they were not able to get employment.

Government Orders

The government finally, after New Democrats pushing for students to be on the CERB, set up an entirely separate benefit that paid less. One of the reasons the government said it was justified in paying students less and having a whole separate administration, bureaucracy and program for students was because they were going to have an excellent summer work program that was going to top up students' benefits. That came to be known as the WE Charity scandal. That money has not flowed to students in any way, shape or form. That employment was never created. In fact, we found out that that money really was a targeted benefit for certain wealthy and well-connected friends of the Liberal Party, including their own family members, to the great shame of the government.

Part of the reason why we are in the urgent scenario that we are in is because they did such a terrible job of that. It was so obscene that the Prime Minister felt he had to prorogue Parliament just to escape scrutiny from it. That meant that Parliament did not have the time it ought to have had, and could have had, if Parliament had not been prorogued.

• (1245)

The economic challenges of the pandemic are not going away. They are not going to go away until we get back to normal, and that is going to take a significant amount of time. As I said earlier, the CERB expired yesterday at midnight, so we now find ourselves in a position where a significant portion of the over four million people who were still on CERB now do not have anything in place. We heard some discussion of this earlier in the House, and I think everybody is quite right to feel a great sense of frustration at the government that it came to this point. The NDP had negotiated a series of summer sittings, once every two weeks, partly to check in and make sure that the government was not misappropriating funds or spending them on its friends in inappropriate ways. It is a good thing we had those summer sittings, because we learned a lot about what the government was doing behind closed doors.

However, we did not get to have the last one, during which we could have done one of two things.

First, we could have considered legislation for the government's new program. We know that they knew the details, because they announced all of the details of the program the day after the Prime Minister prorogued Parliament. The idea that this was not ready to go or that we could not have had that discussion in August is simply false. We know they were ready to have that conversation, but they decided not to for reasons that had to do with their own political interests and nothing to do with the public interest. I submit that in that moment the government lost sight of the real stories of human tragedy that the pandemic has engendered and the importance of the role of government in supporting Canadians through this time. Had that been foremost in their minds, they would not have prorogued Parliament. They would have brought this legislation to us then.

Government Orders

Second, the NDP called for Parliament to resume earlier, for an earlier Speech from the Throne. Anybody familiar with Liberal election platforms for the last 30 years could have mocked up that Speech from the Throne on the back of a napkin in about half an hour. There was nothing special in that Speech from the Throne; there was nothing new. There was nothing even particularly eloquent about it. There was no good reason to wait on this important work for that Speech from the Throne, so we could have gotten that done. They could have done that a lot sooner. It was a canned speech as far as I am concerned. We could have been dealing with this and subjected it to more and appropriate scrutiny.

However, there is no doubt that there is an urgent need for this help, because we find ourselves where we find ourselves. We can play the blame game, but I think Canadians want us to move beyond that. Assigning political blame should not be a recipe for paralysis in a crisis.

We do need to move forward. We do need to have something to replace the CERB. Finally, after weeks of no communication, the Liberals got serious about talking to opposition parties, and we were able to push them to stop the cut that they announced in August to the CERB benefit, from \$2,000 a month to \$1,600 a month, and get them to maintain that benefit level for Canadians who needed it. That was a real, productive outcome of those negotiations, even if they happened late.

Likewise, we were able to secure improvements to the government's sick leave plan, a sick leave plan that, incidentally, the government was opposed to for a long time. The NDP had to make it a real priority in our negotiations with the government to get a commitment to paid sick days for Canadians in the context of the pandemic. Then it took months for the Liberals to announce a plan, and when they finally announced it, they prorogued Parliament. There has been delay after delay after delay, but I think we have shown that when the government is finally ready to work, we are there ready to get to work right away. We are ready to make improvements to these measures on behalf of Canadians.

I will say once again that when it comes to laying blame for the situation that we find ourselves in, although this is not a recipe for us to not ensure there is something in place for Canadians, in a democracy the ultimate mechanism for accountability is an election. Even though we are going to do our job and make sure there is a program for Canadians in their time of need, I do hope that Canadians remember at election time, whether it is in a month from now, a year from now or three years from now, that the Liberal government was prepared to play political games with their futures and, if nothing else, even if this legislation passes expeditiously, to rob them of the time to plan for what the replacement would look like.

• (1250)

We know in this minority Parliament that it takes negotiation among the parties to get something passed. Canadians know that. They are not fools. Notwithstanding whatever the government announced in August, Canadians did not know what they could rely on until this moment, until there had been negotiations, and they will not know until the legislation is passed. That makes it very hard for them to plan for their futures.

That has been a theme of the government: It has been ragging the puck and making it hard for Canadians to plan month to month. We saw it with a couple of eleventh-hour extensions of the CERB. The government wasted that time instead of using it to come up with something that could have either replaced the CERB or extended the CERB for a longer period. We saw month-to-month extensions and then an extension over the summer, but that time was not properly used to develop an alternative that Canadians could rely on.

Despite the fact that we are prepared to support these measures as a matter of urgency, the paid sick leave provisions are not what Canadians deserve. Canadians, like workers in many other jurisdictions internationally, should have the right to 10 paid sick days from their employer on a permanent basis, regardless of what the illness is. In the bill the Liberals presented before, Bill C-2, we saw a very restrictive approach to these sick days and know they are only temporary. When the new bill is tabled, I am hoping and expecting very much to see expanded eligibility that makes it easier for Canadians to avail themselves of this sick leave, which is not quite COVID-specific. I hope it is just a stepping stone to get to the point where Canadians have permanent sick leave.

It is also relevant to the pandemic. What we want to do is take as many barriers off the table for Canadians that would cause them to question whether they are eligible for this benefit or not, because we saw this in the story of CERB and the attestation, as well as with the concern over the fraud provisions in Bill C-17. Canadians are honest, by and large, and they are deeply concerned about applying for benefits that they are unsure they qualify for. What was really important when it came to sick leave was to ensure that Canadians had the maximum level of comfort to be able to avail themselves of those provisions. Let us remember why these sick days are such an important tool for the pandemic. It is so that when Canadians wake up and are feeling sick, whether they are sneezing, coughing, have a headache or feel sick to their stomach, they can make the call to not go into work to protect their colleagues and their communities from the spread of a virus that we know is spreading rapidly. This is what we are asking people to do to prevent the spread of the virus, and they need the tools to be able to do that. Paid sick leave is an important tool.

We have pushed to try to make this as easy to access as possible in the context of a government that does not want to see 10 permanent sick days allocated to Canadians as a matter of right. That is unfortunate, but it is a battle we will continue to fight, notwithstanding supporting this legislation today. What we are doing today is getting something in place that can serve Canadians now. It is not building back better. It is not what we would like to see when it comes to having immediate solutions that build toward a brighter future. It is a band-aid solution, but one that is badly needed in the circumstances.

I hope one day Canadians will have a government that is willing to respond to a crisis in a way that sets us up to have a better future beyond the crisis, rather than just limping through. That is something Canadians can count on the NDP to continue fighting for here in this chamber.

• (1255)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, there has been a lot of discussion today about whether proroguing the House was necessary and why that happened, but when we think about what has taken place over the last six or seven months, we know billions and billions of dollars have been spent to assist Canadians. Quite often there was very little debate before those funds were approved by all parties of the House. It happened the majority of times when those bills came forward.

The thought that perhaps we needed to come back to the House to ask if the government was going in the right direction and whether we should continue down this path was extremely important. What we saw was one of the shortest prorogations in modern history. Only two sitting days were actually lost as a result of it.

I find the comments from my NDP colleague very interesting because I thought the New Democrats were on board with the Speech from the Throne and were going to vote in favour of it. Now I hear him talking about horrible it is, that it was not even eloquent and that it did not have anything good in it. Is he going against his party? Is he not going to vote in favour of the Speech from the Throne?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, I do not feel quite right dignifying that with a response.

What the New Democrats have been doing is working with a government that we are quite critical of. We were elected to a minority Parliament, as were they, and we said we would come to Ottawa and make Parliament work as best we could for people. That is the work that we continue to do, notwithstanding the shenanigans of the Liberal Party. We will work as best we can. As long as we can find agreement on a path forward that is better for Canadians than what they would get if the Liberals were simply left to their own devices, we will continue to do that work. That is what we are here to do.

It came as no surprise to me that it was not a very inspiring Speech from the Throne. That was not my criterion. I was not looking to be inspired by a Prime Minister who has had ethical scandal after ethical scandal and is clearly looking to help his friends. What I was looking for is an opportunity to do my work and leverage more out of the government for ordinary Canadians who it does not

think about enough, frankly, and I will continue to do that work for as long as I can.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Madam Speaker, I think the hon. member would agree with me that Matt Gurney of the National Post described the throne speech best when he said it was bizarre.

I really appreciate what the hon. member had to say and his interventions in the House because he speaks with passion. He speaks succinctly and with reason as well. During his speech, he mentioned band-aid solutions. We saw that very early on in this crisis when the government was trying to ram through legislation without any parliamentary oversight, without any committee work, without the ability of stakeholders or advocates across this country to really assess those pieces of legislation and allow them to be better, better from the stakeholder and advocate perspective, better from parliamentarians' perspectives and certainly better for Canadians.

I wonder if the hon. member agrees with me. If we are proposing to spend \$57 billion for programs that Canadians need, would it not be wise to have this go through the normal parliamentary process, putting it through committees to hear from people who are affected by these programs to see whether they are negatively affected and whether there is more that can be improved? Would that not be the normal process to go through rather than the process we are going through right now?

• (1300)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, I certainly agree with the hon. member that this is the gold standard, but given the expiration of CERB yesterday, we are in a situation of real urgency and that help needs to get to Canadians.

I am as frustrated as anybody that the opportunity was not afforded to Parliament to do that very work and to follow that normal process. This was as a result of a government trying to run and hide from a political scandal that it created without any prompting and for no good reason. However, now we find ourselves in the situation we are in.

I hope Canadians are paying attention. I hope they will remember this come election time, this crass disregard the government had for Canadians' vital interests. However, now we need to make sure that there is a net to catch all of the people who are coming off of CERB, and that requires us to be flexible.

I think we need to draw a box around a lot of the procedural things that have happened during the pandemic and recognize that we are not setting precedents for how Parliament ought to operate normally. What we are doing is working hard to get the help to Canadians that they need on an urgent basis. With a different government and a different attitude in government, we could have done that in a way that observed more of the normal parliamentary process. It is regrettable that we do not have a government that is willing to do that in good faith. Nevertheless, what needs to come first is the interests of Canadians, and those are what we are here to support first and foremost.

Government Orders

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would remind hon. members that on behalf of the Bloc Québécois, my colleague from Salaberry—Suroît introduced in this Parliament Bill C-242, an act to amend the Employment Insurance Act. As my colleague from Thérèse-De Blainville was saying earlier, we should have had this kind of legislation on employment insurance 15 years ago.

By rushing through programs like this we quickly get a sense of their flaws. Instead of fixing them this summer, the government chose to prorogue Parliament and put democracy on hold.

Today, we are being asked to pass a bill at lightning speed without having the chance to hear from a single witness to help us uncover any possible weaknesses, such as identifying who is truly affected by the situation or even those who are taking advantage of these programs.

We know that the COVID-19 pandemic has forced us to act quickly, but is this not the right time to review the entire employment insurance system instead of bringing in even more programs? We could avoid recreating a program by piecemeal if we just accept that the Canada recovery benefit is also not a good fit for our reality.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question. She may be aware that the NDP has been pressuring the government for quite some time to make changes to the EI system. Indeed, this is something we must do. I myself tabled in this Parliament a bill to increase EI sickness benefits to 50 weeks. That is something we support and want to discuss.

However, the problem we have today is that the CERB came to an end yesterday and we want to ensure that a new program will provide Canadians with the support they want to be able to count on. Our work in the House today is to focus on that.

[English]

Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to share a story from one of my constituents. She is a single mom raising two school-aged children. When the pandemic hit, she lost her job and CERB was a lifeline. For the last month she has been facing uncertainty, not knowing what is going to happen when she can no longer afford to put food on the table or pay rent. Then the government proposed cutting the benefit by \$400 which, for many Canadians including this mom, would mean the difference between keeping their homes and losing them.

Does the member agree that it was irresponsible for the government to prorogue Parliament and make this mom and millions of Canadians face the kind of uncertainty that we have seen?

• (1305)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for bringing it back to the lived experience of Canadians who are struggling through this. Here we are having a policy debate, and then there are politics layered over that. It is easy to get lost in all of that. The task that the NDP has really set for itself in this Parliament and throughout the pandemic has been to bring it back to that experience, not to this administrative deadline, this political reason or that political reason.

There is a single mom who is trying to make rent. She does not know if, at the end of the month, she is going to get a cheque for \$2,000 or \$1,600, or nothing at all. That makes a big difference in her life. The stress and anxiety of not knowing that is serious. It is real and it compounds all the problems of the pandemic.

The least we can do from here in Ottawa, and those in government can do, is to act in a timely way to make sure that people have as much knowledge and lead time as possible to prepare themselves—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Resuming debate, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is really good to be back in the House representing the residents of Windsor—Tecumseh and also good to be back in the House with all my colleagues across the aisle.

I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Orléans.

I am pleased to rise today to participate in today's motion, but before I begin I would like to acknowledge that we are meeting on the unceded territory of the Algonquin people.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, our government has put Canadians first and provided the support they need to continue to make ends meet while staying safe. As long as the pandemic continues, our number one job will continue to be supporting Canadians. That is what our Speech from the Throne was all about on September 23. The pandemic crisis exposed many gaps in Canada's social safety net. As a result, the government committed to addressing these gaps in ways that both keep Canadians afloat and boost the economy for an eventual recovery. The measures our government has put forward are part of that commitment. If passed, the measures will help Canadians weather the next phase of the pandemic while at the same time helping keep people connected to the labour force. Let me provide some context.

In August, the government extended the Canada emergency response benefit, also known as the CERB, for another month: from 24 to 28 weeks. We also made changes to the EI program to enable more people to access benefits. On September 27, Canadians began transitioning from the CERB to this more flexible and more accessible EI program, but not everyone who is currently receiving the CERB will be eligible for EI even with the new temporary measures in place.

Our message to Canadians is that if they cannot work for reasons related to COVID-19, there will be support available to them. Specifically, our government has proposed a suite of three temporary benefits: the Canada recovery benefit, the Canada recovery sickness benefit and the Canada recovery caregiving benefit.

I will spend my time today on the Canada recovery benefit. This new benefit will provide \$500 per week for up to 26 weeks to workers who have stopped working due to COVID-19, or who are working but have experienced an income drop of at least 50% due to COVID-19. This new benefit will be available to them if they are available and looking for work, and are willing to accept work when it is reasonable to do so. This makes the CRB different from the CERB. It aligns more with how EI benefits function and will reintroduce measures that help keep people connected to jobs and the labour market. Let me provide a real-life illustration.

Ibrahim is a self-employed bookkeeper in Toronto. He earned \$34,000 in 2019, but his business has slowed to a trickle due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In April, Ibrahim applied for and received the CERB, but like many Canadians, his benefits ran out on September 27. While his business has begun to rebound, it is still not business as usual. He is back to working at only 50% capacity, but he is available for work and is actively seeking new clients. Ibrahim would not qualify for EI, but he would qualify for the Canada recovery benefit. As I mentioned, he could receive \$500 per week for up to 26 weeks between the period of September 27, 2020 and September 25, 2021.

• (1310)

If his annual net income ended up being above \$38,000, not including the CRB payments, he would need to repay 50¢ on every dollar over that net income through his annual income tax return. Thanks to this benefit, Ibrahim would be able to maintain his business, help support his family and continue to be an active participant in the economy.

This new benefit also differs from the CERB in terms of the integrity measures we have put in place. The government is committed to setting up safeguards to protect Canadians from fraud and to prevent non-compliance.

To prevent misuse of the CRB and the other benefits in this proposed legislation, the following measures would be part of the package: The Canada Revenue Agency would collect the social insurance numbers of applicants, CRB applicants would need to provide documentation to prove their eligibility for the benefit and individuals would have to repay any benefit amounts they were not entitled to.

In other words, we would have stronger integrity measures in place for the new recovery benefits. Unlike with the CERB, which had integrity measures built into the back end, the new recovery benefits would have robust verification measures up front. Applicants would experience different up-front and downstream validation checkpoints to ensure they only receive the benefits to which they are entitled. Applicants should prepare for a potentially longer gap between the submission of their application and their payment than they experienced with the CERB or the Canada emergency student benefit, the CESB. As well, unlike the CERB, the benefit would be paid in arrears and taxable at the source.

Government Orders

Our government has been there for Canadians. Since March 15, we have paid more than \$76 billion in CERB benefits to almost nine million individuals. In my riding of Windsor—Tecumseh, thousands of Canadian families and workers took advantage of, and benefited from, the support the government provided during these incredibly difficult and challenging times.

While millions of Canadians have returned to the workforce and are no longer actively receiving the CERB, many Canadians are still facing the reality that they do not have a job to go back to. That is why we introduced measures that are delivering a more flexible and more accessible EI, and the Canada recovery benefit would work in parallel with it to ensure all working Canadians are supported as we work together to build back better and stronger.

The recovery plan our government has laid out would help us span the gap between the emergency support of the spring and summer and the new measures that will help us get through the next phase of this crisis, and that is why I encourage hon. members to support this motion.

• (1315)

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Madam Speaker, near the end of the hon. member's statement this morning he said something interesting, which was that Canadians should expect a longer gap in transition from the CERB to this new program. I am wondering what that longer transition will look like in terms of weeks or months.

There is a second part to my question. Knowing that there would be this longer transition, why did the government prorogue Parliament in August when it knew this situation was going to happen? It could have recalled Parliament to deal with this piece of legislation so Canadians would not have this gap in the transition. There are two questions there.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Madam Speaker, I want to reiterate that from the very start of this pandemic the primary focus of the government was to make sure we got the support Canadians needed into their hands as quickly as possible. With the new Canada response benefit, I can assure the member that when people apply online they will be able to receive benefits within three to five days of the application if they have a direct deposit account. I reassure the hon. member that Canadians will receive the support they need in a timely fashion.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Montarville, BQ): Madam Speaker, I believe that my colleague clearly explained, a few moments ago, that changes to the EI system have been needed for a long time. It was foreseeable that they would be needed by the time the CERB came to an end.

Government Orders

Why then did the government prorogue Parliament? And why did it set so little time between the end of the CERB and the start of new EI provisions?

In other words, why did the government choose once again to put Parliament in such an untenable position?

In his speech, I heard my colleague talk about the support provided by the government to Canadians. It ensured that Parliament would be of very little help to Canadians.

Why has the government once again put Parliament in an untenable position, as it is doing now?

[English]

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Madam Speaker, though the members in the opposition are focused on talking about prorogation and other such matters, this government's focus, first and foremost, has been to deliver the support Canadians require to get through the pandemic. That has been our priority and that will always be our priority.

Through legislation such as the Canada recovery benefit, we will ensure we get the supports to Canadians when they need them in a timely fashion. That has always been our priority. That will always be the priority of this government.

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Madam Speaker, I want to echo what I have heard from other people. We hear through the media that 400,000 people will not get the help they need through this new program. This affects several people in my riding. One person had a medical leave of absence and was going back to work just at the time the pandemic hit. Another person was taking care of an elderly father and was just going back to work when the pandemic hit.

Would it not be better to look at a revamp of our social safety net to ensure that no Canadian can fall below a specific income level and that we take care of Canadians no matter what their circumstances? Does the hon. member not think it is time for a guaranteed livable income?

• (1320)

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Madam Speaker, we know how hard the hon. member is working both in his riding and also for constituents across the country. This government believes that strategic, targeted support is what Canadians are looking for to ensure the money gets into the hands of the Canadians who need it the most and in a timely fashion. That is our priority and that is why we have designed the programs the way they are designed currently.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.): Madam Speaker, on behalf of the community of Orleans, I am truly proud to be able to speak to these measures, and especially to the three new recovery benefits that will help Canadians who are unable to work because of COVID-19.

No one should be left behind as we enter the recovery phase. The Canada Revenue Agency is now ready and remains ready to implement these new recovery measures once they are approved by Parliament. I want to acknowledge the Canada Revenue Agency and the tremendous work it did to implement the government's previous emergency measures.

First, I want to remind members that the CRA is responsible in large part for administering and delivering the Canada emergency response benefit, or CERB. It is fully responsible for administering and delivering the Canada emergency student benefit, or CESB, the Canada emergency wage subsidy, or CEWS, and the 10% temporary wage subsidy for employers, or TWS. The latter two benefits were intended for Canadian businesses.

We must heartily salute the employees of the Canada Revenue Agency for their hard work. CRA has dedicated, highly qualified staff who are committed to serving Canadians in times of need. It has proven this to us beyond all doubt from the beginning of the pandemic. The mobilization has been very impressive. I must say that in my riding, Orléans, people really appreciate the professionalism shown by CRA staff in getting out the money allocated through these new programs quickly to those in need.

I will relate the sequence of events that led to the successful implementation of the emergency measures, namely, the CERB, the CESB, the CEWS and the TWS. In March, the agency immediately realigned all of its activities to improve efficiency during this crisis. It then worked to quickly implement the government's various economic measures. On March 18, it announced that it was extending the deadline for filing personal, corporate and trust income tax returns, thereby lightening the burden on the people of Orléans and Canadians. On March 20, the agency began publishing information about the TWS on its website. On April 6, the agency's CERB portal registered its first applications. On April 27, the agency rolled out the CEWS and offered the subsidy calculator to businesses and their representatives. On May 15, it launched the CESB.

The results so far are impressive. Since April 6, nearly 22.1 million CERB applications have been received and processed by the agency, providing support to close to 5.3 million unique individuals. In regard to the CEWS, as of September 20, the agency had received over 1.14 million wage subsidy applications, with a total of nearly \$37.5 billion being paid out to support more than 317,000 Canadian businesses. Where the CESB is concerned, as of September 24, the CRA had approved over 2.13 million CESB applications to help support more than 706,300 Canadian students.

Now let us talk about some of the agency's accomplishments throughout the rollout of the emergency measures. First, we saw a significant increase in the technology deployed to serve Canadians day to day in an even more accessible, efficient and timely manner. The agency managed to deliver online services within only a few weeks. The Canadian media qualified the technological aspect of the CERB rollout as miraculous. When the CERB launched, the agency's system received 30,000 applications in 12 minutes.

• (1325)

It is also important to point out that it was quick and easy for Canadians to apply for emergency benefits, regardless of type. What is more, the money was paid out promptly. Most individuals and businesses received their benefits via direct deposit within three business days.

The CRA was also able to mobilize its human resources by moving many of its employees to its call centres. For example, 7,500 CRA employees responded to the call to help the call centres.

The agency received over two million calls from businesses and their representatives. Over 120,000 of those callers received an answer about COVID-19 tax relief measures and 150,000 of them were given general information on the Canada emergency wage subsidy.

As we prepare to implement three new stimulus measures, it is important to recognize that the CRA is perfectly positioned for this task, not to mention the fact that it has highly qualified staff who work hard to serve Canadians. This is even more impressive when we consider that the agency did all of that at a moment's notice. The CRA had no idea that it was going to be implementing critical programs to support Canadians during this crisis.

Among the key elements of the agency's success is its service model, which is undeniably based on its people-first philosophy. Since the current Minister of National Revenue took office in 2015, redesigning the agency's service model has been at the heart of all its commitments. More than ever, the agency is a fair and trusted organization whose service delivery is focused on the needs and expectations of Canadians. This is a top priority.

Add to this the fact that all this work was obviously done while ensuring that appropriate compliance measures were put in place for all these applications for emergency financial assistance. Compliance is an essential factor in the agency's mission. The agency has therefore developed electronic and manual verification measures for the eligibility of applicants, and the terms and conditions of repayment.

In short, the extensive implementation of the CERB, CESB, CEWS and TWS emergency measures by the Canada Revenue Agency is a guarantee for the future. The administration and roll-out of the Canada recovery benefit, the Canada recovery sickness benefit and the Canada recovery caregiving benefit will be in good hands with the Canada Revenue Agency.

[English]

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Madam Speaker, while I certainly appreciate the incredible work done by the public servants in CRA, and in all the departments, who have gone above and beyond, the member also spoke about students and the incredible work done by the government for them.

However, I know, specifically as the NDP critic for post-secondary education and youth, that those students who come to me are desperate for additional supports. They did not receive the supports through the Canada student service grant, which they were expecting. Graduate students did not receive supports. International

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students did not receive the support they needed from the government.

In fact, there was not a single word in the throne speech about students. Could the hon. member explain why?

• (1330)

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Madam Speaker, as the member for Orléans, I represent many students who are part of the pandemic and who are certainly affected by having to make decisions about their course of action.

As a society, we have asked them to change their entire way of going to school, to online learning, for many months. Today, we still are seeing the impact of the pandemic.

I appreciate the fact that the government, from day one, showed engagement and commitment to supporting students all across Canada. One thing we have said since the beginning is that we are listening. We are listening to the opposition. We are also listening to students and Canadians in addressing their immediate needs.

Mr. Warren Steinley (Regina—Lewvan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened intently to the debate brought forward by the hon. member for Orléans. She was talking about tax relief for businesses during this time of crisis with the COVID pandemic. I am glad to hear her say that she is listening to members and people across the country, because one form of tax relief the Liberals could have brought forward during the pandemic was to not double the carbon tax on producers across western Canada on April 1, which I found to be a seriously unfunny April Fool's joke.

If the Liberals are talking about tax relief during this time of need and trying to put more money into the pockets of Canadians across the country, why would they not take the opportunity to not raise the carbon tax on our farmers, producers and manufacturers across western Canada? That would have left more money in not only businesses' pockets but also in consumers' pockets, because we all know the carbon tax trickles down and affects people at the grocery stores, gas pumps and across all industries in our country.

If the member is looking for a way to keep money in Canadians' pockets, why would the government not scrap its carbon tax, or at the very least not raise it on April 1, when Canadians are going through a health crisis and a financial crisis across the country?

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question but I think on this one I would disagree.

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I am so proud of the work that we have done for all businesses. Before politics, I was a business owner and I can certainly relate to many of the businesses here in Orléans and across Canada on the impact that this pandemic has had. I was pleased to see that the government mobilized a lot of effort and financial help, such as the wage subsidy, which is still needed and has been extended until next year, as we heard in the Speech from the Throne. There is also CEBA, which was one big thing that our businesses needed. Again, by listening to our businesses and the sector, we have improved CEBA to make it more available to various businesses throughout Canada.

With all due respect to the member, I believe that we need to move forward, as we have learned from this pandemic, on the need to address climate change. Very few people in the riding of Orléans would not agree with me that we need to be firmer and stronger on our climate change initiatives, and I was very happy to see this reflected in our Speech from the Throne.

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola.

Canada is facing a critical moment in the continuing COVID crisis. Millions of Canadians are still in need of emergency funding of one sort or another. Although the early soaring numbers with tragic loss of life in seniors homes and beyond were brought down by the first lockdown with a range of precautions and restrictions, as imperfect as it might have been, we are concerned now about the sharp resurgence of infection in some urban areas and among certain groups whose compliance with the advice of public health officials and government at all levels relaxed far too soon.

The COVID crisis is not just a health crisis. COVID has taken a terrible toll on our Canadian economy, as it has on economies around the world. Canada today has the highest unemployment rate in the G7, despite having almost the highest spending in the G7. With the amendment to Bill C-2, now before us today, Canada's deficit and debt would soar to historic record new levels.

The government must recognize that a significant number of businesses and industries, despite COVID restrictions and precautions, have gradually been able to safely reactivate their workplaces to bring back workers safely and fire up their respective corners of the economy. Over the past month, I visited large industrial manufacturers and small businesses, and I have been impressed at how they are safely, defiantly, coping with the challenging new realities of their workplaces. However, I have also heard from a range of small, medium and large employers and members of chambers of commerce and boards of trade who say that government needs to balance essential emergency financial support with meaningful incentives to return to work where it is safe to do so.

When we first saw Bill C-2 last week, after six weeks of prorogation with the Liberals in hiding from scandalous revelations in committee, the estimated costs of the post-CERB expanded benefits were enormous: \$37 billion in one year. The estimated costs are now in the mid-\$40 billion range with another \$17 billion in ongoing COVID program spending attached to this bill. We are debating almost \$60 billion in new spending in two days. The deficit for 2021 is now certain to be well past \$400 billion.

There is no question that the three principal elements of Bill C-2, the Canada recovery benefits act, would provide a lifeline to millions of workers and folks left out of earlier support. The government's decision to effectively embrace our Conservative back-to-work bonus proposed in June is an overdue step forward, a work incentive that would allow workers to earn beyond the benefit payments with a 50¢ on the dollar repayment of earnings if they exceed \$38,000 in annual income. However, the original expectation of a minimum taxable payment of \$400 a week expired when the Liberals caved in to NDP demands that \$400 a week was not enough.

The Liberals caved in again on Friday when the NDP demanded more, a two-week paid sick leave demand, without any consideration by the House or Parliament of its possible negative impact on Canada's struggling economy. One must consider the continuing disincentives discouraging many healthy workers from safely returning to workplaces that can provide assurance of strict adherence to public health guidelines.

In my province of Ontario, under the new legislation an individual who works full time for just over three weeks will be able to access EI for six months at \$500 a week. An Ontarian working full time at minimum wage, \$14 an hour, receives \$525 a week.

That said, the three pillars of the Canada recovery benefits act are needed: first, the CRB, the Canada recovery benefit for workers who are self-employed or not eligible for EI; second, the CRCB, the Canada recovery caregiving benefit for eligible Canadian households where a parent cannot work because they must care for children or a high-risk dependent; and third, the CRSB, the Canada recovery sickness benefit for workers who are sick or must self-isolate because of COVID-19.

Unfortunately, the time wasted in prorogation and the closure vote tomorrow, a most offensive application of the legislative guillotine, prevents the due diligence these benefits deserve.

● (1335)

The last-minute amendment to the sickness benefit that the Liberals caved into Friday, which provides for what the act calls a "leave of absence", lacks answers to abundant questions on how it may be used or abused.

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The amendment says that “every employee is entitled to and shall be granted the leave of absence” from work of “up to two weeks—or, if another number of weeks is fixed by regulation” if the employee is unable to work because, one, “they contracted or might have contracted COVID-19”; two, they have underlying conditions, are undergoing treatments or have contracted other sicknesses that, in the opinion of a medical practitioner, nurse practitioner, person in authority, government or public health authority would make them more susceptible to COVID-19; or three, “they have isolated themselves on the advice of their employer, a medical practitioner, nurse practitioner, person in authority, government or public health authority for reasons related to COVID-19”.

There are huge legitimate, logical questions in these provisions. Pre-existing underlying conditions like asthma, diabetes, weakened immune systems, etc., don't go away in two weeks, and the provision for cabinet to extend coverage weeks is unlimited. There are some very big questions here.

As well, employment lawyers and experts have long raised red flags about this intrusion into areas of provincial jurisdiction, because most workers are governed provincially. One noted Ontario employment lawyer, Lior Samfiru, says that new incentives may be required to provinces and to employers in the form of tax cuts to get the buy-in in those jurisdictions. There have been, as well, fears expressed by economists and employers that 10 paid sick days could have a serious negative impact on productivity, that said with an eye to some public service unions' exploitation of already-contracted sick days. Then there is the unanswered question of monitoring and enforcement of a violation of the program criteria.

All of these issues should have and could have been explored during the six weeks of the WE scandal turtling by the Liberal government, rather than the clumsy presentation of Bill C-2, followed by the Liberals' second desperate concession to the NDP, and this debate and tomorrow's taking place in the shadow of the legislative guillotine of closure.

As I said at the top, millions of Canadians need emergency funding and many of them are caught now between the ending of CERB and when they will be able to access the new programs. They are caught in dire circumstances again because of the latest self-inflicted stumble by the Liberal government.

Conservatives believe extraordinary emergency funding has been needed and continues to be needed to support Canadian workers, employers and all those in need of support from the start of this COVID crisis, but we lament the lack of transparency and accountability of the Liberal government, the unacceptable neutering of Parliament, the time lost during the unnecessary prorogation for all-party consideration, debate and more reasonable outcomes, and the rush now to confect legislation on the run in the interest of self-serving partisan survival.

Even as we all struggle to do our part to deal with the resurgence of infection spread in certain areas, Conservatives lament the lack of a meaningful recovery plan with the investments, the tax cuts and regulatory improvements that will build competitiveness, incentivize workers and employers, and make Canada a better place to invest, to rebuild and to safely live.

• (1340)

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, we agree with the member that the government should not have prorogued Parliament and delayed the rollout of fixing the benefit program, the CERB, which ran out last night at midnight. We completely agree with him that the government waited too long and people are struggling.

I am concerned, though, about his statements around paid sick leave. As I cited earlier from The Huffington Post, 14% of workers earning less than \$16,000 took paid sick leave versus 74% of those earning over \$96,000. Clearly, workers are going to work because they are afraid they will be unable to make ends meet, feed their families and pay their rents, and they are desperate.

Paid sick leave would allow people who have COVID symptoms to stay home and protect themselves, their co-workers and the businesses where they work. If COVID spreads in the workplace, it is going to be shut down. If a person works in a restaurant, becomes sick and continues working with the whole team at the restaurant, that could take the restaurant down. A restaurant previously closed by public health could get shut down again and be wiped off the map if an employee became sick.

I would like my colleague to speak about what the Conservatives would do to protect those workers in the workplace. We have not heard what they would have done with CERB. Would they have cut it? What would they have done with paid sick leave? We have not heard what they would like to do, so I hope my colleague can talk about what the Conservatives propose to do to protect those workers who have lost their jobs or those businesses that have closed their doors. Those people have relied on CERB and have nothing right now.

• (1345)

Hon. Peter Kent: Madam Speaker, I agree with many of the points my hon. colleague raised at the beginning of his intervention and question. Of course it is absolutely necessary to ensure workers do not have to choose between going to work and earning a living or staying at home and taking the precautions that will protect us all. For the last six weeks of prorogation, the Liberals were hiding from scandal, we could have been discussing this in committee among parties.

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This is a massive change to the Canada Labour Code. In many ways, it is in potential conflict with provincial jurisdictions. Employers and the boards of trade and chambers of commerce should have been engaged in the long-term discussion of how to make this effective in those areas where it is essential, but also in ways that it is not exploited, as we have seen exploited, for example, in Ontario with regard to teachers and their abuse. The school boards are very clear in saying that their contracted sick days have been abused in a variety of ways. They have been reduced, but are still a huge cost consideration and a challenge to continuity in teaching in public schools. This is a consideration that we wish had been considered.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, there is no doubt we are in a second wave of the pandemic. This legislation is greatly needed to protect Canadians in all regions of our nation. It would provide necessary support for us to continue moving forward through this situation.

Members have raised the issue regarding the number of hours. I would like to ask the member about something I expressed previously, and that is that it has been decades since a government has sat during summer months. That allowed opposition members to literally have hundreds and hundreds of additional questions of the government about open programs.

Could the member give his thoughts on how important that vehicle was in providing members the opportunity to provide direct input into legislation such as the one before us today?

Hon. Peter Kent: Madam Speaker, that is an outrageous claim by my hon. colleague. The several hybrid sitting days during the summer did not provide any meaningful answers at all to the questions raised in those sessions. Where we were getting answers was in committees, which the government shut down with the unnecessary and outrageous prorogation of Parliament.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Madam Speaker, if you seek it this time, I think you will find unanimous consent for the following motion:

That the membership of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs be amended as follows: Ms. Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London) for Mr. Richards, (Banff—Airdrie), Mr. Lukiwski (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan) for Mr. Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil) and Mr. Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George) for Mr. Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry).

• (1350)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Normally when there are requests for unanimous consent, the Chair asks in the affirmative whether members agree.

[Translation]

This being a hybrid sitting of the House, were the Chair to proceed in this fashion, if there were any dissenting voices, particularly

for members participating via video conference, they may not be audible.

[English]

Therefore, for the sake of clarity, I will only ask those who are opposed to the request to express their disagreement. In this way, the Chair will hear clearly if there are any dissenting voices and I will accordingly be able to declare whether or not there is unanimous consent to proceed.

[Translation]

All those opposed to the hon. member moving the motion will please say nay.

The House has heard the terms of the motion. There being no dissenting voice, I declare the motion carried.

(Motion agreed to)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS NO. 1

The House resumed consideration of the motion, and of the amendment.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Madam Speaker, my whip gave a much better response than I will. On behalf of the good people of Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, it is an honour to speak after the master class; that is the member for Thornhill.

This year has been unlike any other in at least 100 years. A deadly virus has impacted all our lives and necessitated a significant pause on our economy. Just yesterday the total worldwide death toll from COVID-19 passed one million people. Even now that things are opening, until the virus is dealt with, there can be no going back to normal.

In the face of unprecedented job and economic impacts, the government has created the largest social assistance program ever, the Canadian emergency response benefit. In the face of a recovery insurance system that simply could not manage the scale of requests and millions of Canadians were not even eligible for EI, all parties came together to support this program.

As we now debate the next phase of COVID benefits, I want to be clear that we will not stand in the way of Canadians getting the benefits they need. Many sectors of the economy are still paralyzed by COVID and may not come back any time soon.

[Translation]

Those who have lost their jobs because of the pandemic need support. However, the government's handling of this benefit has been shameful.

[English]

The Prime Minister prorogued the House to avoid scrutiny on his WE scandal. We all know this. The day after prorogation, the government announced these benefits, several of which would need legislation. Instead of spending time over the last month debating and passing these benefits, the Prime Minister shut down Parliament. Now that the CERB has ended and many Canadians are not eligible for EI, the government is playing politics with the well-being of Canadians.

[Translation]

They come to us and tell us that if we do not pass everything at once with no debate, people will not get support.

We could have debated this three weeks ago, and it could have gone through proper parliamentary review. The government is becoming far too contemptuous of the House.

[English]

At the beginning of the crisis, we all understood the urgency and need to pass bills quickly, but now the government thinks that this is how all bills should be passed. Why have real debate when the government can pass everything it wants immediately and blame the opposition for being callous when it wants to have even the bare minimum of scrutiny?

What the government wants is to eliminate Parliament and treat the House as a rubber stamp for its program.

[Translation]

This is unacceptable, and it cannot go on.

[English]

We wanted to work on this bill over the weekend and the government said no, that it would rather pass it on Monday with no debate. Canadians deserve better. They expect better from the government. I will do my job for the people who have sent me here and participate in the sacred responsibility with which I have been entrusted.

Parliament is not an inconvenient annoyance for the government that believes it knows better. It is a demonstration of the democratic will, the will of the people of Canada, not the unelected staffers in the Prime Minister's Office.

When the question emerges as to why debate and scrutiny are so important, I have a good example why. When the government proposed the CERB originally, people lost the entire benefit if they made one dollar. In many cases, people were forced to choose between the CERB or turn away clients who kept their doors open, but could not pay their rent or put food on the table.

The opposition pointed this out, but it took a while for the Liberal government to pay attention and set a \$1,000 threshold. That was certainly better, however, there were still major problems. Through

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the spring and summer, we in the opposition repeatedly pointed out how the threshold would be a disincentive for workers to pick up extra shifts. Doing so put them right above that \$1,000 threshold that would remove their entire CERB. We proposed a back to work bonus where workers would have their CERB slowly phased out to ensure people were never worse off for having worked. We presented it and the government ignored it.

● (1355)

[Translation]

The minister even said that the disincentive to work, the CERB, was problematic. That was at the beginning of the summer, and the government had options. What did it do?

[English]

The government refused to make any changes and just accepted the problems in the CERB until now, in the fall, when it is getting around to making this change. The Liberals were either stubborn or lazy, or did not want to admit the opposition was right or maybe just did not care. If we had a chance to debate these bills and study them at committee, we could uncover these issues and propose changes that would make the bill better.

Another bill the government put forward this summer was designed to create a one-time payment for people with disabilities, a payment I will note that has not been given yet. When the government first proposed the payment, it only applied to existing disability tax credit holders. Many people highlighted that was far too narrow a group and it should apply to Canada Pension Plan Disability recipients as well as those on a veterans disability benefit.

I and many opposition MPs were ready to debate it and work to make that bill better. However, the government refused to allow a debate, demanding to pass the bill immediately or not at all. Our then leader, the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle, proposed a full debate and the government said no. Therefore, no improvements could be made.

[Translation]

Soon after that, the government introduced a new bill to make these changes. However, the purpose of this assembly is to improve bills or reject them if they are a bad idea.

[English]

Rather than work with others, the Liberal government took a much longer road to pass a bill to support people with a disability, support, as I said, has not even come yet.

Statements by Members

We have all been sent here for a reason. I was sent here by my constituents just the same as the member for Papineau was sent by his. He should remember that. Why are these benefits important? As we see a surge in cases through the country, we are constantly reminded of the danger of this pandemic to our health and to our economy.

[Translation]

I have heard workers say they really have no idea when they can go back to work. Entire sectors of our economy, such as hospitality, food services and entertainment, could be shut down for quite some time. Those affected by these job losses did nothing wrong; they are the victims of a terrible virus, and they need support.

[English]

I think of parents who are unable to go to work. Their children cannot go to school because they have medical issues that make it far too risky. I think of people who develop symptoms and must wait a week or more for test results and cannot work during this time even if they want to.

Data comparing this recession to the previous one shows that people are looking for work in the same numbers as before despite the new benefits. We know Canadians want to work. Many can however many cannot. That is why we are not standing in the way of these benefits. Our system was simply not designed for this situation. Our EI system is built on a house of spaghetti from the 1970s.

In a briefing earlier this year, I was told by government IT officials that fixing the system would take a decade. Many people have not paid into employment insurance, usually due to being self-employed or gig workers.

[Translation]

However, in a time of crisis, those individuals need support. The impact the pandemic is having on white-collar jobs has been largely addressed. Workers in lower-paying jobs are the ones still feeling the worst repercussions of these job losses.

[English]

Sectors like accommodation and food services are significantly down, as are sectors that generally employ lower-paid workers. We see from Statistics Canada data that unemployment remains considerably higher than average among racialized Canadians. The people with the least are bearing the largest burden, and they need help.

I understand the need for new benefits to flow to people who need them, but the government has to stop playing political games. It is clear as crystal what the Liberals are doing here. They pro-rogue and wait until the last possible moment to introduce this bill and then exclaim that if we do not pass it all today at once, people will not have support.

We could have done this last month. Instead, the government continues to play political games with benefits and gets up in arms when the opposition dares to propose that Parliament operate as it is supposed to: as a deliberative body. In the Liberals' minds, Parliament is an inconvenience at best. They know what is best for everyone and they will do it, Parliament be damned.

I was sent here by the voters and I will come here every day to do my best to make government programs work. I wish that the Prime Minister and his marketing department at the PMO would understand that too.

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

● (1400)

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola will have five minutes of questions and comments coming to him when we return to this.

Mr. Dan Albas: I have many questions. Can I pose them to myself?

The Speaker: We will see if no one else is interested, but I am sure there will be plenty of interest.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

CALEB'S COURAGE MOVEMENT

Mr. Mike Kelloway (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, each September Cape Breton—Canso residents Mike and Nicole MacArthur, along with their family, prepare for the annual Caleb's Courage Superhero Walk, Run or Fly. It is a community fundraiser in honour of their son Caleb, who bravely battled cancer until he passed away in 2015. He was only four years old. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the MacArthur family was unable to host this fundraising event as planned this year. However, knowing the impact it continues to have on the community, they have decided to host the event virtually, inviting participants to join from across the country. The Caleb's Courage movement has raised more than close to a million dollars to support critically ill children in Cape Breton. It is thanks to Caleb's Courage the Cape Breton Regional Hospital is now home to the Caleb's Courage Superhero Suite, a superhero-themed pediatrics room that allows so many children to receive their treatments, often life-saving, and at home.

September is Childhood Cancer Awareness Month, and today I want to honour all the little superheroes who have fought or continue to fight big battles just like Caleb's.

I would also like to thank Mike, Nicole, Ella, Aubreigh, Lauchlin, Emery and all those involved with the Caleb's Courage movement for doing their part to strengthen health care in Cape Breton—Canso.

SIMCOE—GREY TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Terry Dowdall (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Mr. Speaker, throughout this pandemic, my riding has been put at a significant disadvantage as lockdowns and working from home have become the norm. People in the cities have the privilege of reliable high-speed Internet, which allows them to work from home or their kids to learn online. They are also able to stream and connect with friends and family without worrying about exceeding their monthly data allowance. Canadians in my riding of Simcoe—Grey are not so privileged. Our parents cannot reliably work from home and often must head into the city despite the health risks. Our kids often cannot connect to online courses and fall behind their peers. Also, our isolated seniors suffer as they are unable to visit loved ones in person at this time. With all of this, we still pay hundreds or even thousands of dollars in extra fees for less than what other Canadians are taking for granted.

The government had some nice words in the throne speech about connectivity. There were nice words about many things, but actions speak louder than words. We need a plan to connect rural Canada to high-speed Internet now.

* * *

[Translation]

WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

Mrs. Élisabeth Brière (Sherbrooke, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in early September, I joined Marianne Auclair, the executive director of the Eastern Townships branch of Femmessor, on a tour of SOS Odours. Josée Samson is the president of this family business, which specializes in making air fresheners. During the pandemic, Ms. Samson was proactive and innovative, designing a modern assembly line to produce hand sanitizing gel that she could sell to her clients and the governments of Quebec and Canada.

We have a host of examples of women entrepreneurs who are helping to fight the spread of the virus and contributing to the economic development of our communities. However, even today, only 16% of Canada's small and medium-sized enterprises are owned by women.

I am proud to be part of a government that is investing nearly \$5 billion to boost the number of women entrepreneurs and make the business world fairer and more dynamic.

* * *

● (1405)

SUZANNE TREMBLAY

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of our leader and all of my Bloc Québécois colleagues, I want to express our sadness at the passing of a great sovereignist and one of the first Bloc Québécois MPs.

Suzanne Tremblay passed away on Saturday, and this staunch defender of our interests is being mourned not just in the Lower St. Lawrence region, but all across Quebec. I once had the privilege of working with her to showcase what our corner of the country has to offer, and I can assure the House that she was extraordinarily dedicated to regional and rural development.

Statements by Members

She will be remembered for her outspoken nature, her audacity and her indomitable spirit, as well as for the enormous contribution she made to cultural issues and the way she defended the industry as a whole from international giants. I am grateful to Suzanne Tremblay for standing up to promote Quebec and our region. Her career is an inspiration to the new generation, which I belong to.

Thank you for everything. Farewell, Suzanne.

* * *

[English]

ALS TREATMENT

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, ALS patients in Canada suffer from a lack of access to new therapeutic treatments and a quarter of Canadian ALS patients do not have access to clinical trials within their own provinces. The current system is prohibitive to ALS patients who wish to access new therapies that could significantly improve their quality of life. We have a duty to care for those individuals who are vulnerable, and we must do better. We must work with our international partners to uncover and approve new treatments for ALS patients, ensure that ALS therapies are covered by provincial health authorities and make certain that ALS patients have equal access to the treatments they need. Pursuing these goals will see the burden of ALS decrease with patients living longer with less severe symptoms and a greater ability to contribute to society.

* * *

JIM MERRIAM

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on September 19, Canada lost a great Canadian, rural media personality and columnist. Jim Merriam passed away surrounded by his loving family after a 21-year battle with cancer.

Jim's "Funny Farm" column was well known and well read. Whether sharing his opinions on newsworthy events or controversial decisions, details about his farm and beloved mules, light-hearted jokes or promoting charitable events, his was a loud, reasoned voice that came directly from the heart. Jim loved to tell those personal stories and connect people with each other right across the region. It was that ability to tell a story with a sense of humour, yet get to the crux of the issue, that was fundamental to who Jim was. Maybe most telling about Jim is that he was approached by different parties to run for politics. He was smart enough to stay away.

Statements by Members

I consider myself lucky to have known Jim my whole life. I am confident that many others still can through his written work.

● (1410)

Rest in peace, Jim. You have earned it.

* * *

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL SECRETARY-GENERAL

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Alex Neve is a fierce defender of human rights and the conscience of his nation. As the outgoing Secretary-General of Amnesty International Canada, Alex has fought to preserve, promote and protect the inherent dignity and inalienable rights of individuals and peoples around the world. A man who speaks with purpose, listens with humility and acts with conviction, Alex's work is defined by countless compelling victories overcoming many injustices in the world.

Alex continues to inspire and challenge all of us to advance human rights. Some of his recent work includes advancing refugee rights, ensuring corporate social responsibility, implementing the optional protocol on torture and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, as well as seeking accountability for atrocity crimes in places like Sri Lanka and Myanmar.

This week, Alex passed the torch to Ketty Nivyabandi, a passionate human rights defender who will lead Amnesty. I want to thank Alex, his partner Patricia Goyeche, and his children, Brennan, Sean-Daniel and Selina, for all of their sacrifices to make our world a better place.

* * *

KITCHENER NBA PLAYER

Mr. Raj Saini (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to celebrate the talent and accomplishments of a truly exceptional member of my community. Like most members, I take special pride in the success of all of our citizens from coast to coast. Whether it is an athlete, musician, businessperson or any other Canadian, we are here to root for them, which is why I rise today to highlight one of Kitchener's finest, Jamal Murray. As a basketball player for the Denver Nuggets, Jamal has shown remarkable leadership, poise and determination while taking his team to the NBA conference finals.

Jamal is an inspiration for basketball fans in Kitchener Centre and in communities across Canada, not only for his plays on the court but also off the court. He is an advocate for the Black community and youth sports, including assisting in building local basketball courts and providing backpacks for children returning to school.

Although Jamal's team was not successful, he was successful in uniting a nation and elevating our hope and pride. I ask all members to join me in wishing Jamal all the best.

We are all rooting for Jamal.

BURGERS TO BEAT MS

Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate Randy Nickle and the entire team at Kenora's A&W for raising over \$27,000 for research and support for those living with MS.

There are 77,000 Canadians who have MS. It is a chronic illness that affects the brain and spinal cord, causing pain and weakness as well as issues with vision, speech and coordination. There is currently no cure, but research is being done into new therapies to improve quality of life.

This year, A&W's Burgers to Beat MS campaign raised \$1.3 million in support of the MS Society of Canada. Randy and his team in Kenora have cracked the top five in fundraising seven years in a row, and this year they were number one nationwide. They went above and beyond the scope of the campaign by finding a number of creative ways to raise money, including holding bake sales, collecting personal donations and even selling rain barrels. I salute them for their continued passion for this cause and thank everyone who donated or helped to raise funds.

Together, we can beat MS.

* * *

DAVID SMITH

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it has been some time since David Smith died. David was a lawyer, MP, cabinet minister, senator, chairman of the world's largest law firm and a born raconteur.

I got to know him through the Liberal Party politics and the Wednesday morning prayer breakfasts. His standard greeting was, "How's brother John today?" Regardless of the scripture passage or prayer concern, David would have a story. My favourite featured he and Colonel Gadhafi sitting around a campfire in a Libyan desert and being serenaded by fornicating camels. I do not know what a fornicating camel sounds like, but it was extremely difficult after David's story to maintain a prayerful attitude.

David also liked to sing the great old hymns of the faith. The hymn *What a Friend We Have in Jesus* became infinitely more poignant when David told us about the deeply tragic life of the Port Hope man who wrote the hymn, Joseph Scriven.

I miss that raspy voice. I miss that off-key singing. I miss those hilarious anecdotes. May my friend rest in peace.

YOM KIPPUR

Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday at sundown, Jewish communities across Canada and the world gathered to observe Yom Kippur, the holiest day in the Jewish calendar.

Marking the end of a 10-day period of prayer, fasting and introspection, Yom Kippur is a sacred day of atonement when those in the Jewish community seek forgiveness for the past year and reflect on where better choices and actions could have been made. However, this is not only a time for reflection, but also a chance to look forward to the future for new and more hopeful days of joy and opportunity.

Hamilton is blessed with a vibrant Jewish community. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the members of Beth Jacob Synagogue, Temple Anshe Sholom and Adas Israel Synagogue, along with all Jewish Canadians, for the profoundly positive contributions they have made to Canadian society and will continue to make for generations to come.

As Yom Kippur draws to a close, I hope the day has been an easy fast and brought meaningful reflection to all Jewish people who are celebrating this solemn, sacred day.

G'mar chatima tova .

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COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Mr. Chris d'Entremont (West Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I am proud to rise in the House of Commons to honour Nova Scotia and particularly the residents of West Nova.

Back at home, as elsewhere in the country, our communities work very hard supporting each other during the many difficult challenges that have deeply affected our entire population due to the current pandemic. We all know that the strength of a community can certainly be defined in tough times, and God knows how much our community in Nova Scotia has gone through over the past number of months.

I want to send out a special thanks, a shout-out to the Kingston-Greenwood Isolation Support Network, which was created to respond to the need for help during the first peak of the pandemic. The network's goal was to get essential items like groceries to individuals remaining at home, whether for their safety or the safety of others, due to the pandemic.

Congratulations and a big thanks to the local Lions Club, 14 Wing Greenwood, and Sobeys, as well as all the volunteers who made sure our residents did not go without during this difficult time.

* * *

● (1415)

FOREST FIRES

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after several catastrophic years, we had relatively few forest fires in Canada in 2020. In my riding, there were only three fires that threatened homes.

Statements by Members

Unfortunately, after those fires were brought under control, southern British Columbia was beset with thick, choking smoke from fires south of the border, as California was beset with temperatures not in the 30s, but in the high 40s and even in the range of 50°C.

I want to take this opportunity to thank all the firefighters on the ground and in the air for battling the fires in southern British Columbia, especially the volunteer crews who worked in extreme terrain and in extreme temperatures to keep family homes safe.

We had only three serious fires this year, but I can remember only one fire that came close to homes when I was growing up in the Okanagan in the 1960s and 1970s. Now, there is no going back to the cool days of the sixties, but we can hold global warming to 1.5 degrees if we take bold action now. I call on the government to do just that.

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[Translation]

AVIATION INDUSTRY

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there was not a word about aerospace in the Speech from the Throne. It is inconceivable that it be left out.

Aerospace is to Quebec what the automobile is to Ontario. Greater Montreal is the third-largest aerospace hub in the world, after Seattle and Toulouse. It is the leading exporter, which translates into 40,000 direct jobs and 100,000 indirect jobs. It is big, granted, but it is on shaky ground.

That is why we have been asking for an aviation policy for years. The pandemic has made the need more pressing. With COVID-19, aircraft are grounded, maintenance activities are limited, and order books for new aircraft could remain poorly stocked for years. The precarious situation is even forcing aviation technicians into the construction industry to make ends meet.

While Quebec is starting to envision a carbon-neutral plane, Ottawa remains at a standstill, with no vision, no targeted support. There is nothing. Ottawa must listen to reason. We need an aerospace policy and we need it now.

*Oral Questions**[English]***COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, earlier this month I received an email from an Innisfil resident who, like roughly 780,000 Canadian homeowners, chose to defer her mortgage payments when COVID-19 forced businesses to close and workers to be laid off. In the email, she spoke of not being fully back to work as a result of the shutdown, yet her financial hardship is mounting because, as it is for many Canadian families, a deadline is looming this week when mortgage deferrals end, and payback will be required with interest. This means she will have to pay a lump sum of \$3,750 in principal and interest, which is more than her monthly income.

In last week's throne speech, not one word of this looming crisis was mentioned. Instead, what we heard was the Prime Minister delivering no plan to get our economy back on track, no plan to secure investment, no plan to secure jobs, no plan for rapid testing, and no plan to pay for the mounting debt and deficit. What we did hear was a Prime Minister willing to bankrupt our country to win the next election.

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*[Translation]***HOMELESSNESS**

Ms. Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is important to keep in mind that, well before the virus arrived in Canada, winter was already a major challenge for marginalized people experiencing homelessness.

This year, these people will face significant additional hardships. Implementing public health measures such as physical distancing is a massive challenge in enclosed spaces like the shelters that take them in.

As indicated in the throne speech, our government is aware of these realities. This is a major issue that matters to us all, and the government is focusing on it. We are concerned about Canadians living in extremely precarious situations.

Homelessness can happen to anyone. More than ever, solidarity and compassion must guide us through this trying time together.

[English]

The Speaker: Before continuing, I just want to remind all the members who are joining us virtually that they have access to headsets that are provided by the House. The members really have wonderful voices, so we want to make sure that those voices come through in their true colours. I want members to take that headset and use it, as opposed to the ear buds. Not that there is anything wrong with ear buds, but they do not bring out the full force of their voices.

ORAL QUESTIONS

• (1420)

*[English]***COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE**

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my first question today is on behalf of that single mom who is standing in line right now, for the second day in a row, waiting to get a COVID test, for that senior widower who is at home alone, scared and isolated, waiting for his result, and for the thousands of Canadians just like them who are scared and worried and do not know if they have COVID.

Very simply, what is the government doing to ensure that Canadians get access to rapid and safe at-home testing?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is very aware of the urgent need for rapid testing. We know that rapid tests can save lives and help keep our economy strong, but it is also very important for all of us to appreciate how valuable it is to live in a country where the independence of our health regulatory authorities is respected. Our lives quite literally depend on that.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister always seems to be playing catch-up. Whether it was months ago and the decision around the border, or today, being slow and inept in helping small businesses or getting rapid, safe at-home testing for Canadians, the Liberals are always giving Canadians too little too late. Things are not okay. There are 700 new COVID cases in Ontario alone. Shutting down the economy and going back to the Prime Minister's morning show is not the answer.

When will the Prime Minister see that he is failing on dealing with the COVID crisis and that he is actually leaving millions of Canadians behind?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is absolutely aware of the gravity of the global pandemic that we are fighting together. That is why, in the throne speech last week, we were very clear that we will do whatever it takes to support Canadians in the fight against this virus, to acquire essential vaccines, and to work closely with provinces, territories and municipalities on stepped-up testing and tracing efforts.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, six weeks ago when Bill Morneau, the finance minister, resigned, it was clear the Prime Minister was going to do whatever it took to shut down the noise around the WE scandal. He was more concerned about himself and covering his own hide than governing, so he locked up Parliament, wasting precious time that could have been used doing work for Canadians.

Does the Prime Minister not know that his scandals are not going to go away and that by trying to cover them up, he has put his own interests above the interests of Canadians, their lives, their livelihoods and their peace of mind?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not know about the members opposite, but speaking for the members on this side of the House, I can say that we have all been very hard at work over the past six weeks. We put together the safe restart agreement at the beginning of the summer because we knew that a second wave would be coming. That is why we knew we needed to give the provinces \$19 billion to help us get ready together. Then, just a few weeks ago, we knew it was a priority to get kids safely back to school, which was another \$2 billion.

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[Translation]

INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all indications are that, in three hours' time, the Premier of Quebec will announce that the Quebec City and Montreal regions are being upgraded to red zones. This is very serious, and we all need to take action together to address the problem.

Last week, the Prime Minister made some awkward and unfortunate remarks in the House about the Premier of Quebec and all the provinces.

Can the Prime Minister stand up and acknowledge that he "dropped the ball" and that he understands we all need to work together?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have made significant investments in health care, and we will continue to make significant investments in this area, whether in Quebec or elsewhere in Canada.

Once again, my colleague is trying to start a fight between Quebec City and Ottawa. We do not want that. We want to work together. That is what we are doing now, and that is what we will do in the future.

* * *

● (1425)

HEALTH

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with all due respect to the Deputy Prime Minister, I did not realize she had such highly developed sense of humour. For her to have the nerve to claim that we are picking a fight when her Prime Minister insulted the Premier of Quebec last week only adds fuel to the fire.

The best way to solve this would be for everyone to mind their own business. The federal government has responsibilities, such as approving tests faster. The provinces have a responsibility to provide health care directly to patients.

Will the government agree to the provinces' request to increase health transfers in a stable, predictable way, with no strings attached?

Oral Questions

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I too have a great deal of respect for my hon. colleague.

However, I cannot agree with his comments that everyone should just look after their own affairs. We are in the midst of a global crisis, the biggest crisis since the Second World War. This is a time for all members and all provincial, territorial, municipal and federal leaders to work together in close collaboration. That is our approach.

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebec taxpayers pay taxes to the federal government. In turn, the federal government must ensure that the services provided to Quebecers are as good as possible.

The top priority for Quebecers right now is health services. We are living through a pandemic and we have to wait for the federal government to take a part of the taxes paid by Quebecers and give it to Quebec, since it is Quebec that provides health care and services and we are in the middle of a pandemic. However, that is not what the Liberals are doing.

Why is the government blackmailing Quebec with money from Quebec taxpayers and refusing to give Quebec what it is asking for?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are not blackmailing anyone. We are co-operating and collaborating. That is why we made significant investments in health in Quebec and in all the provinces and territories.

In the safe restart agreement, \$13 billion of the allotted \$19 billion will go directly to health and the fight against COVID-19. That is true collaboration.

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, two weeks ago, the provinces and Quebec said that the federal government needs to provide an additional \$28 billion in funding. Provincial governments are asking for more money for health care, not because they want to pick a fight but because we are in a pandemic. If the Government of Quebec is asking for an increase in health transfers, it is because we are going through the worst health crisis ever. If Quebec is asking for these transfers, it is because health care has been chronically underfunded by the federal government for 25 years. If Quebec is asking for these transfers, it is because Quebecers need this money.

When will the government give Quebec what it deserves?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we agree with all members of the House and Quebec leaders that we are facing a very serious crisis with COVID-19. We must all work together. That is our government's approach.

That is why, for example, as part of the safe restart agreement, we gave more than \$3 billion directly to Quebec to help it fight COVID-19. We will continue to do that.

*Oral Questions***TAXATION**

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, COVID-19 has had a profound impact on families, workers and small businesses. These people must not be forced to pay for the recovery and pay for this crisis. The ones paying should be the people who have made record profits during this time.

Will the Prime Minister commit today to ensuring that the wealthiest Canadians who earned record profits will pay?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are not looking to divide our country. We want to work together, because this is a global crisis, a national crisis. That said, as we stated in the throne speech, we agree that people who are in a position to do so must do their part for Canada. This is why we mentioned taxes in the throne speech.

• (1430)

[English]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government talks about not dividing Canada, but the reality is that there is a division. On the one hand are everyday families and small businesses who are feeling the impact of COVID-19 and who are going through pain and are struggling. On the other hand, the ultra-rich have profited off the pandemic. They have made record profits. There is a division.

While the Liberals talk about taxing extreme wealth inequality, no one knows what that means. Will the government commit to ensuring those who have profited off the pandemic pay the price to support people in need?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to start by saying I really believe strongly that today, at a time when we are confronting a global pandemic and our deepest economic crisis since the Second World War, is a time for all of us to bear a deep responsibility for uniting and not dividing Canadians. We also believe, of course, that we all have to pay our fair share. That is why in the Speech from the Throne we talked about taxing Internet giants and we talked about taxing stock options, and we are going to do that.

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HEALTH

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the health minister agreed to pay \$237 million to Baylis Medical for 10,000 ventilators, even though the devices were not approved in any jurisdiction. Baylis Medical, of course, is Frank Baylis, the former Liberal MP.

Why was there a fast track for Mr. Baylis's device, but no fast track for the rapid testing that every Canadian needs right now? Why is a former Liberal MP with technology that has no track record of being approved anywhere in the world getting a special deal?

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. colleague may recall that in March we went out to businesses right across the country and said we needed their support to build up personal protective equipment

capacity right here in Canada, and they heard our call loud and clear. There are over 1,000 businesses that have retooled and scaled up their operations to make sure that we have the appropriate personal protective equipment for front-line health care workers. I am very proud of that track record and will continue to support our health care workers and make sure we support the broader economy as well.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member literally said nothing, and while he said nothing, there are women waiting in line who cannot afford to take time off from work today to get a COVID-19 test. Some former Liberal MP gets his stuff fast-tracked, but rapid tests do not happen. That is just garbage.

I just read, as it is just breaking, that there is a global initiative about to send 120 million antigen tests, at-home tests, to developing countries around the world. Germany has bought 20 million of these tests, and so has France and Switzerland. Where are ours?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is important that we understand that testing is a complex space and one test is not the same as another. It is also very important that we rely on the incredible scientists and regulators who are working so diligently at Health Canada to assess every single applicant and ensure that whatever is regulated and approved in Canada will not make the situation worse but in fact will help provide clarity for people seeking tests.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since the beginning of the pandemic, the Prime Minister and his cabinet have been delegating operational responsibilities to the provinces. However, the federal government also has operational responsibilities, such as closing the border at the appropriate time or telling people not to wear a mask.

Let us remember that, in January and February, we were being instructed not to wear a mask.

Now, the Minister of Health is encouraging the provinces and territories to create their own saliva tests, as though the provinces had the means to do that.

Why is the minister creating so much confusion for the provinces and premiers?

[English]

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said, we are so incredibly proud of the hard-working scientists, researchers and, in fact, the innovative community of Canada who are rapidly working to find new solutions to testing. This is not just a Canadian problem. This is happening around the world. In fact, countries are working together to try to unlock how to come up with rapid tests that can be accurate. The accuracy is important. We do not want tests on the Canadian market that will provide people with a false negative or a false positive, leading to confusion, fear and increased COVID cases.

• (1435)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am talking about the current lack of consistency and the health minister's problem understanding what her jurisdiction is.

The minister is currently telling the provinces to develop their own saliva tests when that is her department's responsibility. The premiers are coming together and wondering what is happening and whether they have to develop a test themselves. No. That is the responsibility of Health Canada and the minister.

The minister has said publicly that it was up to the provinces to do it if they wanted to. That needs to stop.

Will the minister apologize to the provincial premiers?

[English]

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every step of the way, we have worked with provinces and territories to ensure that they have the tools they need to fight COVID-19. Members have heard the Deputy Prime Minister speak about the billions of dollars that were transferred to provinces and territories. More than that, when there is an outbreak we work very closely with local communities within provinces and territories to make sure they have the tools they need. We will continue to work diligently with provinces and territories to unlock the tools that can help us beat and defeat COVID-19.

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ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

Hon. Tim Uppal (Edmonton Mill Woods, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Sikh RCMP officers have been removed from their front-line policing duties and given desk roles for nearly six months. The RCMP is the only police force in Canada that has sidelined Sikhs during the pandemic. Since early June, the World Sikh Organization has written to three different ministers to discuss a solution, but was completely ignored. Now that this has become a media story, the Prime Minister has said that he is disappointed that Sikhs in the RCMP have been sidelined.

Why have the Liberals ignored this issue for months?

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do appreciate the question and I agree that all officers of the RCMP must be given the opportunity both to serve their community and to freely practise their faith. We

Oral Questions

need to ensure that all of our officers are not discriminated against and that the requirements of their religious faith receive appropriate accommodation.

Reports from the World Sikh Organization were deeply concerning. The Prime Minister and I have been quite clear on our expectation that the RCMP will work diligently to rectify this situation as quickly as possible. With that, we are getting advice from occupational health and safety and the labour ministry to make sure that this can be done safely.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Sikh and Muslim RCMP officers were pulled from active duty due to a beard policy, which is an obvious discrimination against ethnic minorities. The World Sikh Organization reached out to Liberal ministers Blair and Bains months ago with no response. When made public, the Prime Minister gave nice and fluffy words with no action plan.

Why has it taken the Liberals six months to admit this is a problem, and when will they get rid of this blatant discrimination against these Canadian heroes?

The Speaker: I just want to remind hon. members that when referring to someone else in the chamber, to refer to them by the name of their riding or by their position, and not by their proper names. This is just a reminder. I know we have been away for a while and we are getting kind of rusty.

The hon. minister.

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me be very clear. We believe absolutely that the Sikh officers, who serve their communities and this country with professionalism and with absolute dedication, need an accommodation so they can practise their faith, as well as continue to serve.

We have raised the matter directly with the RCMP. We expect this issue to be rectified at the quickest opportunity. We have also ensured that there is a comprehensive examination of occupational health and safety requirements and in consultation with the labour board to ensure that this can be done safely. It will be done. We will accommodate those officers.

* * *

[Translation]

HEALTH

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this is a serious matter. Montreal and Quebec City will apparently move into the red zone again. That means the second wave is under way. It also means that people will be hospitalized, and some will suffer severe effects or die. That means another lockdown, and no one wants to go through that again. That is why Quebeckers want to get their tax money back in the form of health transfers.

Oral Questions

Does the government realize how out of touch it is to refuse to provide adequate health care funding during a pandemic?

• (1440)

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian government is collaborating regularly with the governments of Quebec and the various provinces.

The second wave is real. We see the number of cases in Quebec increasing. The number stands at 750 cases in Quebec and 700 cases in Ontario. We must act quickly. That is why we tabled the bill before us today. I sincerely hope that my Bloc Québécois colleagues will support it.

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, not only is the second wave upon us, but this is also cold and flu season. More people will have to be tested because they will have more symptoms. We do not have the resources to test people and get their results to them quickly. Our ability to flatten the curve depends on testing. We do not have the money or resources to meet those needs. Plus, front-line workers are exhausted.

Is there anything more important right now than increasing health transfers?

[English]

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we have said, we will be there for provinces and territories to defeat COVID-19 no matter what it takes. I have reached out to Minister Dubé on a number of occasions and I look forward to speaking with him very soon to determine what more we can do at the federal government level to handle and assist in many of those challenges the member opposite is outlining.

This is a Canadian response. We need to work together to ensure no matter where COVID-19 is surging, that we are there together and in support of each other. That is the only way through this crisis.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the throne speech is full of federal interference in Quebec's affairs. It talks about school-based child care and job training. It even talks about creating national parks in our cities.

Quebec is already taking care of all those things. The federal government just needs to acknowledge that and hand over its share. Instead of interfering in areas under Quebec's jurisdiction, why doesn't the federal government just look after its own responsibilities by permanently increasing health transfers?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have already been clear. With respect to the programs that already exist, there will be discussions and equivalent transfers.

There remains the issue of seniors, which the Bloc Québécois often raises. As I said the other day, our seniors are not a comma or a paragraph in the Constitution. They are human beings. They are the ones who have suffered the most during the pandemic. The Government of Canada will be there. Whether the Bloc likes it or not, we will always be there for our seniors.

[English]

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week the public safety minister said there was a "process in place" to deal with cases of compassion for family members who do not fit the Liberal definition of being "necessary" for entry to Canada. John McCall's adult children are Canadians by birthright. They never had problems travelling back and forth before, but the minister rejected their request to visit their dying Canadian mother. She died a week before the paperwork was done for them to come to Canada. So many other Canadians face the same heartbreaking barriers.

Why is there one system for connected elites and one for everyone else?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have taken the decisions that are necessary to protect the health and safety of Canadians and everyone in Canada at the border. We know it has been difficult and we have to make sure that we get the decisions at the border right, which is one of the reasons why we have introduced an immediate family exemption. Last week I announced that we were going to be accelerating and prioritizing the application of family sponsorships.

We will continue to work with all members of the House to reunite as many families as possible.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): However, Mr. Speaker, the problem is there seems to be two processes: hundreds of special passes for famous athletes and billionaires, for example, while everyday Canadians are kept from work or are separated from loved ones. On September 16, the public safety minister said a new compassionate process was imminent and on September 24, he just said the current system is in place. On September 26, the Liberal MP for Beaches—East York told families to be ready to apply in a new process this week. It seems Liberal insiders have the details long before suffering families know.

When will the minister actually make the changes public and why have the Liberals set up a cold-hearted system of such obvious double standards for the past six months?

• (1445)

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said, we have a system that is ensuring that we are exercising compassion as much as possible, we have introduced an immediate family member's exemption, and we are accelerating and prioritizing family sponsorship applications. At the same time, we have to balance those needs against the health and safety of all Canadians, while dealing with the pandemic. I would just underscore that we are still in the midst of a pandemic. We will continue to work with her and all members of this House to strike that balance and get it right.

Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadian Sarah Campbell has been battling thyroid cancer for months and needs her U.K. fiancé by her side, but they have been separated due to the border closures. Sarah has written 123 letters to Liberal cabinet ministers asking for a compassionate exemption. When she finally received a response, it was nothing but a cold-hearted, useless letter from the department. The minister did not even have the decency to sign it himself. There are thousands of Canadians just like Sarah who are being completely ignored by the Liberal government and they deserve answers.

Will families be reunited in October, yes or no?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): First, Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by congratulating my hon. colleague on her appointment as my critic. I look forward to building on the very constructive conversation that we had soon after she was appointed.

With regard to the case involving Ms. Campbell, of course we are sympathetic. We know that there are some families who have not yet been able to reunite, but that is because we are taking decisions at the border to protect the health and safety of Canadians throughout this pandemic, which is our paramount concern.

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VETERANS AFFAIRS

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today the PBO reported that even with the 300 new hires in June, over 40,000 veterans will continue to be left on the wait-list over the next two and a half years. An NDP motion in this House, supported unanimously in 2018, required that the government reinvest every penny back into the veterans department. That did not happen. The Liberals shortchanged veterans of \$100 million last year alone. Today's report shows that if the Liberals had spent that money on veterans, that backlog would be addressed in one year. The Conservatives started the cuts with their government and the current government is continuing the trend.

When will the Canadian government stand up for Canadian veterans?

Mr. Darrell Samson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that too many veterans are waiting much too long for decisions on their applications, which is an issue we want to improve on. That is why the backlog is of top priority for this government. The report shows that new hires from our recent investment of \$200 million will have a significant impact on the backlog, but it does not take into account the many steps we have taken to improve the process and its efficiency. We are confident in our report and I want to thank the PBO and his team for their work so far.

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COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when the Liberal government rushed to fund its friends at WE Charity, it did so with almost a billion dollars that was promised to help students. When it got caught, the help disap-

peared, but the concerns of students as to how they would afford their tuition fees, rent, food and bills did not. Just because the Liberals want the WE scandal to be forgotten does not mean young Canadians who have been hit hard by this pandemic can be. When will the government put that \$912 million it promised toward student assistance?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the COVID-19 pandemic has hit every segment of society and has disproportionately impacted certain segments. That is why young people, students and youth will always have a full voice at the cabinet table. When we came out with our plan, we put forward a \$9-billion plan to ensure that we were meeting the needs of students. The first thing we did was stop the interest on and repayment of Canada student loans. To ensure there was a monthly stipend, we brought forward the Canada emergency student benefit, and the list goes on. We will continue working on behalf of students and youth. That is what we are here to do. We will have the backs of Canadians and it is important that we all work together to get this done.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Yvan Baker (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Since the August 9 fraudulent Belarusian election, hundreds of thousands of Belarusians have demonstrated peacefully to call on the incumbent President Lukashenko to step down and for new free and fair elections to be held. To remain in power, Lukashenko has used Vladimir Putin's support, violence and mass arrests against opposition leaders, demonstrators and the media. Canada and other governments have refused to accept the election results and have condemned the crackdowns. What steps will Canada take to ensure the democratic will and human rights of the Belarusian people are upheld?

● (1450)

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada has made it clear that we do not accept the results of the fraudulent presidential election in Belarus. We continue to call for new elections that are free and fair. I have been speaking regularly with the opposition leader Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, including just last week, after we announced \$600,000 toward projects to support civil society and democracy, with a focus on women and independent media. We will always stand by the Belarus people.

*Oral Questions***FISHERIES AND OCEANS**

Mr. Chris d'Entremont (West Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Nova Scotia fisheries crisis is entering its third week and no agreement seems to be possible in the short term. The Minister of Fisheries and the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations had discussions with the Mi'kmaq chiefs, but are leaving the commercial fishermen in the dark. Conflict resolution requires honest and transparent communications with both sides in a dispute.

When will the Minister of Fisheries do her job, show some leadership and respect, and open a true dialogue with all parties for a lasting solution?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said from the beginning of this crisis in Nova Scotia, our main priority is keeping people safe. To that end, I believe the path forward is through honest, respectful and collaborative dialogue. I have met with both first nations and industry partners over the last number of weeks to find that path forward. We are committed to making sure we implement the treaty rights guaranteed to the first nations under the Marshall decision.

Mr. Chris d'Entremont (West Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Marshall decision was 21 years ago. It is not a new issue. The Liberals have had five years to bring parties together in advance negotiations and the minister knew about this specific issue as it has been boiling around for about a year now. When will the minister resolve the situation?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been having good conversations with first nations communities and with industry. I firmly believe that the best path forward, to make sure we are keeping people safe and make sure we are implementing the rights of first nations people, is through respectful and collaborative dialogue. We have been having those conversations. We will continue to do that, because it is imperative that we implement these rights.

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[Translation]

COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the one million Canadians who have lost their jobs and not gone back to work since February. COVID-19 is present in Japan, Germany, the United Kingdom, the United States, Italy and France, and yet all of those countries have fewer unemployed workers than here in Canada. In fact, our unemployment rate is 3% higher than the OECD average. Can the minister name one G7 country with a higher unemployment rate than Canada, yes or no?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by pointing out just how much our government is doing for workers across Canada. Our government supported nearly nine million Canadians through the CERB; our government helped 3.5 million Canadians keep their jobs through the wage subsidy program; and our government helped 750 small businesses pay their rent. Clearly, we are here for Canadians, and we will continue to be here for them.

[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are horrified by the mass detention and slaughter of Uighur Muslims in China. Whenever he is asked about this issue, the foreign affairs minister has assured us that he is deeply disturbed by these events, but he has not committed to action. Canadians do not care how he feels; they want to know what he will do.

Will the minister understand that he has obligations under the genocide convention and therefore commit to Magnitsky sanctions against those criminals responsible for 21st century concentration camps?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as my hon. colleague said, we remain deeply disturbed by the troubling reports on the situation in Xinjiang. As we should all do in this House, we have repeatedly voiced our concerns both publicly and privately, and I have taken action.

Canada recently co-signed a declaration on this important issue at the Human Rights Council. I have been engaging with my international partners, and more recently, I have engaged the United Nations high representative for human rights to see what more the international community can do together to uphold the human rights of Uighurs.

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● (1455)

[Translation]

SENIORS

Ms. Andr  anne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, no one in the Bloc believes that seniors are just a comma or a line in the Constitution. No one. However, for seniors the second wave means more health risks, more isolation and more anxiety.

Seniors have enough anxiety already without adding financial stress to the mix. The government can take care of its own jurisdictions. Will the government listen to seniors and increase old age security by \$110 a month starting at age 65?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, seniors have been our number one priority from the start. That is why we brought in programs specifically for them. Our seniors are suffering the most from this pandemic. They are the hardest hit. They are the ones who built our country and our society, and we owe them everything.

When the Bloc Qu  b  cois brings seniors into a constitutional crisis—or so they call it—that bothers me. Seniors are the ones who have suffered the most, and we will be there for them.

Oral Questions

Ms. Andr  anne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, is the government trying to again tell us that the Quebec government is absolutely not responsible for seniors? The leader and the Deputy Prime Minister said so, as though they had discovered the one talking point that would silence us. I have news for them: We are going to keep talking about seniors.

Quebec is responsible for CHSLDs, our long-term care facilities. Ottawa is responsible for old age security. The federal government should start minding its own business, rather than meddling in the affairs of others. Will it now increase the old age security benefit for all seniors at age 65?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to see that the Bloc Qu  b  cois recognizes that the federal government has a say in matters pertaining to seniors.

The point is that we can and must work together for our seniors and for society as a whole. We are in the middle of a second wave. This is not the time to quarrel, to be divided or to look at who should do what. Let's work together and pool our resources. Let's do that.

The government has a responsibility towards society and our seniors, as do opposition parties. We were all elected by the people and our shared responsibility is to work together for the well-being of all Canadians.

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[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the middle of a pandemic, the government announced policy without a plan. It systematically prohibited some firearms on the basis of appearance, but the Liberals have no plan on how to buy back the firearms or even a budget to pay for them. They tried to purchase a plan but have cancelled the tender.

When will the minister admit he has no plan for the firearms he prohibited and agree to withdraw the order in council?

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada has a very strong plan. We are going to strengthen gun control in this country. We have begun by prohibiting a number of weapons that were designed and have been used to kill large numbers of people. They are now prohibited.

We are absolutely committed to continuing with the strengthening of gun control measures, including taking steps to secure our border so that guns will not be smuggled in and dealing with those who steal guns or otherwise divert guns into the hands of criminals.

We are working for the safety of Canadians. The opposition will weaken gun laws; we intend to strengthen them.

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Jacques Gourde (L  vis—Lotbini  re, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the repercussions of the Liberal government's lack of vision are reverberating through the entire Canadian economy. While some companies are shutting down for lack of business, others are cutting back on production for lack of workers.

While the Liberal government is developing the criteria for the new EI programs, will it take into account that companies are having serious difficulties recruiting Canadian workers?

[English]

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can assure every member in this House that we are taking robust steps to make sure that everybody is encouraged to work when it is safe for them to do so, that when they are available to work they take job offers and that they are put in a position to work in healthy and safe work environments.

Quite frankly, Canadians want to work, and we are doing everything we can to put in place circumstances so they can do so safely.

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● (1500)

[Translation]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, from the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Canada has spent more than any other country in the G7 and has the highest unemployment rate.

Meanwhile, in the midst of our economic recovery, small businesses in Quebec keep looking for workers but are unable to find them. This means that even with the billions of dollars of deficit off-loaded to our children, the Liberal government's measures are not working. What is worse, it did not present any kind of economic recovery plan in the throne speech.

Can the Prime Minister tell us when he will present a real economic recovery plan to everyone?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question.

Our economic recovery plan is working. Members do not need to take my word for it. I want to read a quote from Lucy Iacovelli, Canadian managing partner of KPMG's national tax practice. She said, "Our clients have told us that the federal wage subsidy program is helping them not only to retain their employees, but also to cope with pandemic-related costs and rehire workers who have been laid off".

*Oral Questions**[English]***CANADIAN HERITAGE**

Mr. Vance Badawey (Niagara Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Wednesday is Orange Shirt Day. I invite all to wear orange, to help raise awareness for this important day, among their friends, their families and within their communities.

In our last mandate, we made significant progress in supporting self-determination, improving service delivery and advancing reconciliation. Moving forward on reconciliation with indigenous peoples is a priority to this government. We still have work to do; reconciliation is an ongoing process.

Could the minister update the House of Commons on the government's intention to respond to call to action number 80 regarding a national day for truth and reconciliation?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is no relationship more important to us than the one with indigenous peoples. Implementing the Truth and Reconciliation report's call to action number 80 to establish a statutory holiday remains a top priority for our government.

Thanks to the important work being done with our partners among the Inuit, Métis and first nations, as well as the Orange Shirt Society, we will be tabling a bill to make September 30 a statutory holiday.

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NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne was nearly 7,000 words long. Energy is Canada's leading export and supports 800,000 jobs, yet there was not a single mention of oil, gas, pipelines or energy workers. Nor was there any mention of a plan to expedite the approval process of more than 20 billion dollars' worth of job-creating energy projects currently stuck in the regulatory queue.

My question is simple: Why not?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me quote from the Speech from the Throne. It was mentioned, "The Government will: Support manufacturing, natural resource, and energy sectors" and that "Canada cannot reach net zero without the know-how of the energy sector...including people in places like British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Newfoundland and Labrador."

We have supported our energy sector throughout this pandemic. We will continue to support it and rely on our workers as we build back better.

Mr. Greg McLean (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, thousands of men and women depend on Newfoundland and Labrador's offshore industry to provide for their families, but the government's announcement on Friday left them behind once again. After suffering six months of job losses, this is the latest in a growing list of failed government approaches to the oil and gas industry, with no specifics, no timelines and none of the supports that industry has been asking for.

When is the government going to arrive at a plan that actually provides the assurances workers in the oil and gas industry need that their jobs will survive this downturn?

● (1505)

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are committed to the successful and sustainable co-management of our offshore under the Atlantic accord and have taken action to support the people and economy of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Our government has announced a \$320-million transfer to the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to support jobs and to ensure a sustainable, long-term, low-emitting future for our offshore. This agreement will allow the province to invest in activities to create jobs, such as safety improvements, maintenance and upgrades of existing facilities, and research and development. We believe in our workers, and we will always have their backs.

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TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Jeremy Patzer (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, cell and Internet connections are slow or non-existent for millions of Canadians. They have less opportunity for working or learning from home. It is also a public safety issue, especially in rural areas. My constituent Mark had his combine catch on fire, and he had to drive 20 minutes just to be able to call 911.

Five years ago, the Liberals promised to connect Canadians. Five months ago, the Minister of Rural Economic Development said the government would accelerate broadband funding. Five days ago, the Liberals recycled an empty promise to accelerate connectivity. When will they actually get it done?

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Rural Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since day one, we have worked to connect over a million households to high-speed Internet, and that work is far from over.

Access without high-speed Internet and cell service is difficult at the best of times, but because of COVID-19, hardships, frustrations and challenges have increased. Our government is aware. We are accelerating our plans. We are adding ambitions to those plans. We will do everything we can to connect every household to high-speed Internet, because economic recovery for Canada begins with rural broadband.

HEALTH

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Ontario reported a record 700 new cases of COVID-19 this afternoon, and 104 of those cases are from the Peel region. These trends are extremely concerning.

Last week, the Minister of Health was in the Peel region to meet with public health officials. She also joined the Brampton South Youth Council to encourage young people to download the COVID-19 alert app.

Could the Minister of Health inform the House about ongoing work with the provinces to address rising cases in hot spots like Brampton? Could the minister also update Canadians about the latest in vaccine development?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yes, indeed, it was my pleasure to meet with Dr. Loh and all of the hard-working officials with Peel Public Health just last week, to talk about what other supports we could provide to the region as it tries to combat COVID-19 in its own jurisdiction.

This is the approach that we have taken: supporting provinces and territories to enable them to have robust testing and contact tracing systems, but also working with local public health units and regions to ensure that we understand what more we can provide at the federal level.

We need to work together on COVID-19, whether it is at the local, provincial or federal level.

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TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this pandemic showed us that high-speed broadband is an essential service for work and school. Sixty-three per cent of rural households do not have access to high-speed broadband. Some have no service at all. Those who do are seeing rising rates.

The Liberals have admitted their plan to connect Canada in the year 2030 is a failure for business and a failure for education. It fails research and ultimately fails the consumers with obscene pricing. The NDP broadband plan would get access to everyone within four years with affordable prices, without costing the government anything, and be supported by industry and consumer groups.

Will the Liberals just adopt the NDP plan and get on with the job?

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Rural Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would also add the two-thirds of first nations communities that currently do not have access to 50/10 high-speed Internet.

We are aware. Since we formed government, over a million households have been connected in over 900 communities, including 190 indigenous communities. Our plan is on track and we are determined to add accelerated efforts.

I look forward to support from colleagues, supporting the Speech from the Throne and subsequent measures, to ensure that every household is able to connect to high-speed Internet.

Routine Proceedings

● (1510)

TAXATION

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Mr. Speaker, during the pandemic shutdown, Canadians banged pots and pans to thank front-line workers, including grocery store workers who were among the most at risk of contracting COVID-19. Meanwhile, over the past six months, Canada's 20 richest billionaires, including the owners of Canada's largest grocery store chains, increased their wealth by a staggering \$37 billion.

Will the government implement a wealth tax so that Canada's wealthiest citizens contribute fairly to the public services that their businesses and employees rely on?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the important question.

Right now, as our country is facing a global pandemic, it is important for us to unite rather than divide. It is more important than ever. Having said that, it is also really important for everyone in Canada to pay their fair share. That is why in the Speech from the Throne we committed to taxing Internet giants, to taxing stock options paid to executives at mature companies and to being sure that we have an inclusive society and an inclusive economy.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

COVID-19 RESPONSE MEASURES ACT

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-4, An Act relating to certain measures in response to COVID-19.

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

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PETITIONS

HUMAN RIGHTS

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to introduce in the House a petition by 44 Canadians who raise the issue of the campaign against the Uighur population in communist China. Among other things, the Chinese government is implicated in things such as political and anti-religious indoctrination, arbitrary detention, separation of children from families, compulsory abortion, organ harvesting and all those ugly things.

Routine Proceedings

The petitioners call upon the House to formally recognize that the Uighurs in China have been and are being subjected to genocide, and secondly, that the government use the Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act, commonly known as the Magnitsky act, to sanction those who are responsible for the heinous crimes being committed against the Uighur people.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, members may have seen the images of people lined up at the train station, being loaded into cattle cars and taken off to concentration camps. No, I am not talking about the Nazi era. I am talking about right now, today. Uighurs in China are being loaded into cattle cars and taken to concentration camps.

I have a petition here from Canadians who are formally asking for Canada to recognize the genocide of the Uighurs and are calling for the Canadian government to use the Magnitsky act in order to end this horrible human tragedy.

• (1515)

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I present a petition on behalf of concerned Canadians regarding the situation in Kashmir. The petitioners are asking that the Canadian government send a fact-finding mission of MPs, journalists and human rights workers to assess the situation. As well, they are asking that the Canadian government work with the UN to ensure a resolution of the conflict.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to join my colleagues in tabling a petition with respect to the horrific crimes happening in East Turkestan. This is what one expert, Adrian Zenz, has called the largest mass detention of a minority community since the Holocaust, and it is time we act to deliver on the promise of “never again”.

I thank members of communities across Canada that have been active in mobilizing public response and signing petitions. This petition calls for the recognition of the gross violations of human rights against the Uighurs as an act of genocide. The petitioners also call for the use of the Magnitsky act against those involved in these abuses.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I stand today once again to present a petition from young people across my riding of South Okanagan—West Kootenay and the neighbouring riding of Kootenay—Columbia.

They are extremely concerned about the accelerating impacts of climate change and wonder whether they will be able to grow, survive and thrive in an uncertain future. They point out that Canada's climate targets are completely insufficient to play our role in keeping global warming below two degrees and that continued subsidization of the fossil fuel sector is sending us in the wrong direction.

The petitioners call for meaningful legislated climate targets, effective carbon tax and redirecting fossil fuel subsidies into jobs and

training for renewable energy systems, energy efficiency and low-carbon transportation.

CANNABIDIOL

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour and privilege to present this petition today.

Cannabidiol, or CBD, is a non-addictive, non-intoxicating, non-psychoactive part of the cannabis plant that is associated with a number of health benefits.

The petitioners call upon the House of Commons to amend the regulation of CBD and classify CBD as a natural health product, to remove CBD from the prescription drug list as certain dosages and to legalize the transportation of CBD products across the Canadian border.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to stand with many of my colleagues and also present a petition signed by Canadians, condemning and showing concern for the genocide taking place against the Uighurs by the Communist Party of China.

These Canadians call to formally recognize the Uighurs in China who have been and are being subject to genocide. They call for the use of the Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act, known as the Magnitsky act, and sanction those responsible for these heinous crimes.

It is incredible. We see satellite pictures of these concentration camps and to think that is happening in our world today is absolutely unacceptable.

The Speaker: Before we continue, I want to remind hon. members that once they are done presenting their petitions to bring them to the table themselves, seeing that we are practising safe measures so the pages are not in danger.

Presenting petitions, the hon. member for Courtenay—Alberni.

OPIOIDS

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, sadly I am rising once again today to table a petition on behalf of constituents from Port Alberni, Qualicum and Parksville. They are raising concerns about the fact that over 15,000 Canadians died as a result of fentanyl-poisoned sources, which were preventable deaths. The number of these preventable deaths total beyond all public health emergencies in the last 20 years, including SARS, H1N1, Ebola and COVID-19.

The petitioners call on the government to declare the current opioid overdose and fentanyl poisoning crisis a national public health emergency; that it reform current drug policy to decriminalize personal possession; and create, with urgency and immediacy, a system to provide safe, unadulterated access to substances so people who use substances experimentally, recreationally or chronically are not at imminent risk of overdose due to a contaminated source.

• (1520)

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition signed by Canadians who wish to bring to the attention of the House the gross human rights violations that are taking place in China by the Communist Chinese regime against Uighurs, including the unlawful detention of some three million Uighurs in what are modern concentration camps.

The petitioners call on the House to formally recognize that Uighurs have been subject to genocide and call for the imposition of Magnitsky sanctions on Communist Chinese officials responsible for these heinous acts.

GRADUATE STUDENTS

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise today with an e-petition from graduate students. They are calling on the government to provide assistance to them.

They face unique challenges as a result of the COVID-19 crisis, including the loss of research assistantships and fellowships, delays in program completion and the dwindling job market. They also emphasize that the insufficiencies with CERB, the Canada emergency student benefit and, of course, the Canada student service grant have not helped their case and certainly have not helped the case for international students.

They ask the Government of Canada to not forget graduate students and to broaden the eligibility for hopefully potential future student grant and assistance programs for their sake and for their future.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I too am honoured to rise, but it is unfortunate that I have to present a petition from Canadians who are profoundly concerned with what is going on in East Turkestan, also known as Xinjiang province in China. The Chinese Communist Party has been subjecting the Uighur Muslim population to crimes against humanity that amount to genocide.

The petitioners ask the House and the Government of Canada to recognize these acts as a genocide and also to implement the Magnitsky act and sanction those individuals in the Chinese Communist Party who are responsible for these outrageous crimes against humanity.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise in the House today to present a petition highlighting the plight of Uighur Muslims in China.

Routine Proceedings

Uighur Muslims are being persecuted and going through unimaginable hardships under the Communist Party of China's dictatorship, from forced sterilizations to forced abortions to birth suppression and forced organ harvesting, just to name a few. Uighur Muslims are facing genocide, as outlined in the UN convention.

I urge all parliamentarians to support this petition to recognize that Uighur Muslims are being subjected to genocide in China and also to use the Magnitsky act to sanction those committing these heinous crimes against the Uighur people and human rights violations.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am here to submit a petition on behalf of Canadians who are concerned about the situation in China, where the Uighur Muslim population has been subjected to isolation in a variety of acts. They are very serious.

The petitioners would like to see the Government of Canada formally recognize that the Uighurs in China have been and are being subjected to genocide and to use the Magnitsky act that was passed in the chamber to isolate those officials who sponsor these acts.

I ask that the government respond not just to the petition but to the concerns in this in a real way that shows Canadian morals on the world stage.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I too am rising on the issue of the ongoing genocide in East Turkestan or Xinjiang province. Three million Chinese Uighurs are being imprisoned in concentration camps, rounded up, taken away from their families in what is clearly an act of genocide.

The petitioners point out that Canada must act against this by using the Magnitsky act. We cannot just do this against small countries; we must take a stand against great countries as well. Being a great power is no excuse to get away with something as horrible as what is going on in Xinjiang, East Turkestan, right now.

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• (1525)

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

*Government Orders***REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY DEBATE**

SITUATION IN CHINA

The Speaker: The Chair has notice of a request for an emergency debate from the hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, prior to the shutdown of Parliament, the Subcommittee on International Human Rights conducted two days of hearings into the human rights situation of Uighur Muslims in China. Your predecessor, Mr. Speaker, has granted emergency debates in the past in response to similar acts of unfolding mass violence, especially when those acts of violence may cross the threshold into genocide.

Three years ago, we had an emergency debate in this place on the Rohingya genocide, which eventually led to an official declaration by Parliament that those events constituted genocide according to the legal definition. The unfolding crisis invites you, Mr. Speaker, to follow that precedent and help us move forward, because the lives and security of an entire people are at stake.

The situation facing Uighurs is similar to that facing the Rohingya, although it is in certain respects even more terrifying. We see a clear and intentional effort by a permanent member of the UN Security Council to eradicate a people and a culture from the face of the earth, using the most sophisticated technology on offer and in the meantime enslaving those same people and selling us the products of their labour.

Experts at the subcommittee called this the largest mass detention of a minority community since the Holocaust. The world has seen the evidence: the photos of people loaded onto trains and the scars of the victims. The subcommittee heard from victims, women who were witness to the systematic sexual violence, forced abortion, forced sterilization and forced insertion of IUDs as part of an orchestrated strategy to prevent the continuing existence of the Uighur people. This is happening as we speak. New reports today in the New York Times show the intentional destruction of mosques and many other important religious sites.

For the moment, I will leave the final word to the great former parliamentarian, former justice minister, Irwin Cotler, who told the subcommittee:

When I was minister of justice back in 2005, the UN General Assembly unanimously adopted the responsibility to protect doctrine. That doctrine says, simply put, that if in any country we are witnessing war crimes, crimes against humanity and, God forbid, the unthinkable, namely genocide, and the government in that country is unwilling or unable to act or, worse, is the author of those crimes against humanity, if not genocide, then there is a responsibility on behalf of the international community to intervene and act to prevent, to punish and to sanction those war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. What we have here with respect to the Uighurs is a classic case study of such war crimes, crimes against humanity and, as I and others have mentioned, acts that are constitutive of genocide. That warrants our involvement, under the responsibility to protect doctrine, to initiate, undertake and implement the panoply of remedies that were heretofore recommended before your committee, some of which I recommended in my testimony, this being part of the responsibility to protect doctrine.

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan for his intervention. However, I am not satisfied

that his request meets the exigencies of the Standing Orders at this time.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS NO. 1

The House resumed consideration of the motion, and of the amendment.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola has five minutes of questions remaining.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Winnipeg North.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what we have witnessed over the last six or so months is a great spirit among all different stakeholders, whether they are government agencies, non-profit organizations or individual outstanding Canadians, coming together to work and appreciate the challenges that were being brought forward as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As such, there is an obligation, and the national government has been a leader at providing the types of supports that are absolutely critical in a time of need. The bill we are trying to suggest to all members of the House, which needs to be passed rather quickly, is to continue that monetary support, in particular for those Canadians who truly need it.

Would the member not agree that we should continue to work together to see quick passage of the legislation?

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I certainly appreciate the question by the member for Winnipeg North, the oracle for Winnipeg some might say.

In regard to my speech, I do not think the member actually heard the substance of the speech. I said that we as the Conservative Party want to ensure people have the benefits to help them through an emergency time during this pandemic. However, it is the way the government has conducted itself. It prorogued Parliament and then two days later announced these new benefits. We could have had an accountability week here where we could have begun debate and this deliberative party, this Parliament, could have ensured that we would have a substantive response to the ending of the CERB. However, that did not happen. The Liberals want to play a game where if we do not pass it, they will say that it is we as the opposition who are holding it up and that we do not want to support Canadians, which is wrong. That is a wrong way to run this Parliament.

• (1530)

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member for Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola is my neighbour. In fact, he used to be my MP before the boundaries were redrawn in 2015. I listened carefully to his speech, but I am getting a bit confused about where the Conservatives stand on a number of issues around the COVID response.

I was happy to hear the member talk about the emergency payments that were supposed to be made to people with disabilities. I do not remember the Conservatives calling for any supports for people with disabilities through the summer. It was the NDP that pushed for that.

I want to ask about sick days. The NDP has put forward a much-needed proposal to give workers sick leave for 10 days, so that they do not go to work sick. The costs that would save, for people's health and for the economy, are immense.

What does the member think of that?

Mr. Dan Albas: Mr. Speaker, another viewpoint from British Columbia is always welcome, that being from my neighbour, the hon. member.

To the substance of the question, first of all, if the previous critic for this file did not make it clear that the Conservatives support seeing people with disabilities get help during the COVID-19 crisis that clearly falls on me, because I served in that role. I take that upon myself and the criticism is probably warranted.

By the same token, the problem we have with this is the process that the Liberal government has chosen to try and ram this through in one day. The particular element of the sick leave called for, I believe, is necessary during this emergency time, but in the legislation itself there will be a lot of red tape and a lot of unanswered questions. Unfortunately, due to the format that the member's leader and the Prime Minister have agreed to, we will not have a full debate.

I worry that there will be questions raised that will lead to complications, meaning people will be without the support they need because we rushed the process. We are in favour of these benefits during an emergency, but we are not in favour of the process that this member, his party and the Prime Minister have pushed on Canadians and their representatives.

Mr. Tony Van Bynen (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne.

I am pleased to rise today to participate in debate on the motion, but before I begin, I want to acknowledge that we are gathered on traditional unceded Algonquin territory.

When the pandemic first shattered our economy last spring, our government was there to support workers and their families. We created the Canada emergency response benefit during a time in the pandemic when we were telling people to stay home in order to flatten the curve and to keep Canadians safe. We swiftly followed the CERB with the Canada emergency student benefit as we saw students struggling when their summer jobs and training opportunities dried up. We created thousands of jobs and training opportunities for youth, and ensured that the not-for-profit sector received

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support so that these organizations could continue to help their communities. To provide certainty and continuity, we recently extended the CERB by an additional four weeks, from 24 to 28 weeks. In addition to this extension, we made changes to the EI program so that more people could access benefits.

We are here today discussing measures that would create new benefits: the Canada recovery benefit, the Canada recovery sickness benefit and the Canada recovery caregiving benefit. Before diving into these new benefits, I would like to say a few words about the employment insurance program and the recent measures that were put in place to help Canadians.

On August 20, our government announced temporary changes to the EI program that would help millions of Canadians meet the eligibility requirements in three ways. First, people can qualify for EI with as few as 120 hours of work. To do this, we are providing all EI claimants with a one-time credit of insurable hours, that is, 300 hours for regular benefit claimants and 480 hours for special benefit claimants. Second, we are helping to meet EI eligibility requirements by setting a national unemployment rate of 13.1% across all regions of the country. This is providing a uniform requirement for 420 hours for people to qualify for EI. I also want to assure Canadians in EI regions with a rate higher than 13.1% that they would keep the higher rate. The third measure we are undertaking with the EI system is to freeze the EI premium for two years, which would help both employees and employers.

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Our changes are allowing more Canadians to access employment insurance and its associated tools and resources. That being said, we understand that many workers still may not be eligible for EI, even with these changes. That is why our government is proposing to introduce a suite of three new benefits via the legislation before us now. The Canada recovery benefit would help those who are looking for work, but do not qualify for EI. It would provide eligible Canadians with \$500 per week for up to 26 weeks, and the eligibility period would run from September 27, 2020 to September 25, 2021. This benefit would be for the workers who have had to stop working due to COVID-19 or have had their income reduced by at least 50% relative to their pre-COVID-19 income. Additionally, as with EI, they must be actively looking for work. Just like the EI system, this new benefit would also allow people to earn an income from employment and/or self-employment while still receiving the benefit.

The new Canada recovery sickness benefit would prevent workers from having to choose between their health and paying their bills. It would provide \$500 per week for up to two weeks if workers were ill or had to self-isolate for reasons related to COVID-19.

Finally, the Canada recovery caregiving benefit would provide \$500 per week per household for up to 26 weeks for a worker who needs to take unpaid leave to care for a loved one due to a school, day care or day program closure.

• (1535)

The benefit would also be available to workers if someone needed supervised care and needed to stay home because they were deemed high risk by a health professional or if their regular caregiver was not available because of COVID-19.

The benefit would also support workers who could not make at least 50% of their income because their child or family member was sick, in quarantine or at high risk of serious health implications due to COVID-19.

In order to ensure that federally regulated employees have access to job protected leave, our government is moving forward with amendments to the Canada Labour Code so employees can access the Canada recovery sickness benefit and the Canada recovery caregiving benefit.

As laid out in the throne speech, we have an opportunity not just to support Canadians but to grow their potential. That means making historic investments in training, and working with provinces and territories to ensure that Canadians across the country have access to the tools and the skills training they need to succeed.

As a first step, this bill would continue with an investment of \$1.5 billion to the provinces and territories to support on-the-ground training services for Canadians.

We are making sure we continue to support the people who need it most because we are still in a crisis. I encourage hon. members to support these benefits and to help provide that much-needed solid foundation for Canadians.

• (1540)

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for working with us to make sure people

get the benefits they need right now. We are disappointed that it took until midnight last night, when benefits ended. The government should have done this and worked with all of us in Parliament in August instead of proroguing. We can agree with the opposition side on that.

I received an email from Claire. Her son Sam in Vancouver is 32, lives with autism and receives disability benefits. He gets about \$1,183 a month and barely gets by. The poverty rate in B.C. is \$1,666 a month. He experienced a renovation and ended up having to leave his place in the middle of the pandemic. He receives a bus pass too, which he cannot use right now, so he had to buy a bike. He is now paying \$750 a month for accommodation, which means he has \$443 to pay for food, clothing and personal supplies. Anyone who has been to Vancouver knows that is not enough.

The \$600 that was promised to people with disabilities still has not happened. Here we are at midnight helping people with CERB and the other benefits, but where are the benefits for people living with disabilities who have been waiting for them?

Will this member advocate for the government to fix this immediately to help people like Sam?

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: Mr. Speaker, my wife and I deliver food for the food bank once a month and encounter circumstances as have been outlined by the member. It's heartbreaking to see the tragic circumstances individuals face from time to time.

This government is genuinely committed and will be moving forward to provide the support we need to. I have heard many times in the House today that we will do whatever it takes, and we will move forward to make sure no Canadian is left behind.

We need to firm up our safety net and we need to make sure we do this as quickly as possible.

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, many members of the opposition have expressed outrage about the prorogation of Parliament and the shutdown of committees. Earlier, the member's colleague said that while members of the opposition focus on prorogation, the government will focus on getting Canadians the support they need. That sounds nice, except it is almost as if the Liberals forgot that government is a function of Parliament. Nothing happens in government without the consent of Parliament.

I would simply ask my hon. colleague if he believes that Parliament should play an essential part in making sure that Canadians do in fact get the help they need.

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: Mr. Speaker, from the debate and discussions we have had today, we have heard that this government, this Parliament, does play an important role in the steps that we take to move forward in responding to the needs of Canadians.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to be back in the House.

There is something that has been bothering me. I was thinking about it yesterday when I left Lac-Saint-Jean. The government wants to pass Bill C-2 very quickly, but it shut down Parliament for over a month. The government told us that it was because a new throne speech was needed, but it could have prorogued Parliament for 24 hours.

Why does the government want to pass Bill C-2 so quickly when it could have just closed Parliament for 24 hours? Then we could have debated the bill properly.

[English]

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: Mr. Speaker, in developing what was in the throne speech, we consulted extensively with stakeholders. We consulted extensively with people who were facing the circumstances. I do not think anyone will deny today that the circumstances we were faced with and looking forward to in the first throne speech were entirely different. We are facing an entirely new world now and are in the middle of a crisis. It was important for this government to reset its priorities and it has done exactly that. The Liberals engaged their constituents. They have talked to people facing the difficulties that this unprecedented pandemic has put upon them.

• (1545)

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since the beginning of the pandemic, Canadians have come together, made sacrifices and done their part to help limit the spread of the virus. As we safely restart our economy, the Government of Canada remains committed to providing Canadians the support they need to continue to make ends meet while staying safe and healthy.

Throughout the pandemic, I received feedback from citizens in my riding of Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne on the various measures put in place by our government to support them. I heard firsthand how the Canada emergency response benefit was there for them when their offices closed and they found themselves without income because of COVID. They were able to put food on the table and keep the lights on. Businesses in my riding were able to keep their employees thanks to the Canada emergency wage benefit. However, while some businesses have reopened and many Canadians have returned to work, some Canadians are still unable to return to work or find employment. We will not leave them behind.

I am therefore happy to support the three new recovery benefits to be administered by the Canada Revenue Agency: the Canada recovery benefit, the Canada recovery sickness benefit and the Canada recovery caregiving benefit.

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First and foremost, we have to recognize that the Canada Revenue Agency has worked quickly over the past few months to administer several important COVID-19 economic measures, namely the Canada emergency response benefit, or CERB, for individual Canadians; the Canada emergency wage subsidy and the 10% temporary wage subsidy for employers, both for Canadian businesses; and, finally, the Canada emergency student benefit for students. I can assure members that the CRA stands ready to meet this challenge again.

Committed to serving Canadians, according to its people first philosophy, the CRA would continue to provide a simple and efficient application process, similar to what millions of Canadians have relied on to access the previous benefits. Eligible individuals will be able to apply for recovery benefits online through the CRA's My Account portal or by phone through the CRA's automated phone line.

The CRA has sought to continuously improve delivery of these emergency benefits to Canadians in a way that is both safe and efficient. The Canada Revenue Agency's employees have demonstrated a commitment to leveraging the CRA's systems while in real time quickly delivering emergency payments to those most in need. To achieve this, the CRA has witnessed an unprecedented immobilization of their resources to build on past successes.

Early in April 2020, the CRA worked with Payments Canada, the Department of Finance, the Receiver General and financial institutions to on board banks and credit unions to a streamlined direct-deposit update capability to facilitate the issuance of COVID-19 relief payments to individuals. To date, there have been nearly 2.9 million direct-deposit enrolments through financial institutions. Overall, 85% of individuals are receiving benefit payments through direct deposit.

The CRA also collaborated with financial industry stakeholders to implement direct deposits for businesses to facilitate the issuance of Canada emergency wage subsidy payments. On April 27, the first bank successfully transmitted direct-deposit information for businesses to the CRA. To date, over 102,000 business payroll accounts have provided direct-deposit information through their financial institutions. Overall, 58% of businesses are receiving their Canada emergency wage subsidy payment through direct deposit.

Members of the House will recall that Bill C-20 received royal assent on July 27, 2020, and revised the eligibility criteria for the Canada emergency wage subsidy in order to support the employers hardest hit by COVID-19. The bill extended the program to November 21, 2020, with the ability to extend the wage subsidy, by regulation, to no later than December 31, 2020.

Canadians can have confidence in the CRA's ability to support the delivery of these proposed new benefits. By way of example, I would like to draw members' attention to the following successes.

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• (1550)

Since April 6, almost 22.1 million CERB requests have been received and processed by the CRA, supporting nearly 5.3 million Canadian individuals. For the Canada emergency wage subsidy, as of September 20, the CRA has approved more than 1.14 million requests, for a total of nearly \$37.5 billion paid to support more than 317,000 unique applicants from Canadian businesses. With regard to the Canada emergency student benefit, as of September 24, more than 2.13 million applications have been approved by the CRA, supporting more than 706,300 Canadian students.

I have to underscore another important fact. This work was accomplished while carefully adhering to compliance and security protocols. The CRA is committed to preserving the integrity of the Canadian tax system, and I can assure the House that the CRA would use the same level of rigour in the administration of the three Canada recovery benefits that it did to implement the CERB, the Canada emergency wage subsidy, the temporary wage subsidy and the Canada emergency student benefit.

To ensure compliance with emergency benefits, since the start of this pandemic the CRA has designed electronic and manual verification measures with regard to the eligibility of applicants and the terms of reimbursement. On the one hand, and under guidance of its people first philosophy, the CRA has provided information regarding eligibility and support for Canadians who are endeavouring to comply with the benefit administration process.

The agency recognizes that applicants may make an honest mistake in applying for an emergency benefit period for which they later become ineligible. To support honest Canadian citizens who wish to comply, the CRA has published information on its website to explain how individuals in these situations can easily repay the Canada emergency response benefit or the Canada emergency student benefit.

On May 11, the CRA introduced a tool in the My Account portal to allow individuals to make repayments with a few simple clicks. To date, nearly 70,000 repayments have been made through this repayment service. Rest assured: The CRA enforces measures for those who do not comply.

Allow me to detail the measures the CRA has put in place for increasing eligibility verification, curbing identity theft, preventing fraud and enhancing cybersecurity.

First, the CRA has robust systems and tools in place to monitor, detect, investigate and quickly neutralize potential threats. The monitoring of accounts for suspicious activity to detect fraud is performed routinely. Second, the CRA combines data analytics with business intelligence gathered from many sources, including law enforcement agencies, financial institutions and tips from Canadians, to support these efforts. During the administration of the emergency response benefit, the CRA also took steps to implement additional verification and security measures up front to help ensure they delivered benefit payments to the individuals who were entitled to receive them.

The proposed new recovery benefits outlined in the bill, if passed, will help ensure that Canadians continue to have access to the income support they need as they re-enter the workforce and re-

gain their income. We have confidence in the CRA's ability to administer these proposed new measures.

The CRA has a strong capacity and a commitment to Canadians, and its dedicated and highly skilled workforce is committed to serving Canadians during their time of need. As we gradually and safely restart our economy, the CRA will continue to put Canadians first.

• (1555)

Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, several times over the last seven months the government has left to the very last minute the introduction of legislation to provide supports for people. Does it seem appropriate to leave everything until the last minute and then in essence hold Parliament hostage to get the results it is looking for?

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Mr. Speaker, as we know, when the pandemic hit in March we were building the plane at the same time that we were flying it. It was very important that we addressed the immediate needs of Canadians across the country. Based on the feedback we were receiving from Canadians and from fellow MPs about what was working and where we needed to make tweaks, we delivered. We continued to support Canadians across the country, and when things changed and shifted we addressed them accordingly.

I hope my colleague will support the bill to make sure that constituents in his riding receive the supports they need.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have heard what the Canada Revenue Agency wants to do to help alleviate what we are going through right now.

I am very concerned about those who received the CERB in error, and those who were supposed to receive it but did not. I am also very concerned about the thousands of individuals who have been victims of fraud and will suffer the consequences by the end of this fiscal year. Some are not aware of it yet.

How can the Canada Revenue Agency be effective under this bill when we have only seen the tip of the iceberg of CERB fraud?

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

We know that there have been cases of fraud in Canada, and we have even seen more cases of telephone fraud during the pandemic. It is important to point out that we have made huge investments in fraud prevention and that we have also conducted investigations in collaboration with our provincial and territorial partners and police forces.

As soon as an individual becomes aware of potential fraud, it is important that they contact the Canada Revenue Agency to find out what they can do. We also ran a public awareness campaign about this. It is important that our colleagues in the House share this information with their constituents so that, together, we can prevent these kinds of fraud.

[English]

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one of the things that New Democrats fought for with the student benefit was an acknowledgement from the government that students with dependents and students living with disabilities have increased costs. After some fighting, we were able to get the government to acknowledge that and increase the benefits on their behalf. However, I found it very frustrating that at the time, the government would not recognize that students, as parents, have the same kinds of costs, whether the child is 12 or 13.

The Canada recovery caregiving benefit only applies to children who are under the age of 12. Does the member believe that the government should be leaving out all the parents with children over the age of 12?

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Mr. Speaker, as someone who spent my career in the education system, I know first-hand what it is like to go back to school while juggling a family. I did that myself when I decided to go back to school a few years ago. It is really important. I want to salute my colleague across the way. She highlighted a really good point, that by working together we were able to come to the decision to increase the amount for students who had dependents.

It is important that we continue to have this dialogue and that is why we are having this conversation today. It is important that we identify gaps, that we adjust and that we make sure we are supporting all Canadians in this difficult time.

• (1600)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, before I begin, I would like to say that I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Abbotsford.

I am here today to speak to Bill C-2.

Since this morning, we have heard a lot of talk about the part of the bill that concerns the changes to the CERB, now known as the Canada recovery benefit, which provides assistance for self-employed workers and for those who are not eligible for employment insurance and, importantly, who cannot go back to work. There is also the Canada recovery sickness benefit for workers who are sick or who have to self-isolate as a result of COVID-19. Finally, there is the Canada recovery caregiving benefit for people who have to stay at home to take care of children or a sick person because of COVID-19.

Everyone agrees that someone who gets COVID-19 needs help. We do not need to hear the Liberals' fake crying to understand that. Some of my family and friends needed the CERB because they were no longer working. That is okay. It helped them to get by.

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However, we would need more time to talk about other aspects of Bill C-2, aspects and details that we never seem to hear about. The bill introduces financial measures worth up to \$17 billion out of a total of \$50 billion or \$60 billion.

There will be no debate, even though we suggested meeting this past weekend. Last week, my colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent proposed that we meet on Sunday in committee of the whole to have a debate, put questions to the ministers and look closely at this bill. We know we need to act quickly, and we could have met over the weekend. People often say that this is like being in wartime. In wartime, the work goes on 24 hours a day, seven days a week, without stopping. This is urgent, but not urgent enough to work on a Sunday. It was even more urgent this morning, and the government decided to limit the debate.

When I walk around Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, Quebec, or elsewhere in Canada, people ask me if the government is going to control its spending.

This is not about helping Canadians who are in need because of COVID-19. It is about having controls in place, ways of making sure that the money is not being handed out willy-nilly on things that should have been examined more closely.

The Prime Minister shut down Parliament for six weeks. As everyone knows, he did this because he did not want any more talk about WE Charity. He locked the doors so that he would not have to hear about it. I have to say that he seems to have succeeded, since it is no longer getting covered in the media. The problem is still there, but that is a matter for another debate.

The members are back now, and the House of Commons is back to normal. We can now ask questions, and committees will resume soon. We need answers, because the money that the government is spending belongs to Canadian taxpayers.

The important thing is to keep things in perspective. Indeed, it is important to know the difference between what is given out to help with COVID-19 and money that is shamelessly sent out left and right to make friends happy.

I would like to talk about what happened last week. At the last second, the government shut down the vaccine committee. Some of the people who were on the committee have ties with private companies. Once again, we saw cronyism in action for financial gain. The most important thing now is to defeat COVID-19 and come out of it at the lowest possible cost.

It is the opposition members' job to ask questions, but we are being muzzled.

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We do not want a repeat of what happened with the Canada emergency student benefits. The Prime Minister said that we needed to help young people. Most young people received more money staying at home doing nothing or playing on their Xbox than working at Tim Hortons, at a restaurant or at a local business and yet there is a severe labour shortage. The number of complaints I received about that this summer is crazy. People asked me what was up with this awful CESB. Instead of helping in the time of COVID-19, the government hurt economic development. That was the exact opposite of what to do.

The Conservatives even said so this summer before the CESB came into effect. We said that it would cause problems. The government did not want to listen to us and said that we just wanted to prevent people from getting money. That is not our style. That was their narrative, their bleeding hearts. We want to help, we have compassion, but we know how to count. We want to provide measured help. That is the difference.

• (1605)

I remind members that there was a lot of fraud. This was mentioned by people who spoke before me. A lot of people are taking advantage of the system. We knew that this would happen, since the government did not create any safeguards.

I got a call from a police officer in Longueuil this summer. He could not give me his name, but he told me that there were 45 envelopes with CERB cheques addressed to residents of a building that is home to people on welfare who were technically not supposed to have applied. These people had not stopped working because of COVID-19 but they had still applied. The officer asked me what he should do with these envelopes. This is just an example, but there are plenty more if anyone wants them. Some screening measures were needed.

I would like to come back to the part of Bill C-2 that talks only about the different benefit programs, and not about any safeguards. I will highlight a few examples from the bill that raise some questions.

First, there is the issue of PPE procurement. There is some \$2.7 billion allocated for PPE, but it is not clear who it is for or how it works. These are the kinds of questions people want answers to.

The bill also states that \$116 million will be allocated to “Virtual Care and Mental Health Tools for Canadians”. What does that mean? Can someone tell us?

The bill also mentions “Personal Support Worker Training and Other Measures to Address Labour Shortages in Long-Term...Care”. Does that not fall under provincial jurisdiction? Is it not being taken care of by Quebec's CHSLDs and other facilities? We are talking about \$13 million. What does that mean? Compared to \$353 billion, \$13 million does not seem like very much. I am trying to understand but millions add up to billions.

A total of \$262 million is allocated to “Youth Employment and Skills Development Programs”. That is a quarter of a billion dollars. Where is that money going?

The bill also refers to “Additional Support for Canadians Experiencing Homelessness”. We certainly want to help the homeless, but can we know what that \$237 million is for and where it is going?

Vancouverites are familiar with Granville Island. A total of \$6 million is allocated to a “Granville Island Emergency Relief Fund”. What is happening on Granville Island that it needs \$6 million under Bill C-2? We do not know.

As a final example, I will bring up “Support for The Federal Bridge Corporation Limited”. What does help with COVID-19 have to do with granting \$1 million to the Federal Bridge Corporation?

I can provide many more examples like these. I have two full pages. There are \$7 billion worth. Amounts are allocated, and we do not really know why. These are major budget items, but we are not allowed to talk about them. The Liberals are forcing us to talk only about benefits and about helping people. As I said earlier, we understand that. However, we are talking about billions of dollars for things that deserve an answer, and we will not get those answers because time is of the essence.

The reason time is of the essence is that Parliament was shut down for a month and a half because the Prime Minister would rather not hear about his problems. Now we have several billion dollars in spending before us. This is what Canadians are fed up with, not the government's COVID-19 assistance for Canadians in need or for entrepreneurs. They are fed up with us not really knowing where all this money is going.

When this is all over, when all is said and done and we have spent, say \$500 billion or more, it will be hard to figure out how many hundreds of billions of dollars were spent willy-nilly in ways that could have been pared down or avoided because they had nothing to do with protecting people during the COVID-19 pandemic. That is the big question. We do not have an answer, and we will not be getting one anytime soon because everything is urgent and the government is being sloppy.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, over the summer the government sat in the House of Commons on several occasions. During these sittings, members of the opposition had the opportunity to ask, and did ask, literally hundreds of questions. Members could always review the questions, if they choose to do so, which provided many opportunities for opposition members to have direct input on a wide spectrum of programs. Today's bill is important because it continues supporting Canadians in a very real and tangible way.

As the opposition was afforded the opportunity during the summer and, as the minister's door and phones have been open to all members of the House, I am wondering why the member opposite believes the opposition has not had the opportunity to provide any input. We have done things the former government never did. Could the member tell me the last time the House sat in August?

● (1610)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Speaker, today I am talking about Bill C-2, but this gives me the opportunity to answer my colleague.

We did our job so well and asked so many great questions that they locked us out of Parliament. If we had not asked the right questions, the Prime Minister would have carried on as usual. However, my colleagues were so effective in committee and the WE Charity scandal was so public that we were able once again to show Canadians just how shady the Liberals can be. We were so good, the Prime Minister had to shut everything down.

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have a quick question, but I would first like to thank my Conservative colleague for his presentation.

There are many things we agree with, of course. It makes no sense to take us hostage as a Parliament, walking in at the last minute, presenting this at the last second, holding a knife to our throat and telling us that we have to rush it through. The bill has not been studied enough, and it is in danger of being bungled.

We agree on that, but I would be curious to hear what my colleague's long-term position is. In some ways, it can be said that this pandemic has actually exacerbated the very real challenges faced by self-employed workers and people in precarious jobs. I would be curious to know the Conservatives' position on this. Their government implemented a reform that was very harmful to these workers. Where do the Conservatives stand on this issue now?

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

COVID-19 has indeed created a climate that has exacerbated many problems and raised questions about all federal and provincial programs. Thinking about Quebec and all the problems we have in the area of health care, anything that was hidden before has now been exposed to the light of day.

Does EI need to be reformed? I think so. Were changes made in the past? Yes, but the situation was different. Of course we can re-hash what happened in the past compared to today. However, given what is going on now, it would be better to think about what has happened and change things for the future.

[English]

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is one of the rare times I have heard one of the Conservatives actually agree with us on a couple of things.

The first is the government's timing when it prorogued Parliament. This debate to decide what we are going to do about benefits should have happened a month ago.

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Second, the member touched on small businesses. We saw the rollout of the commercial rent assistance program, a boondoggle where only 15% of businesses have had help because of the creation of a landlord-driven application process that excluded many people who needed help with their small and medium-sized businesses.

We agree about the importance of the wage subsidy. Last week we learned from the CRA that businesses with 25 or fewer employees received 28% of the wage subsidy, which is very important. It shows just how important it is when 86% of businesses are small businesses that did not get support through the commercial rent assistance program.

The minister has said to stay tuned. We are waiting. We are still waiting. She said she is listening, but we have not seen any changes to this very important program, which she did not speak about.

Can the member speak about the businesses in his riding that did not get help because of the way this program was designed?

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

I have a very specific example involving a well-known company in Quebec, Nautilus Plus. This corporation has 37 gyms across Quebec, and its business model is to run everything from headquarters. The franchisees were therefore not entitled to the Canada emergency commercial rent assistance program. That created a problem. Practically speaking, a gym or a space in any given shopping mall is subject to the same conditions as any other independent gym. However, the overall structure of Nautilus Plus means that does not work.

These are the things that were raised. By working as a team and collaborating with the government, we suggested improvements from the start. However, the government was very slow to react. It is often quick to send money all over the place, but not so quick when it comes to being practical and effective.

● (1615)

[English]

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to engage in this debate. What we are really debating is a bill that will rush through between 50 billion and 60 billion dollars' worth of spending, with virtually no oversight and no accountability.

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The bill that this addresses is actually one that creates three benefits that we, as Conservatives, support. One is a benefit for workers who are unable to resume work or whose income has been reduced by 50% or more due to the COVID-19 crisis and are self-employed or otherwise ineligible for EI. That is one benefit.

There is a second benefit for workers who are ill or who must self-isolate due to COVID-19 and do not have paid leave or paid sickness benefits.

Then there is a third benefit for people who are unable to work because they are caring for a family member due to a school or daycare closure resulting from COVID-19.

These are things that we can support, but when we are talking about the spending of close to \$60 billion, and we have a government that only wants to debate this for four hours, without any committee investigation or oversight, that is a failure in respect for this Parliament.

We cannot begin to understand it and evaluate the performance of the government on COVID unless we understand the context in which this is all taking place. Members know that Canada was already overloaded with debt before the pandemic hit us, largely thanks to four years of reckless spending by the Liberal government. Members may recall back in 2015 when the Prime Minister won an election promising to balance the federal budget. Members may remember Stephen Harper warning us about the Prime Minister's promise to run tiny deficits. Do members remember that?

Four years later, all the Prime Minister has to show for his broken promise is a string of massive deficits, which are piling more and more onto our national debt. Who is going to pay for that? The millennials are going to have to pay. I hope millennials are watching this. They are the ones who will be paying for the \$400 billion of new debt that has been piled on just this year alone. They and other future generations will have to pay this back.

Canada entered the pandemic with our budgetary and fiscal situation severely weakened. Now we are facing an even graver crisis, a global pandemic for which our country was not prepared, financially or otherwise, and which has seen our national debt increase by a whopping 50% over the last six months. It is going to get worse before it gets better.

How did it come to this? Sadly, with a global pandemic looming, a situation where timing would be of utmost importance and leadership would be called for, the Liberals failed us on both counts. Over the last five years, the Prime Minister and his health minister allowed Canada's global public health intelligence network, which is our early pandemic warning system, to lapse. In fact, I was just reviewing the *Globe and Mail* article on it and it says that the government actually diverted resources away from global pandemic warning, analysis and intelligence to other functions. It is no surprise, then, that the Minister of Health did not act in a timely manner.

This morning I woke up to a screaming headline in *The Hill Times*: "Lapse in early pandemic warning system 'a colossal failure,' says former federal Liberal health minister Dosanjh". A former Liberal health minister, the predecessor to the current one, claims this is a "a colossal failure" to plan and to warn Canadians.

He says that it made him "angry" and it was "a near fatal mistake". Those are his words.

What was the current health minister's response? She proceeded to throw Canada's Public Health Agency under the bus.

● (1620)

By the way, this is the Public Health Agency that the health minister is responsible for. Its website talks about the health minister's responsibility and accountability for the Public Health Agency. All she can do, if the members can imagine it, is throw the agency under the bus.

If one wants an assessment of the government's performance during the COVID pandemic, it is a "colossal failure". It should come as no surprise that, as the health minister sat idly by, the virus spread around the world and across Canada. Day after day, week after week, the minister would stand in this House, and there is the seat she occupied at the time, and scold us for fearmongering. She repeatedly assured us that the risk to Canadians was low, day after day.

Those of us who were challenging her were saying that there were reports coming in from other parts of the world saying that this was serious. Her reply was that we were fearmongering. Flights from infection hot spots, such as China and Europe, Italy for example, continued to land at our Canadian airports and no one was checking passengers for infection. Our land borders remained wide open.

There is only one word that can adequately describe the minister's delay in acting, and that word is "reckless". Now the government is compelled to borrow and print hundreds of billions of dollars to support Canadians during this incredibly difficult time. We want to be supportive of that, and we are, but what has led to this is a series of spectacular flip-flops on the part of the Liberal government.

As I noted, the Liberals originally told Canadians that the risk of human-to-human transmission was low. In fact, as late as March 10, the minister said that the risk of spreading COVID was low and that she was "well-equipped to contain cases coming from abroad". One day later, she inexplicably proclaimed that COVID-19 could infect up to 70% of Canadians and that it was now a "national emergency and crisis". How can one move from it being a low risk one day and suddenly it is an emergency and a national crisis?

There was more flip-flopping. Our Liberal friends implied that anyone who dared suggest that the borders should be closed was somehow racist. I guess that is what Liberals do when they are caught up in a colossal failure. They do what comes naturally and call those who are asking important questions racist.

Liberals also flip-flopped on mask wearing. They originally said that wearing a mask was ineffective. That was certainly convenient, because we now know there were not enough masks to go around. This was because the government had thrown out millions of masks and hundreds of thousands of gloves from Canada's national emergency stockpile. They even sent 16 tonnes of PPE to the Chinese communist regime in Beijing, of all places.

As we all know, when the pandemic really hit, Canada had depleted its PPE. Ill-prepared and facing a critical shortage, Liberals did what they do well. They misled Canadians by downplaying the risk and pretending masks did not help. Fast forward to today, and suddenly Liberals are the great proponents of wearing masks, as if they had always been in favour of wearing them. Again, it is convenient.

It was also the Prime Minister who had the idea, of course, to partner with China on a COVID-19 vaccine development. How did that work out? The moment China had our research, it said that it was not interested and that it was blocking Canada from being part of the rollout of the very vaccine.

The reality is that when Canadians needed leadership, our government failed us. It shut down our pandemic warning system, failed to shut down our borders and flights, misled us on the seriousness of the pandemic, discarded and sent our stockpiles to hostile countries, flipped and flopped on masks, was thoroughly hoodwinked by the Chinese, and then, to add insult to injury, shut down Parliament over the summer to escape the fallout from the WE Charity scandal.

• (1625)

I will not get into it, because I know I am running out of time, but this motion and bill are about spending \$50 billion to \$60 billion of taxpayer money and the Liberals want to avoid debating it. They want to avoid scrutiny. They want to avoid accountability.

I, for one, am not going to take this lying down. I am going to speak out about it. I am going to demand that the Prime Minister get out of the way and let us as MPs do our job.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I did not want to interrupt my dear friend from Abbotsford in full flight of oratory, but he may have come very close to, if not actually, breaking the rules by waving *The Hill Times* in a fashion that amounted to being a prop. I wonder if the Speaker has any thoughts on whether we have relaxed those rules.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands for her intervention. I did see the hon. member for Abbotsford rising. I do not know if he has a further comment on the point of order. I will allow a brief response on that and we will see where we go from there.

The hon. member for Abbotsford.

Hon. Ed Fast: Mr. Speaker, I believe we are entitled to have speaking notes in the House, and I read directly from *The Hill Times*, which says, "Lapse in early pandemic warning system 'a colossal failure,' says former federal Liberal health minister." Surely that cannot be against the rules of the House, that we actually use this to make our speech not unlike any other notes we would have before us.

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The Deputy Speaker: I thank both hon. members for addressing the points on this.

Indeed, the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands is correct in noting that the use of props and other things that add to the message or commentary of hon. members when they have been recognized are in fact prohibited as part of these presentations.

However, also the member for Abbotsford makes the point that when members are using notes or documents in the course of their speeches, they routinely will switch from one to the other to make reference, to keep points that they wish to add in their remarks. I did note that the hon. member for Abbotsford waved his copy of *The Hill Times* for a few seconds or so, but I do not think, in this case, it would be construed as being a prop but rather a document that was used in support of his remarks.

If that is acceptable to the House and to hon. members, we will leave it at that and consider the matter closed.

Question and comments, the hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to what my colleague and friend was espousing with respect to his disappointment in the government. I suspect that his disappointment in this government would carry over to other levels of government. They did the same thing, in part, that our government did. They looked at the science and listened to what the health experts were saying at the time. It is interesting that whether it is the Prime Minister, the Minister of Health or provincial ministers, often the advice and discussions that take place are rooted in what the health experts and science are saying.

Does the member opposite not believe that as politicians, at times, and this is one of those times, we need to listen to what the health care experts are saying? Many of the comments that the member opposite made reference to were based on listening to those experts.

• (1630)

Hon. Ed Fast: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague suggested that other levels of government listened to science, and that is what the federal government should do. Except what happened in this case was that the intelligence network, which is supposed to provide the early warning system, was effectively emasculated because the minister allowed resources to be diverted to other functions of her ministry. Therefore, we did not have the same capacity to get an early warning about a pandemic, and now we have paid a huge price because of it. That is, as the *Hill Times* states, a "colossal failure" of the government.

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Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, like me, my colleague is from B.C. He talked about the irresponsible decision of the government to prorogue Parliament. Not only did it suspend Parliament from doing important things like fixing CERB, which ended last night, waiting to rush through this legislation as we are having to do right now, but it also suspended committees.

We sit on the fisheries and oceans committee, which is studying the fate of wild salmon right now. Therefore, we have another crisis going on right now. We had the lowest return last year of the Fraser River sockeye and this year we have had half of the lowest return last year.

Today, the government announced it would not follow through with recommendation 19 of the Cohen Commission report to remove fish farms that are impacting wild migrating salmon from the Broughton Archipelago. Nor has it followed through with recommendation 3, that DFO should not be promoting salmon farming or be an agent for the salmon farming industry period. The Cohen commission report cost \$26 million.

Maybe the member could speak about how this parliamentary decision has hurt not only committees, the House and people needing benefits, but also wild Pacific salmon that need us now the most?

Hon. Ed Fast: Mr. Speaker, the iconic west coast Pacific salmon is on a precipitous decline right now. We were doing a comprehensive study at committee and in the middle of it, as we were trying to come up with some answers as to how to reverse the decline and preserve our iconic salmon for generations to come, what did the Prime Minister do? He ran away from the WE Charity scandal, a very significant scandal of malfeasance on the part of the Prime Minister, his former finance minister and the WE Charity, and shut down Parliament. Therefore, every committee of Parliament was shut down and we could not get to the bottom of this problem. It is sad.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, since the member brought it up, let us talk about WE Charity.

I would like to talk about the recovery benefit from a parent's perspective. My colleagues and I spent several weeks looking into the WE Charity situation. Just as we were getting to the bottom of it, the government slapped the lid on the pressure cooker, and now here we are with a bill that needed to be passed quickly. Since we need to pass it quickly, I would like to talk about one aspect that troubles me as a parent. Parents with children aged zero to 11 can access this benefit whether their child is healthy or sick.

What does my colleague think about a recovery benefit that applies only for children aged eight to 11, even though a sick child aged 12 to 16 will need their mother or father?

• (1635)

[English]

Hon. Ed Fast: Mr. Speaker, Conservatives will always look at proposals to support Canadians through this very difficult pandemic.

The member mentioned the WE Charity. This is a scandal that Canadians should have taken notice of, because it was a situation where the Prime Minister and his finance minister used the COVID crisis as a premise to try to introduce a volunteer program that they were going to fund. Folks should think about that: a volunteer program for which the Prime Minister was going to pay \$1 billion. He was going to pay volunteers to do volunteer work. He was trying to shovel that money over to his friends, the Kielburgers, at the WE Charity. What a sordid affair that is. That is now reflected across government, and Canadians no longer trust the Liberal government.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my hon. colleague, the member for Davenport.

It is with great pleasure that I rise today to speak on measures that we have been putting in place relating to the economic recovery in response to COVID-19. This legislation is vital to the government's ongoing economic response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We are now more than six months into the worst health and economic crisis of our lifetime.

We talk about many of the programs that have been put in place, whether it is the CEWS, the CERB or the CECRA. Behind those acronyms are faces, names, individuals and families. There is one such individual's story I want to share because it brings home the importance of what we do here today and what it means to Canadians at home from coast to coast to coast.

A mother of two boys, who I met with during the campaign, said she would be losing her job because of COVID-19. She worked at a restaurant in another riding, the riding of Newmarket—Aurora, and the restaurant had shut down. This was her primary income. She pays rent every month for her housing. She asked me what she should do. I told her that our government was coming up with a response to help Canadians like herself from coast to coast to coast, and we came up with the CERB. That \$2,000 a month allowed her and her two boys to stay in their house. When she went to bed at night, she would not have to worry about what would happen when the end of the month came and she had to pay her rent.

When we debate the measures that are put in place for our economic recovery, members of Parliament need to take a step back to ensure that what we are doing is helping Canadians, like this individual in my riding, ensuring they have a roof over their heads, that they can pay their electricity bills at the end of the month, that they can get themselves going, that we can get them through this and get them back to work when it is safe to do so.

Businesses were closed, food supply chains were disrupted, the country's health care system was under a lot of stress, and continues to be under enormous strain. Children were let out of school and many families and individuals were coping with the reduction of their income. People have been hit hard. The last few months have been difficult for many people and businesses across the country. From day one, the government has taken extraordinary actions to protect Canadians and now our economy.

[Translation]

The COVID-19 economic response plan is one of the most comprehensive in the world. It represents 15.8% of our GDP. Our plan for helping Canadians is to continue helping them. The plan promises to protect millions of jobs in our country and to provide support for families. It also promises to keep businesses afloat across the country.

[English]

There are now encouraging signs. Our children, and my children thankfully, and grandchildren are in school, again having structure, and many Canadians are back to work. We are seeing a gradual re-opening of the economy, but the recovery from the pandemic will take time. We are living with COVID and have not beat it yet. In fact, we should all heed the advice from public health officials, with the number of cases during this second wave increasing.

It is still a threat to our health and our economy. This is why Canadians must continue to be careful and listen to the advice of our public health experts. This is also why the government must continue to support Canadians and businesses, and I ask all members of Parliament to join in that effort. This is exactly what we intend to do.

Back in March, Parliament adopted the Public Health Events of National Concern Payments Act, which expires on September 30.

[Translation]

The Public Health Events of National Concern Payments Act is an important part of Canada's response to COVID-19. It authorizes the government to make payments to Canadians and businesses affected by the pandemic. It allowed us to implement several of our assistance programs such as the Canada emergency response benefit. The CERB, as it is commonly known, helped eligible workers who had to stop working and those whose hours were reduced. Millions of Canadians received this taxable \$2,000 benefit every four weeks in response to COVID-19.

● (1640)

[English]

The Public Health Events of National Concern Payments Act also allowed us to give \$2.5 billion to help seniors struggling because of the pandemic. It was a one-time tax repayment of \$300 for those eligible for the old age security pension and an additional \$200 tax-free for those eligible for the guaranteed income supplement, for a total of \$500. As well, I was happy to see in the throne speech that we will be following through on the commitment to raise the old age security, when seniors hit 75, by 10%.

That legislation also paved the way for support for businesses across this country, especially our small businesses. As many mem-

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bers who have heard me debate and speak in the House know, the city of Vaughan, the city I reside in, and there are three MPs that represent this area, is home to over 13,000 small and medium-sized enterprise businesses, from Canadian Pacific and Saputo to Vision Plastics, Martinrea and our local corner coffee shops, pastry shops and grocery stores. Many of these businesses have utilized the Canada emergency wage subsidy and the Canada emergency business account to remain open, keep their employees employed and maintain that attachment between an employer and an employee, which we know is so important. So many experts commented on why we needed to do that 75% CEWS.

Canadians have worked their whole lives to establish businesses that serve their communities and provide good local jobs. Small businesses are not only the backbone of our economy but they define our neighbourhoods, and we all live in a neighbourhood. They give our main streets their character, owners become community leaders and they become the places we rely on to connect to one another.

[Translation]

It is largely thanks to the Public Health Events of National Concern Payments Act that we are able to give Canadians a hand, help businesses and support our economy. It is also why we are able to protect Canadians' health and safety.

Take the safe restart agreement, for example, which will help protect Canadians from future waves of COVID-19. The agreement is implemented in part through provisions in the Public Health Events of National Concern Payments Act, such as federal PPE purchases. The act also enabled us to fund medical research on COVID-19 and vaccine development.

[English]

As I said, the legislation was enacted in March, at the beginning of the pandemic. Six months later, we know more about the virus and its impact on our economy and on our daily lives. Millions of Canadians remain impacted and we need to be there to assist them. As our government has said, we have their backs. We have their backs through the programs and measures we have put in place, and we have their backs through the legislation that was put forward today.

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We have taken extraordinary action to protect both the economy and Canadians' quality of life, but there is so much more to do. It is important for Canadians that we extend the application of the act. The extension would help the government to support Canadians and businesses through the next phase of the recovery from the pandemic. It would allow us to continue to support provinces and territories, and improve the capacity of our health system. It would allow us to keep buying personal protective equipment to help essential workers. It would allow us to continue measures to ensure that the most vulnerable Canadians have access to the supports they need. It would continue to provide support for the public health, social and economic response in our indigenous communities. It would prevent any disruption to final payments under existing programs such as the Canada emergency response benefit, as well as the purchase of personal protective equipment supplies. It would ensure, frankly, ongoing support to those who need it the most.

[Translation]

This bill will set the stage for recovery. It will take time for the economy to get back up to speed. Over the coming weeks and months, we will have to adapt our assistance programs in response to the pandemic. We will have to create more flexible programs that will help Canadians find work while at the same time enabling us to adapt to the latest wave of the pandemic. Step one is making sure payments under existing programs are not delayed.

I invite all members of the House to support this bill.

• (1645)

The Deputy Speaker: I would like to make a brief statement before moving on to questions and comments.

It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the question to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment is as follows: the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands, Fisheries.

[English]

Mr. Scot Davidson (York—Simcoe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government House leader mentioned in his speech today specifically that Canadians are counting on us, and it was brought up by my hon. colleague from British Columbia that Canadians need leadership.

My question would be concerning prorogation and, as my hon. NDP colleague from British Columbia said, that committees were cancelled. We have the B.C. wild salmon in jeopardy right now. I have my private member's bill, Bill C-204, to stop the export of plastic waste for final disposal. All these things are being held up. We have a Liberal government that promised the Lake Simcoe clean-up fund \$40 million over a year ago, and we are still waiting for it in my riding of York—Simcoe, which is close to the member's riding as well.

We prorogued Parliament and committees were cancelled. We have to be able to walk and chew gum at the same time. People are depending on politicians now to earn their paycheques. We offered to sit on the weekend. If we have to work 24 hours a day to work together to get things done, that is what we have to do.

The Deputy Speaker: I hate to interrupt, but we have to leave enough time to get a few more questions in. I know the hon. member for York—Simcoe was getting to his question.

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

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Mr. Speaker, I have come to know my colleague from York—Simcoe very well since he was elected. It is nice to see that member of Parliament.

My focus, as I alluded to in my speech, is to make sure we assist those Canadians who remain impacted by COVID-19, like the individual I spoke about who was in an insecure housing situation and lost their job. We need to continue to support our most vulnerable Canadians. That is the focus that I am here for today. That is the focus this Parliament is about. Let us get this done and assist those Canadians who remain impacted by COVID-19.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I was a film technician in another life. I worked on film sets, including everything from big American blockbusters to small Quebec television shows. I was often unemployed between contracts.

When the CERB was announced back in April, I knew right away it would be problematic because there was no incentive to work. The Bloc Québécois proposed a very simple measure, specifically, to use the same mechanism for the CERB that is used for EI. Now this has been included in Bill C-2. The then finance minister told us that it would be impossible to implement, that it was too complicated. He told us that back in April.

My question for the member is very simple.

Why did we have to waste so much time and hurt so many businesses by failing to include incentives to work in the CERB?

Can the government explain why implementing them was impossible back in April but possible now, in September?

• (1650)

[English]

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Mr. Speaker, I am glad to hear that the party opposite has put forward constructive ideas, and that those ideas have made it into the legislation. That is great. This is how we can all work together to make sure we best serve our constituents back home and those sectors of the economy, which the member opposite is very familiar with, where the flow of income and revenue to people is very choppy and where it may not be an eight to four, Monday to Friday job. I have a great deal of respect for those individuals in the film and cinema sector who take on those initiatives. With their creativity, they bring vibrancy to the cultural life here in our beautiful country.

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Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am so glad the parliamentary secretary mentioned the real people behind these supports that we have been providing through the spring and summer.

Also, through the spring and summer, I have been wondering what this would look like if this had been a Liberal majority government. All along, it has been the NDP that has been dragging the Liberals. Their initial proposals have always been so timid and ineffective that we have had to create CERB, make the wage subsidy better and now look at fixing the sick leave benefits.

I wonder if the member could comment on why the Liberals have come out so ineffective and timid, and why it has been the NDP that has been doing the real work.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Mr. Speaker, I can tell the member for South Okanagan—West Kootenay that for the last six months I have been very hard at work in my riding, sometimes 10 or 12 hours a day, meeting with stakeholders and individuals, and passing on the ideas from Canadians, not politicians, to the ministers. I know my colleagues have done the same thing. All members of the House have gathered ideas from Canadians all around.

It is not a political game. It is providing services to Canadians and ensuring that the programs we have are robust and meet Canadians' needs during this unique and very extraordinary time in our country's and the world's history. That is what this is about: helping Canadians out. That is why we are all here.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an absolute honour for me to stand here in this venerable House on behalf of my constituents, the residents of Davenport, to speak on behalf of this very important bill, an act relating to economic recovery in response to COVID-19.

This key piece of legislation is vital to the government's economic response to the COVID-19 pandemic and will help ensure that Canadians continue to have the supports that they need to weather the COVID-19 storm.

[Translation]

Since the start of the pandemic, our government has quickly responded to the challenges posed by COVID-19 to Canadians and the Canadian businesses they rely on. The current rise in the number of COVID-19 cases and the start of the second wave shows that we are still grappling with the pandemic.

[English]

It is clear that we must not let our guard down when Canadians need us the most. By supporting Canadians who cannot work due to COVID-19, we are making it possible for our country to continue to practise physical distancing and to do the right thing to protect Canadians' health and safety. That is why we are asking all members of Parliament to also do the right thing and pass the bill before us so that the government can continue to finance emergency measures to support Canadians and businesses. As well, in passing the bill, we would ensure that three key measures are introduced that will help many Canadians who are still having a hard time finding a job and making ends meet, who are taking care of loved ones who are affected by COVID or who might potentially be sick and need some coverage in that area.

[Translation]

We can all agree that this pandemic is the most serious public health crisis Canada has ever faced. The job losses are perhaps the most obvious consequence of the global economic disruption that has affected Canadians and people around the world.

Given the job losses among Canadians, it quickly became evident that many workers would need support until they could once again find work. However, existing income support programs were not designed to deal with such an unprecedented situation.

That is why the government quickly created the Canada emergency response benefit, a temporary program to help millions of Canadians get through a very difficult period. Since the CERB was implemented at the start of the pandemic, when we asked Canadians to stay home, almost nine million Canadians have received this benefit, which helps them pay their bills and support their families.

With the economic recovery now well under way, CERB recipients will move over to the EI system. For those who do not qualify for EI in normal times, the government, through this bill, will temporarily create the Canada recovery benefit.

The bill would also create two new recovery benefits to help Canadians who are unable to work because of COVID-19. The government is proposing the Canada recovery sickness benefit and the Canada recovery caregiving benefit, which both aim to support Canadians as we work towards building a stronger and more resilient economy.

• (1655)

[English]

The bill would introduce three key measures that I think will be very helpful. I know many residents in my riding of Davenport will find them very helpful. We will be introducing the Canada recovery benefit of up to \$500 per week for up to 26 weeks to workers who are self-employed, who are not typically eligible for EI and still require income support. This benefit will support Canadians who have not returned to work due to COVID-19 or whose income has dropped by at least 50%. We are also introducing the Canada recovery sickness benefit of \$500 per week for up to two weeks for workers who are sick or must self-isolate for reasons related to COVID-19. We are also introducing the Canada recovery caregiving benefit of \$500 per week for up to 26 weeks for households of eligible Canadians unable to work because they have to care for someone who is suffering from COVID-19.

Points of Order

I am proud of the immediate and impactful measures that the government has implemented to date. Passing the bill would enable our government to continue this important work. With the bill, our government is also seeking to extend the Public Health Events of National Concern Payments Act, set to expire on September 30, until the end of the year. This act was instrumental at the beginning of the pandemic in allowing the government to quickly put in place and finance many of the emergency measures through Canada's COVID-19 economic response plan that have supported Canadians and businesses through these difficult times. Failing to extend this act could cause a disruption to these critical payments. This includes measures to support Canadian employers, big and small, which are the backbone of our economy and have helped us weather the storm.

[Translation]

Programs like the Canada emergency commercial rent assistance program have provided more than \$1.6 billion to help over 121,000 small businesses, which employ more than 1.1 million employees, pay their rent. By extending the Public Health Events of National Concern Payments Act through the end of the year, we will ensure that everyone eligible for this assistance will be able to access it.

[English]

This is just one example of the many emergency measures that will enable the government to protect the health and safety of Canadians, particularly those who are most vulnerable, and enable the support that Canadian businesses rely on.

There is funding for important measures in our fight against COVID-19, including the purchase of personal protective equipment to help keep our essential workers safe and safely restart our economy, and the funding of medical research, to increase our knowledge of the virus and inform our response and the future purchase of vaccines and other treatments.

Now is not the time for austerity. Now is not the time for us not to be doing everything we can to support Canadians and workers, to support our small, medium and large businesses as we continue to grapple with the impacts of this pandemic.

• (1700)

[Translation]

Our government is determined to do what it takes to protect Canadians and businesses from the economic impact of COVID-19.

As a first step, we must ensure that the necessary legislation is in place to ensure that there is no delay in delivering the benefits to Canadians through existing programs and that Canadians receive the assistance and support they need when they need it most.

[English]

By supporting this bill, all parties can make sure that happens as we work together to build a stronger, more resilient Canada for the health and safety of Canadians, for their income security and livelihoods, and for families and businesses that continue to need support through this difficult and unprecedented time.

I urge all members of Parliament to join me in supporting passage of this bill.

POINTS OF ORDER

STANDING ORDER 69.1—BILL C-4

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order pursuant to Standing Order 69.1, to have the question on Bill C-4, An Act relating to certain measures in response to COVID-19 divided for the purposes of voting at second reading.

Standing Order 69.1(1) reads:

In the case where a government bill seeks to repeal, amend or enact more than one act, and where there is not a common element connecting the various provisions or where unrelated matters are linked, the Speaker shall have the power to divide the questions, for the purposes of voting, on the motion for second reading and reference to a committee and the motion for third reading and passage of the bill. The Speaker shall have the power to combine clauses of the bill thematically and to put the aforementioned questions on each of these groups of clauses separately, provided that there will be a single debate at each stage.

Standing Order 69.1(2) exempts budget implementation bills, but Bill C-4 is not a budget implementation bill so we may disregard this portion of the rule.

My argument is that Part 3 of Bill C-4, that is to say clauses 10 to 14 and the schedule, is sufficiently different from the remainder of the bill so as to warrant—

The Deputy Speaker: I was expecting the hon. member for Banff—Airdrie to have a point of order, which indeed it may well be once we hear what he has to say. It sounds like he has a couple of pages at least to talk about.

We will come back to him and pick up where he left off on this, so that we can finish on questions and comments to the speaker who just gave her remarks to the House. We can then go back to the hon. member on his point of order. For the purposes of continuity, we will make that interruption at this time.

We are going to take questions and comments to the hon. member for Davenport and then we will come back to the member for Banff—Airdrie.

Mr. Blake Richards: I have a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I would think that I should get to finish the point before the responses.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, I will get to that. We will come back to the hon. member for Banff—Airdrie to finish his point of order because I see it is potentially several minutes.

We also have points of order coming from the hon. government House leader and, I believe, the hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader on another response to another issue that is before the House, as well.

We will do those in order.

However, before we do any of those, I would like to get to questions and comments to the hon. member for Davenport. Let us finish those up and then we will get back to the hon. member for Banff—Airdrie.

• (1705)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS NO. 1

The House resumed consideration of the motion and of the amendment.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, regarding the member for Davenport's speech, I, like most Canadians, saw her on the finance committee in the grand defence of the Prime Minister as it related to the WE scandal.

Earlier today, we heard the member for Windsor—Tecumseh say that there will be a transition gap of some three to five days for those recipients of the new programs that are being announced in this piece of legislation. When they backdate that, the potential exists that two weeks could elapse for people from the time they make that application for these new benefits until the time they actually receive the benefits. Of course, proroguing Parliament, as the hon. member supported, really causes problems in that regard.

Why was the member so interested in protecting the Prime Minister and not interested in protecting those Canadians who are going to fall through this gap?

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a very good question. The beginning part of his question, I think, will be a question I will hear in my office.

In terms of the time period between the changeover from a CERB for people who are moving on to the new Canada recovery benefit, my understanding is that we are trying to align the Canada recovery benefit very closely to the existing EI system, as much as possible. For CERB, people actually put in an application every two weeks or they are supposed to reaffirm that they still need it so it is actually forward-looking two weeks, whereas the EI is backward-looking by two weeks so people have to say that in the last two weeks they looked for a job and could not find anything.

Nothing falls perfectly. We tried our very best to make sure there were no gaps, so that people who need it will continue to get the support and help they need and that is what we are doing right now.

[Translation]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her presentation and I am trying to understand something.

As my colleague the member for Lac-Saint-Jean said earlier, we had proposed a benefit with a work incentive. We can assume that the CERB was relevant when it was introduced, while we were in lockdown and everything was shut down. Then summer came, and I am sure that just about all 338 members here had problems in their riding related to the labour market.

Why is the government now proposing a benefit with a work incentive? It is a very good thing and better late than never. However, where is the logic in offering this benefit when we are once again preparing to put people in lockdown and shut things down?

[English]

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Mr. Speaker, at every moment in time, we are trying to do our very best to present a number of programs that are going to support as many Canadians as possible.

Government Orders

Earlier, in the House, a member wondered why the Liberal government was taking the ideas of other parties. We heard ideas from right across the country, from every party, from every political stripe, and we basically took the very best ideas. Our objective is not only to continue to keep Canadians healthy and safe, but to do everything we can to introduce whatever program and use whatever means, in as flexible a manner as possible, to continue to support Canadian workers, continue to support those who are struggling through this unprecedented pandemic and continue to support our small, medium and large businesses. We must do everything we can to create that foundation, so that as we get out of this—

The Deputy Speaker: We have time for a very short question and response.

The hon. member for Victoria.

Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member talked about supporting workers who are sick and who are getting tested. It was only after the NDP pushed and pushed to get the government to agree to invest in sick leave that we got that commitment. Then the government tried to limit this to a few thousand Canadians.

The New Democrats pushed and fought again to expand the eligibility, and I am proud that we were able to push the government to expand it to millions of Canadians. However, there are still Canadians who will not be able to access sick leave, and this benefit is temporary.

Does the member think that Canadians do not deserve to have 10 days of paid sick leave, permanently and accessible to all?

• (1710)

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Mr. Speaker, my understanding, which came from our Prime Minister, is that the idea for the sick benefits actually came from the Premier of British Columbia. In any case, it is an idea that all of us can support. We work much better together when we share our best ideas.

I am very proud that we have the sickness benefits in our legislation. I agree that it will protect millions of Canadians.

I will also say that there are 70 other programs that have been introduced. This is over \$200 billion in supports. While maybe some Canadians will not be able to access the sickness benefits, there are lots of other programs out there for support.

We will not stop. We will do everything we can to continue to have the backs of Canadians, Canadian workers and Canadian businesses moving forward.

Points of Order

The Deputy Speaker: We will now go back to the chief opposition whip to resume his earlier point of order.

The hon. chief opposition whip.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

STANDING ORDER 69.1—BILL C-4

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I ask for your guidance. Would you like me to restate the case already made, or can I continue from where I left off?

The Deputy Speaker: Quite honestly, I think the chief opposition whip can pick up where he left off. Certainly the words he already has on the record are there for the consideration of other hon. members. I appreciate his patience with this. I know it is slightly unorthodox to split this up, but it just so happens that in this particular case, for the continuity of the House, we should just carry on and pick up where he left off with his point of order.

The hon. chief opposition whip.

Mr. Blake Richards: Mr. Speaker, to restate the first part, it is my argument that part 3 of Bill C-4, clauses 10 to 14 in the schedule, is sufficiently different from the remainder of the bill so as to warrant the question at second reading being divided for a separate decision. Again, that is under Standing Order 69.1. While it is true that the state of the whole bill's content is associated with the response to COVID-19, that alone does not qualify as a common element for the purposes of the standing order.

The National Assembly of Quebec has similar procedures regarding omnibus bills, which are instructive. I refer the Chair to *Parliamentary Procedure in Québec*, third edition, which says at page 400, "The principle or principles contained in a bill must not be confused with the field it concerns. To frame the concept of principle in that way would prevent the division of most bills, because they each apply to a specific field."

This statement of the National Assembly's practice was endorsed by your immediate predecessor, the hon. member for Halifax West, when he ruled on March 1, 2018, at page 17574 of the Debates:

While their procedure for dividing bills is quite different from ours, the idea of distinguishing the principles of a bill from its field has stayed with me. While each bill is different and so too each case, I believe that Standing Order 69.1 can indeed be applied to a bill where all of the initiatives relate to a specific policy area, if those initiatives are sufficiently distinct to warrant a separate decision of the House.

The importance of distinguishing between principles and a field was articulated by former National Assembly vice-president Fatima Houada-Pepin, on December 11, 2007, at page 2513 of the *Journal des débats*:

[*Translation*]

In this case, the bill contains more than one principle. Although the bill deals with road safety, the Chair cannot consider that to be the principle of Bill 42. The principle or principles of a bill should not be confused with the topic to which it pertains. Coming up with a different concept of the notion of principle would disqualify most bills from being subject to a division motion because they deal with a specific topic. In this case, the various means of ensuring road safety included in this bill could constitute distinct principles.

[*English*]

The 2018 ruling in our own House concerned the former Bill C-69, which was an omnibus bill with disastrous consequences for the natural resources sector in Canada. The government had argued that all of its provisions hung together on the principle of environmental protection, but the Chair ruled that the argument was not good enough to avoid dividing the question. In that case, he found there were sufficient distinctions to warrant separate votes.

A similar argument was put forward by the government for the former Bill C-59. It claimed that everything was unified by the principle of national security. As the deputy speaker ruled on June 18, 2018, at page 21196 of the Debates, "while the Chair has no trouble agreeing that all of the measures contained in Bill C-59 relate to national security, it is the Chair's view that there are distinct initiatives that are sufficiently unrelated as to warrant dividing the question."

Turning to Bill C-4, parts 1 and 2 concern the establishment of assorted pandemic income replacement benefits for Canadians impacted by COVID-19, together with associated labour law amendments. Part 3, meanwhile, is the government's request to spend over \$17 billion on a wide array of measures, bypassing the normal estimates and appropriations procedures of Parliament. One of the considerations the Chair employed in 2018 was to look at how integrated the different provisions of the impugned bill were. In the case of Bill C-69, for example, two parts that were extensively linked with many cross-references were held to have a sufficiently common element between them. However, another part was, despite the presence of some cross-references, found to be not so deeply intertwined as to make a division impossible.

• (1715)

In the present case, part 3 of Bill C-4 appears to have absolutely no cross-references or drafting links to the remainder of the bill. It was simply grafted on. The various components of the bill that are part of the response to COVID-19 are really about the only thing which could even link them together. In fact, I would argue that the long title of the bill itself gives away the fact that the link is tenuous: "An Act relating to certain measures in response to COVID-19". If there were any stronger connection among these assorted provisions, a more descriptive long title would have been possible.

Before concluding, I will offer a couple of comments of the circumstances particular to the present case.

First, I recognize that time is of the essence in reaching a ruling, because the House is currently seized with government Motion No. 1, which would ram Bill C-4 through the House with barely any debate at all. In fact, it is possible that members are on track to be called upon to vote on the bill late tomorrow night. As noted by the Speaker's immediate predecessor's ruling of November 7, 2017, at page 15116 of the Debates, points of order calling for the exercise of Standing Order 69.1 must be raised promptly. I am rising on this matter on the same afternoon the bill was introduced. To do so earlier would, frankly, have been impossible.

Second, should the House adopt government Motion No. 1, there is nothing in the motion that, in my view, would change the application of Standing Order 69.1 to Bill C-4. The wording of paragraph (b) of the motion refers to voting on “all questions necessary to dispose of the second reading stage of the bill”. This language certainly contemplates multiple votes at the second reading stage and, of course, would be undisturbed by the amendment proposed by the hon. House Leader of the Official Opposition. Moreover, the chapeau of the motion does not make any provision for it to operate notwithstanding any standing order, let alone that it would operate notwithstanding Standing Order 69.1.

In conclusion, it is my respectful submission that Bill C-4 is an omnibus bill and that under the provisions of the standing order, its part 3 should be separated out for a separate vote at the second reading stage.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. chief opposition whip for his point of order. I will take it under advisement and get back to the House in due course.

* * *

[Translation]

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS NO. 1

NOTICE OF CLOSURE MOTION

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with respect to the consideration of Government Business No. 1 I wish to give notice that at the next sitting of the House a minister of the Crown shall move, pursuant to Standing Order 57, that debate be not further adjourned.

* * *

[English]

PRIVILEGE

PROVISION OF DOCUMENTS TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen’s Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be responding to two matters of privilege that have been raised and provide comments.

In particular, I am rising to respond to the question of privilege raised by the member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes on Thursday, September 24, respecting the production of documents ordered by the Standing Committee on Finance in the previous session.

The member argues that the government did not respect the finance committee's motion, while at the same time acknowledges that the government provided the requested documents to the clerk of the committee on August 8, 2020. It was the opposition parties who wanted the law clerk to review these documents for the purposes of additional redactions. Liberal members on the committee agreed to the motion. I want to be clear: The government respected the finance committee's motion and provided the documents on time. The government also provided exactly the information that the committee requested in its motion. The only things excluded

Privilege

were matters of cabinet confidence and national security, which the committee spelled out in the motion.

In preparing the documents in response to the committee motion, public servants respected their statutory obligations under law. The government provided the documents, which were 5,600 pages, on the date requested by the committee. Due to the time needed for the law clerk to do his work, Parliament was prorogued before they were properly given to the committee. As a result, not only did the finance committee cease to exist with prorogation, but the committee did not fully have these documents. It is therefore difficult for the opposition to argue that the government did not comply with the committee's motion when they were not in a position to take such a determination since they did not have the formal law clerk-approved documents.

The second issue was that there was no report from the finance committee to the House. The hon. member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes correctly cites the relevant section from the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, 2017, which states, “If such an order is ignored, the committee has no means to enforce the order on its own. It may report the matter to the House and recommend that appropriate action be taken. It is then a decision of the House whether or not to issue an order for the production of papers.” There has been no report from the finance committee and the hon. member knows that committee business does not carry over from one session to the next.

My hon. colleague also states that the Speaker needs to take extraordinary steps to intervene now to prevent actions “to keep our committees from considering substantive business until November”. I would like to draw the attention of my hon. colleague to a motion that the House adopted immediately upon the opening of the House, a full day before he gave and made his intervention. In addition to allowing the House to meet in a hybrid format and to vote remotely to ensure the safety of members and their staff, the motion also stated that the Standing Committee on Finance must hold an organizational meeting as early as October 8 but no later than October 9. The hon. member knows that the opposition holds a majority on the committees and that the finance committee will decide its agenda at that time.

Furthermore, the motion enabled all committees to meet either virtually or in a hybrid format, which means that it can meet to transact any business it wants as of next week. It is therefore incorrect to state that the government can use procedural tactics to delay the finance committee from considering substantive business until November.

The member argues that there was no ability for the finance committee to report the matter in the question to the House. I would refer the hon. member to the motion adopted by the House on March 24, 2020. I quote the section (i) of that motion where it states:

Privilege

(i) starting the week of March 30, 2020, the Minister of Finance or his delegate shall provide the Standing Committee on Finance with a bi-weekly report on all actions undertaken pursuant to parts 3, 8 and 19 of the COVID-19 Emergency Response Act and shall appear before the committee to discuss the report, provided that, until April 20, 2020, or any date to which the adjournment period is extended pursuant to paragraph f), if committee is not satisfied with how the government is exercising its powers under the Act, it may adopt a motion during a meeting by videoconference or teleconference to report this to the House by depositing a report with the Clerk of the House which shall be deemed to have been duly presented to the House on that day.

● (1720)

Since this matter was not before the House and the documents were not formally before the House or the committee, it would difficult, if not impossible, for the Speaker to make a determination on whether the committee's motion was respected. While the government asserts that this issue does not constitute a *prima facie* case of privilege, I want to make it clear that when the finance committee restarts on October 8 or 9, if it readopts the motion and is not satisfied with the way the government has provided documents to the committee, the government is prepared to work in good faith with the committee to address any concerns that it may have.

This matter has raised a number of unique circumstances. I will note that the procedure and House affairs committee has undertaken two studies on how our House should operate in a pandemic. It therefore makes good sense to ask this committee to undertake a study of the Standing Orders and practices, and once complete, report its findings to the House.

● (1725)

RESPONSE BY PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY TO ORDER PAPER QUESTION

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in response to the second question of privilege raised on September 24 by the hon. member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes.

In his intervention, the member made a serious claim in accusing the Minister of Public Services and Procurement of misleading the House in response to Order Paper Question No. 443. I submit that the matter raised by my colleague amounts to a dispute as to facts and does not meet the high threshold for finding a *prima facie* question of privilege.

There are two key matters to support this view. First, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation and the member misread and miscalculated the amounts in the access to information request. Second, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation and the member's Order Paper question cover different periods.

In his remarks, my counterpart referenced access to information request no. 2020-00025, which was provided to the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. The ATIP in question requested a generic actuals report of the cost of renovations, improvements, construction and maintenance of the Prime Minister's official residence at Harrington Lake between January 1, 2020, and April 22, 2020. It seems that the member across the way read the table in the same way as the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. I suspect that both the member and the Canadian Taxpayers Federation added all of the amounts listed in the response to the access to information request together rather

than viewing them as spending from a total budget. Put simply, the member and the Canadian Taxpayers Federation misread and miscalculated the numbers in the response to the access to information request.

I will refer to Order Paper Question No. 443, raised by the same member. This question reads as follows:

With regard to construction and renovations at the Prime Minister's country residence and surrounding property at Harrington Lake: (a) what are the details of each new building or other structure constructed, or in the process of being constructed, at the property since November 4, 2015, including (i) date construction began, (ii) projected or actual completion date, (iii) square footage, (iv) physical description of the structure, (v) purpose of the structure, (vi) estimated cost; and (b) what are the details of all renovations which began at the property since November 4, 2015, including (i) start date, (ii) projected or actual completion date, (iii) structure, (iv) project description, (v) estimated cost?

First, I note that in question (a) at point (vi) and in question (b) at point (v), the hon. member clearly requested the estimated cost and not the generic actuals report, as requested by the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. Second, the date of the actuals requested from the Canadian Taxpayers Federation is from January 1, 2020, to April 22, 2020, in comparison with the hon. member requesting the work and estimates from November 4, 2015.

I am happy to refer my hon. colleague to the National Capital Commission's website for Harrington Lake, which clearly states that the estimated budget of repairs for Harrington Lake is \$8.6 million. This is still the budget for the renovations and was the amount provided to my hon. colleague in his response to Question No. 443.

To provide perfect clarity, approximately \$850,000 of the cost to which the member alludes is for contracts that serve all six official residences in the NCC portfolio. Furthermore, some of the actual expenses incurred by the NCC, released as part of an ATIP, fall outside the estimated budget of \$8.6 million. At no point was the House misled in this manner.

This is a matter of debate as to facts and does not meet the high threshold for finding a question of privilege. It is a long-standing tradition that the House takes members at their word, and as I mentioned in an intervention in March of this year, there are other avenues to resolve such disputes before raising questions of privilege. There are alternatives and other ways of seeking clarification on such matters.

● (1730)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I thank the hon. parliamentary secretary for the additional information on the questions of privilege. We will compile this additional information with the other information as we continue to deliberate on them.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock.

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS NO. 1

The House resumed consideration of the motion and of the amendment.

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to address this House on C-2. I also want to begin by letting the Speaker know I will be splitting my time with the member for Calgary Midnapore.

As the parliamentary secretary just mentioned, the Prime Minister shut down Parliament for six weeks. He did so because pressure was starting to mount from the WE scandal. Every day new details started to emerge on the Prime Minister's intimate involvement with that \$900-million scandal. Canadians, no matter where they are, want to know more details about that scandal. We say that because the Prime Minister has already been found guilty in accepting a paid vacation to a luxury island. He was also found guilty in his involvement of the SNC-Lavalin scandal.

Now, as the parliamentary secretary said a few moments ago, it was the Prime Minister's decision to prorogue Parliament. He just did not shut down debate in this chamber, which was limited to begin with, he shut down the important work of several committees, including our ability to study the COVID-19 recovery.

Just a few weeks ago, the new leader of the official opposition raised that need to quickly restart the committees. That was done on a call to the Prime Minister, but unfortunately, those calls for the committees to be reinstated were rejected. The Standing Committee on Health could be studying the Liberals' ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Its members should be talking about the need for more rapid testing and why other countries, including many of our G7 partners, have rapid testing available to their constituents.

The Standing Committee on Finance could be preparing a report on the COVID-19 recovery. The Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities could be looking at legislation that transitions Canadians from the CERB to the new employment insurance programs.

We all know a fully functioning Parliament is necessary for Canadian democracy, especially during a crisis like the pandemic, and the Conservative Party of Canada was the only party in this House consistently calling for the full recall of Parliament during that pandemic.

We heard in the parliamentary secretary's remarks that Liberals claim to have the backs of Canadians. Conservatives are the ones consistently calling for Liberals to improve their slew of programs. It was us, as the official opposition, who consistently called for the recall of the House of Commons, not the fake Parliament the Liberals agreed to, which gave opposition members very little time to critique the programs that were being laid out. We all know there was a whole slew of problems with some of those programs, including with the wage subsidy, which started at 10% while countries like Germany were upwards of 70%. It was calls by the opposition that helped move the government to where it was able to better help those small businesses needing help because they were told

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to shut down and people all across this country were told to stay home.

We have a lot of serious work to do, and I will quickly touch on child care because it falls under my portfolio as the critic. The Minister of Families, Children and Social Development just last week talked about the Liberals' desire to create accessible and inclusive child care spaces right across this country. For anyone in this House, or anyone watching on CPAC or any program, I do not think too many Canadians would put the two together, that the government is very accessible or flexible, for that matter. We all know a large number of Canadians who do not have access to these child care spaces, and in my community there is a waiting list, but there are a lot of people who do not want access and want flexibility in the programs.

This is where the Conservatives' plan comes in. We are talking about giving Canadians more money in their pockets to help lower the cost of those child care spaces or, if a family so chooses, they could then move their child to maybe a parent or grandparent. Maybe someone has set up a small business in their neighbourhood, following all provincial rules and guidelines to make it a safe space for those children to go. This is what we are talking about. We are talking about flexibility.

The government rarely has flexibility in anything it offers. We also know child care is in provincial jurisdiction and we want the provinces, if they so choose to move in that direction, to include flexibility in their programs.

● (1735)

We want to ensure competition within the provinces so that if one province is doing something extremely well, another province that is having trouble could probably take best practices from those jurisdictions and implement them within their own system, which I think allows better quality of care all around, rather than the federal government implementing its own system or imposing rules and regulations on the provinces and territories in exchange for those tax dollars to come back, which takes time too. Coming to these agreements with the provinces takes time. There are people who need the flexibility now to help them. We talked about shift workers. A lot of shift workers are excluded from government child care because the flexibility is not there. However, if they had more money in their pockets and were able to make choices in their lives with a wide variety of options, they might be able to help their case and get back into the workforce quicker.

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It seems when we talk about economic recovery, no matter how many restrictions the government imposes on an industry, the solution is always another government program. Let us take the oil and gas industry as an example. It has been unfairly punished by the government, with rules and regulations one after another. One piece of legislation, Bill C-69, the tanker ban bill, comes to mind. Then, in order to make up for its careless decisions, it decided to purchase a pipeline to ensure that project was completed, and a number of other pipelines were scrapped because of the Liberal decisions, including northern gateway, energy east and many others.

We could talk about the expansion of the Billy Bishop airport in downtown Toronto, where an expansion of runway would allow business people the ability to get to their destination a lot quicker, rather than going from downtown to Mississauga, the neighbouring community, to access a plane for a short trip. When the Liberals decided to scrap that plan, Billy Bishop airport was not able to expand. Therefore, Porter Airlines was not able to buy a number of C Series jets, which then caused Bombardier to come into financial hardship. What did the government do? It brought in another government program and decided to bail out Bombardier, yet the dollars that were available for this expansion and the decision to buy these planes came from private dollars. Therefore, we have more government intervention in the marketplace.

We will go back to child care here for a quick second. Spaces are needed now and we talk about what the government had in 1993. It talked about the Red Book and that it was going to come up with a national day care program. That took well over a decade to negotiate. The deal was signed in 2005-06, so people who had a child nearing 1993 had already passed the care age needed. In many cases, depending on where the child was born, he or she might be finished high school. Therefore, the parents who need help immediately have to wait until the government figures out its plan. That is one thing it always asks for, more time and more money. Whether it works or not, whether it wants it or not, it does not really matter, it just needs more time and money. When those plans fail, it comes up with another plan.

When we talk about Parliament being shut down over the pandemic, despite calls from the Conservative Party to reinstate Parliament, we are here dealing with Bill C-2, an act we all know needed to be dealt with immediately. Parliament did not need to be prorogued. We all know why that happened. As I mentioned at the beginning of my speech, it was because the WE documents were coming out. The Prime Minister was going to be implicated in this scandal worth \$900 million.

Let us go on to what Bill C-2 is talking about. I know I am running out of time.

● (1740)

Let us talk about a person from my riding, Katherine. She previously ran a home day care as a small business owner. A year ago her family decided to start planning for one more child, and she signed up—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I am sorry, there is no more time. However, the member will have time to add to his comments during questions and comments.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the pandemic has put a great deal of pressure on in many different ways.

Earlier this year, the government, in co-operation, particularly, with the New Democratic Party, recognized the value in the House of Commons sitting in the summer, and justifiably so, something it has not done, at least not that I can recall, in the last 30 years. I suspect it might be even longer than that, since the House actually sat in the summer months.

I was here both in July and August, sitting inside this chamber, listening to hundreds of questions. That does not even come close to the types of transparency and accountability that I saw when I was on the opposition benches. Government was available for questioning.

Where was all the interest, which the Conservatives have today, during the summer, when they were not necessarily posing the types of questions they are looking for answers to today?

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the question from my hon. colleague across the way, but I would respectfully disagree with him. As I mentioned in my speech many times, the Conservative Party was calling for the recall of Parliament, almost immediately, after we had a handle on the problems the pandemic was causing in our communities. We wanted Parliament called back right away to deal with that.

What the government gave us was a fake Parliament. We were not able to debate legislation. We had a few questions, but it was every other week, and the Prime Minister decided to prorogue Parliament, shutting down the last week of that debate.

The Conservative Party wanted to debate all throughout April, May, June, July, August, September and onwards. The fact that we were not given that opportunity is a real shame for Canadians, because we know there are a lot of problems with the programs that the government announced. We wanted to work with the government to ensure those fixes were in place.

● (1745)

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Madam Speaker, the part of my colleague's speech that caught my attention was the part on child care. I had my daughter in 1999, when I was a student, and child care cost \$20 a day. As a student, I can assure you that in 1999 that was a lot of money. I very much welcomed the creation of the national child care service in Quebec shortly thereafter. It is a Quebec program and a provincial jurisdiction for the other Canadian provinces.

What does my colleague think of the idea of allowing women to return to work or to school and other women to have a job, which would help the national and provincial economies, while also respecting provincial jurisdictions?

[English]

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Madam Speaker, that is exactly what I was talking about. If the provinces, the provincial jurisdictions, want to implement a day care system of their own, that is perfectly fine. That is up to the provinces. It is not up to the federal government to say “You are going to do X, Y and Z, and if you do not, you are not getting your federal money.” That is what we are talking about.

We are also talking about flexibility for those parents who may work shift work or otherwise. Every situation is unique. There is not a one-size-fits-all solution to the day care problem. The plan that Conservatives are putting forward to Canadians to show an option for them in the next election is that we are going to give them the freedom to make choices, and we all know that more choice is a good thing, and so is competition, a better service, a better product at a better price.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his speech. Here today, we just learned that Ontario has now had its highest number of infections, 700 cases today in his home province. My colleague is raising the need for testing.

Does the member not believe that paid sick days are just as important, and that people should not be going to work if they are sick, infecting their co-workers?

We learned that 14% of workers earning less than \$16,000 are actually getting paid sick leave, versus 74% of those earning over \$96,000 a year. We know that women, especially, have been impacted by COVID-19. They are 20 years behind. Their participation—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I did ask for a small question.

I want to give the member an opportunity to respond with a brief answer, please.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the question from my friend. I mean that in the truest sense of the word.

Yes, absolutely, testing is very important. I mentioned in my speech that there is a need for rapid testing as well. It needs to be available. We have countries all across the G7 that have approved rapid testing. It is the key to opening our economy.

Of course I agree with the member that anyone who is sick should be able to stay home while they recover, but that is not the point here. In order to move forward, we need rapid testing, so why is the government delaying rapid testing from being approved?

[Translation]

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to be here today.

This is the second time this week for me. I unfortunately do not always bring good news, and my comments about Bill C-4 are no exception.

We have an important decision to make this week. We need to take time to talk about how we ended up here, which did not happen overnight. It took the government, Canadians and us a long time to get here.

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I want to review the decisions the government made, talk about what happened in the world before and during March and April, and talk about how we got to this point.

[English]

On January 28, the World Health Organization described the risk of transmission to be very high in China and very high at a global level of the virus, which was of course on the horizon.

On January 30, the Minister of Health said that it would be virtually impossible to prevent the virus from arriving in Canada, but did not take any steps to prepare at that time.

Between January 22 and February 18, 58,000 travellers arrived in Canada from high-risk areas and only 68 were pulled aside for further assessment by a quarantine officer. There again we see that the government had an opportunity to do so much, an opportunity which it passed on, leading us to where we are today.

By February 17, the national lab had only run 461 tests, and on March 10, public health officials advised policy makers that COVID risks were low in Canada and that mandatory quarantines for returning travellers would be too difficult to enforce.

Before I go on, I have to go back to February, because who can forget what happened in February when the government sent 16 tonnes of personal protective equipment back to China?

• (1750)

[Translation]

Perhaps it did not think that we might need that equipment in the future. The government did not think ahead, and that is very clear right now.

[English]

Of course, on March 13, the Prime Minister went into isolation. On March 13, the U.S. declared a national emergency. On March 16, finally, Canada closed its borders, and on March 20, we finally closed our borders with our good friend, the United States. However, on April 9, the Prime Minister warned that it could be over a year until life returns to normal.

We can see that the government had much notice and time to prepare from so many perspectives, from a health perspective, a public safety perspective, and an economic and fiscal responsibility perspective, but it did not. That is the reason we are going into the chamber again to vote in support or not of the legislation of the government, which has been so incredibly irresponsible.

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As an official opposition that loves and supports Canadians and that loves and supports our fellow citizens, we did what we had to do. We supported the legislation to give all of the incredible supports to Canadians across the country. I will say that some supports did work better than others.

As the vice-chair of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities during the spring, I saw different studies in terms of evaluating the supports that were given. Unfortunately, though, there were no long-term economic solutions to maintain financial security for Canadians. I will get more into that.

In addition, we did not look at providing any long-term solutions to any groups, such as non-profit organizations, beyond the pandemic, so everything was very short-sighted. That does not matter anyway now, because any useful work that was conducted has become null due to the prorogation of Parliament. Of course, who can forget the WE scandal, where the government was more concerned with doling out contracts to its friends than with providing supports to the Canadians who needed them?

I will also add my two pieces as the outgoing vice-chair of HUMA. I think the government did a terrible job of protecting our seniors in long-term care facilities across this country. I am so happy our official opposition has a fantastic new shadow minister for seniors, the member of Parliament for Battlefords—Lloydminster, who I know will fight for seniors.

I will also say I am very excited to see the previous speaker, the new shadow minister for families, children and social development, who I know will take on the battle to get Canadians out of this cycle of perpetual poverty, which is what we are seeing with the extension of the bill today. Again, as good Canadians and as good stewards of the health, safety and well-being, particularly the economic well-being, of Canadians, we will certainly consider doing what we have to do to support Canadians. However, we were put in this place by the government and its absolute irresponsibility.

What keeps me up at night is the economic recovery of this nation. I could go on and on about the economic recovery of this nation because as we speak, Canada's debt is over \$1 trillion. Our deficit for the 2020-21 fiscal year is \$380 billion. It is absolutely unthinkable and unbelievable, but here we are.

On July 8, a Global News article said, "The flood of federal spending in response to the coronavirus pandemic and the ensuing economic crisis will see the deficit soar to \$343 billion this year, as officials warn the economy might never go back to normal." Well, would we not like a deficit of \$343 billion instead of the \$380 billion that we have now.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer, speaking of the federal government, stated, "It's without a doubt that we cannot afford deficits of over \$300 billion for more than just a few years. And when I say a few years, I really mean a year or two. Beyond that it would become unsustainable." We are easily reaching the state of this being unsustainable, and beyond.

In addition, the Parliamentary Budget Officer added, "So if the government has plans for additional spending, it will clearly have to make difficult choices and either raise taxes or reduce other areas

of spending. Because it's clear that we cannot afford to have deficits of that magnitude for even the medium term."

Unfortunately, this is the poor planning of the Liberal government, the Prime Minister and all of his officers. They had several occasions prior to the pandemic to put us in a better fiscal position and to put Canadians in a better position to respond to this pandemic. Then the pandemic hit. Conservatives, who care about Canada and our economy, made the decision to support Canadians in their time of need and in this time of relief.

Again, it is the poor planning of the government in the present and moving into the future that behooved us to show up in the House again and vote for additional supports, supports, which I might add, that will cost north of \$50 billion, and possibly as much as \$60 billion. This is on the backs of Canadians, on the backs of my son and all the other Canadian children.

I was very proud to take on an economic recovery task force in my riding of Calgary Midnapore. I was very happy to do that, but it feels sometimes that it is an absolute futility because the Prime Minister stated on September 1 to the CBC, "We shouldn't be moving forward with an ambitious, bold vision to help Canadians and build a better future without ensuring that we have the support of Parliament."

The start of the throne speech stated, "For over 150 years, Parliamentarians have worked together to chart Canada's path forward. Today, Canadians expect you to do the same." The Liberals only care to work with as many parliamentarians as they have to to advance their own agenda. If they managed to dangle a carrot in front of 24 NDP MPs, they have ignored 160 other parliamentarians who also represent Canadians. Canadians deserve help, but more importantly, they deserve a plan for an economically sustainable recovery.

• (1755)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is interesting to have contrast here. We have a Conservative member who is making it very clear. The debt that is being accrued because of the programs we are bringing into place is very upsetting and appears to be something which the member does not support. She is giving the impression that we should not be borrowing as much money as we are. On the other hand, she tries to give the impression that she supports all these programs.

Looking specifically at this bill, the member is complaining about the \$50 billion, but she is supporting the programs. She cannot have it both ways.

Does the member believe that we should continue to support Canadians through programs that are largely, in part, being financed through debt? Does she believe we should do it or should we not do it?

• (1800)

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Madam Speaker, my point is that we never should have been put in this place that we have to do this. This is again and again as result of the poor planning of the Liberal government: first, in not preparing before the pandemic arrived; second, the poor preparation and the inability to recognize the magnitude of the pandemic; and third, adequately addressing the needs of all Canadians and all businesses several times over.

Thank goodness my leadership team had the foresight to put in the provisions to not let this spending get completely out of control. Yes, Canadians need our support, but it could have been done in a far more responsible, accountable fashion.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Calgary Midnapore for her noteworthy efforts in French during her speech.

I see the Conservatives are trying to be very compassionate. On the other hand, what concrete action would they take for people who are less fortunate and those who have limited access to jobs? Unfortunately, I do not see any solutions in the Conservative line, and I would like to hear the member's comments on that.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his question.

I sincerely believe that the Conservatives have always been the party of compassion in Canada. We are the family party and the seniors' party. We are the party that believes in Canadians. We are recognized as the party of compassion across Canada and in the House.

[English]

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Speaker, I certainly agree with the member that the Liberals have been absolutely irresponsible by proroguing Parliament and then just sitting on this until midnight last night, when all benefits expired and a million or more Canadians were left with absolutely no means of support. Therefore, I certainly agree with her there.

I strongly disagree with her portrayal of Conservatives being a compassionate party while at the same time decrying the provision for paid sick leave, for the first time in Canadian history, for workers who are struggling to do the right thing when they are sick, either having to put food on the table or staying away from work. The NDP forced the government to actually make that difference, forced it to make that change for the first time in Canadian history. For 150 years now, Canadian workers, including in Calgary, have not had access to paid sick leave in many cases and now they will, finally.

This is a major achievement. It is not a carrot; it is an absolute necessity for people who have to struggle to make ends meet. At the same time, it is essential as a public health precaution to ensure

that people who are vulnerable or susceptible to the pandemic are not affected by it.

Why did she characterize the provision for sick leave as a carrot and how can she pretend the Conservative Party is compassionate—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): There are only five minutes for questions and comments and I want to allow the member to answer. I would ask members to reduce the time for their questions as opposed to delivering a speech.

The hon. member for Calgary Midnapore, a brief answer, please.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Madam Speaker, I certainly can understand the member of Parliament's embarrassment to prop up the government, but unfortunately his party has a history of doing that. The New Democrats did it in 2005 to pass Paul Martin's spring budget. They did in November of 2005 to defeat the government. They did it with their failed coalition with the Liberals in 2008. Therefore, I am not shocked at all to hear that response from the member.

• (1805)

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey—Newton, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Cumberland—Colchester.

I rise today to speak about the Canada recovery benefit legislation and the way in which it will positively impact the lives of Canadians across the country as we continue the process of restarting our economy.

Many members of the House, myself included, have not been in Ottawa over the past six months, but we have all been conducting our work in our ridings, interacting with our constituents in a safe manner during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The actions this government took in implementing the Canada emergency response benefit were significant in the lives of Canadians, whose incomes have been disrupted or eliminated entirely by the health crisis. It allowed families to make ends meet while facing such challenges and, of course, while maintaining their own health and safety.

Over the past few weeks, we have seen a return to many of the things that families are used to. Children are returning to school. Many workplaces have or are about to resume operations with many staff who were laid off several months back.

We also have seen new situations arise as a result of COVID-19. Workers have had their industries permanently changed and are looking for new careers. For example, in British Columbia, all stand-alone banquet halls have been ordered to shut down by our provincial health officer. This has left many of my constituents in a difficult situation, trying to figure out what is next when it comes to collecting a paycheck.

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I have also seen many self-employed business owners who are recovering their past clients and work activities, but are doing so in a way that is slower than the bills that are piling up.

These are the familiar and new realities that have inspired this bill. As we transition away from emergency response measures like the CERB, it is imperative we understand the situations that we as elected officials are hearing on the ground and that we take that feedback into account. Simply put, our government understands that the next phase of recovery cannot have millions of Canadians falling through the cracks without any means of support.

This is why we extended the Canada emergency response benefit by an additional four weeks, through to the end of September. However, this bill is about what is next. In that regard, three new recovery benefits are introduced so that the move to employment insurance leaves no Canadian behind.

First is the Canada recovery benefit, which will provide financial assistance for up to 26 weeks to workers who are not eligible for EI but still require income support and who are available and actively looking for employment.

As I mentioned, my riding of Surrey—Newton is driven by small business owners, many of whom are sole proprietorships, run by hard-working, self-employed people. As they move to get more of a solid footing, we do not want businesses to fail because they have seen this during their business activities and we do not want them to be left behind through this transition.

• (1810)

The Canada recovery benefit is about supporting Canadians who have had their income drop or be eliminated due to COVID-19, but it is going to be accompanied by additional support. In these individuals' search for gainful employment, we are working closely with the provinces and territories to share information and provide tools and training to get people back into the workforce.

The second new measure, the Canada recovery sickness benefit, would provide \$500 per week for up to two weeks for workers who are sick and must self-isolate as a result of exposure to COVID-19. During this pandemic, doing the right thing by self-isolating and reducing the risk of spreading the infection to colleagues, friends or family members should not be a path to financial hardship. Workers and their families should not have to choose between staying safe and making ends meet.

Last, this bill is introducing the Canada recovery caregiver benefit, which would provide \$500 per week for up to 26 weeks per household for eligible Canadians unable to work because they are serving as caregivers for someone impacted by the pandemic. This could include a sick child who is being kept at home out of caution because they are not feeling well and is staying home for the public good. Workers would be able to apply for this benefit for the period for which they are providing care and require income support, and they would have to confirm that they will meet the eligibility criteria. The 26 weeks of this benefit could be shared within a household, but two family members residing in the same household cannot receive the benefit for the same period. Only one member of a household can receive it at a given time.

These are the realities of a country that is working to restart our economy and our daily lives in a safe and responsible way. Employment insurance has always represented temporary relief for unemployed workers who are upgrading their skills and looking for new opportunities or who have been laid off. With these new benefits, our government is appropriately changing EI so that the new realities of COVID-19 recovery can be realized without anyone being left without the support that they need to emerge from the health crisis stronger than ever.

This is a bill that has been drafted based on the stories that all of us have heard and brought back from our respective ridings. The bill considers the challenges faced by average Canadians as we continue the process of reopening the country and the economy. Most important, Bill C-4 represents a response that listened to Canadians. This is how we have managed our government's response to COVID-19 from the beginning, and we are responding based on the real-world situations that are happening in people's lives.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this most important legislation today.

• (1815)

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Madam Speaker, in my hon. colleague's speech, he talked a lot about the government response to COVID. I must say I am a bit disappointed with its response. It took a very long time for the government to consider closing the border. The mask mandate was definitely a long time in coming. We see that, even today, we are behind many of our allies with respect rapid testing. That is what the response has been.

The question I have for the member is this. Does he think that proroguing Parliament was an appropriate action at the time?

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister stood firm when it came to closing the border to the U.S. We did not tolerate the bullying from our neighbours to the south, and we continue to do that.

When it comes to proroguing Parliament, the Speech from the Throne allowed us to present Canadians with our vision for the future as we continue to deal with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and restart our economy. The Speech from the Throne also provided the House of Commons and members of Parliament the opportunity to work on this confidence motion so that we could represent the voices of our constituents whom we represent in the House.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, what I appreciate in the House is that there are well-defined procedures. This is the period for questions and comments. This period contains the word "question". Normally, when someone asks a specific question, they get a specific answer. Unfortunately, when the government is asked a question that is too difficult, it simply deflects and refuses to answer.

Therefore, I am going to try to ask my colleague across the way the question I asked his hon. colleague earlier.

When we proposed changes to the CERB in April, we were told none could be made. Today, we see that Bill C-2 is an exact copy of what we asked for in April.

Why was it impossible in April but possible in September?

[English]

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Madam Speaker, if we look at the past six months, in the beginning the Prime Minister talked to Canadians every day, and every day we were seeing new developments and announcements as we proceeded through this COVID-19 situation. Professionals in the health industry advised the Prime Minister and the cabinet, and they acted on that. However, this government still had to do more when it came to the future, because this speech was based on this bill, and all benefits provided in the past are based on our concentration on the ground. That is what we will keep on doing. We will keep advising.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Madam Speaker, the member keeps talking about all these Canadians that the Liberals have consulted, but I am speaking to a lot of students in this country and they are feeling very much left behind by the government. In fact, there was not one single word in the throne speech to help students. The emergency student benefit has ended. The students were looking for an extension with that disappeared money from the student service grant that was announced, and they are really quite disappointed.

I wonder if the member could talk to me about students in his riding. SFU Surrey and Kwantlen Polytechnic are in his riding, and I wonder if students are talking to him about how disappointed they are in the lack of benefits that support them, their rising tuition costs and so on.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Madam Speaker, the hon. member talked about students. In my constituency, I have been on the ground listening to students and talking to their parents. They are in fact very satisfied with what we did as a government. We doubled the number of jobs during the summer. We gave \$1,250 per month to all students and, if they had a disability, they got \$2,000. We doubled the grant for university students. All of those benefits students are enjoying and they are supporting us on the ground.

● (1820)

Ms. Lenore Zann (Cumberland—Colchester, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to take part tonight in Parliament's debate from Wagobagitk, the traditional unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia.

I believe we can all agree that the COVID-19 pandemic has changed how we live, work and interact with others. It has been a severely challenging time for Canadians from coast to coast, including right here in Cumberland—Colchester and indeed across Nova Scotia.

Over the past months we have noticed that there has been an increased interest in and also a need for mental health supports. The pandemic has taken an especially heavy toll on vulnerable Canadians. We have seen that COVID-19 most negatively impacts our most vulnerable: our seniors, people experiencing homelessness,

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Canadians with disabilities, racialized Canadians, women, persons with substance use challenges and persons with mental health challenges, along with those who work to support them.

I am pleased that our government is responding to these needs with a \$19-billion investment provided to the provinces and territories under the safe restart agreement. This investment will help provinces and territories respond to COVID-19 in unique ways in critical areas, including funding to support the capacity of health care services and procurement of personal protective equipment. In fact, we are making hospital gowns and masks right here at Stanfield's in Truro and that has provided 275 jobs to Nova Scotians as well as providing PPE to Canadians.

This agreement supports infection protection and control measures to protect vulnerable populations, including residents in long-term care facilities and those requiring home care and palliative care. It also provides funding for other vulnerable populations such as homeless Canadians and those living in remote and isolated communities.

This agreement is an indication of our deep and ongoing commitment to protect the health and safety of all Canadians. It will help struggling Canadians in a number of ways, including the newly proposed Canada recovery benefit for Canadians who are self-employed or not otherwise eligible for employment insurance. The Canada recovery benefit would provide aid for up to 26 weeks between September 27, 2020, and September 25, 2021. It also provides a benefit for 10 days of sick leave to any worker in Canada who falls ill or has to self-isolate due to COVID-19. A third benefit will support Canadians who must stay home to care for a child under the age of 12, or another dependant, because their school, day care or other day program facility has been shut down due to COVID-19.

This pandemic has had disproportionate effects on women, who are more likely to be asked to take on home responsibilities and who have reported increased rates of family violence during these times of increased isolation. We also know the pandemic has further isolated indigenous youth and those in the 2SLGBTQIA community.

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Access to support or prevention programs by those fleeing family and gender-based violence has become more difficult in the context of community lockdowns and social distancing practices, which is why our government has included new initiatives to help reduce the impact of abuse and violence within vulnerable families. A \$50-million investment is being provided through the reaching home program to women's shelters and sexual assault centres, including \$26 million to Women's Shelters Canada to distribute to women's shelters across the country, \$4 million to the Canadian Women's Foundation to distribute to sexual assault centres and \$10 million to support Indigenous Services Canada's existing network of 46 emergency shelters on reserve and in Yukon.

Access to mental health services for indigenous communities is so important, yet it has been disrupted or shifted to virtual and telehealth approaches while many remote communities have limited Internet connectivity. Our government is therefore investing \$82.5 million in mental health and wellness supports to help first nations, Inuit and Métis communities adapt and expand mental wellness services, improve access to distinctions-based services and address growing demand in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our government also recognizes the significant and unique challenges faced by Black Canadians and other racialized populations during this pandemic. As a key social determinant of health that can affect an individual's access and willingness to seek medical care, racism is a public health issue, and systemic racism must be stopped.

• (1825)

Given this, the Public Health Agency of Canada and partners are undertaking a number of activities to improve Canada's knowledge of the impact of COVID-19 on racialized communities. We are establishing a new national COVID-19 data set, approved by Canada's special advisory committee on COVID-19.

We recognize that COVID-19 has taken a toll on the mental health of Canadians right across the country: feelings of isolation, lack of access to usual support networks and living in fear of the uncertainties caused by the pandemic.

We also recognize the traumatic effect of the largest mass shooting in Canada's history, which tragically took place just five months ago in my riding of Cumberland—Colchester. I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the families of the victims of this terrible tragedy and offer them my sincere condolences on the loss of their loved ones.

After the dual crisis of COVID-19 and the mass shooting, I was adamant that our government offer increased mental health support to all those in need. In response, I was pleased that we introduced the wellness together Canada portal, which provided 24/7 mental health support to all those in need. More than 283,000 Canadians have now accessed this portal. We also made a \$7.5 million investment to the Kids Help Phone for children and youth, which saw a huge increase in use.

The mental health impacts of this systemic discrimination and COVID-19 also have negative impacts on physical health. In response, our government is working to advance the knowledge of intersections between the mental and physical health of all Canadi-

ans, especially Black Canadians through the promoting health equity mental health of Black Canadians fund.

Under the COVID-19 and mental health initiative, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research has also launched, in partnership with four provincial research agencies, a funding opportunity to better understand mental health and/or substance use needs of individuals and communities due to the pandemic. We have to admit that there is a huge problem with overdose and opioids in Canada. In parallel with the COVID-19 pandemic, many communities continue to struggle with a second public health crisis, namely the devastating impacts of substance use and the overdose crisis.

In response, our government is taking a number of targeted actions to remove barriers and reduce the risk of harm for people struggling with problematic substance use. As somebody with 24 years of sobriety myself, I know how important this is and I wish everybody who is struggling to find the wellness they deserve. People need to speak up and ask for help and they will get it.

In addition, Health Canada is supporting front-line workers who are delivering important substance use treatment and harm reduction services as well as community-based projects.

For the cultural industries, I am very pleased to see that our government has made a commitment to building strong, Canadian cultural industries. We pledge to require digital giants to contribute to the creation, production and distribution of our own Canadian stories on screen, writing, music and in lyrics and to share the revenue more fairly with Canadian artist creators. It is about time.

As well, the short-term compensation fund will compensate for the lack of insurance coverage for Canada's vital screen industry due to COVID-19 related interruptions. The \$50 million fund, to be administered by Telefilm Canada along with the Canada Media Fund, will be made available to our industry. This is welcomed news for the hard-working artists across the country who are just dying to get back to work. ACTRA national president David Sparrow said that after years of consultation, it welcomed the Canadian government taking action to level the playing field between traditional and digital broadcasters.

This is just a snapshot of some of the actions that have been taken to protect vulnerable Canadians and those who have become more vulnerable during this crisis. This pandemic, like no other crisis in our history, has put into stark relief the importance of our government's overriding commitment to protect the health, safety and well-being of Canadians. I can assure the House that we will continue to do everything within our power and jurisdiction to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

• (1830)

[English]

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON ADDRESS IN REPLY

The House resumed from September 25 consideration of the motion for an address to Her Excellency the Governor General in reply to her speech at the opening of the session, of the amendment, and of the amendment to the amendment.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): It being 6:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the subamendment to the address in reply to the Speech from the Throne.

Call in the members.

And the bells having rung:

• (1935)

Hon. Mark Holland (Ajax, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am rising on a point of order.

I appreciate the indulgence in these very historic times as we attempt our first virtual vote. As might be expected when one tries something for the first time, there are complications. Apparently there is an issue, North America-wide, with Microsoft's system. We have several members who have been unable to log in to be able to vote virtually, so I would seek the unanimous consent of the House that the members who were unable to log in virtually would be able to, with the Clerk by telephone, phone and communicate their votes. They would obviously hear the question, so we would ensure that they heard the question and that their identity was verified through the Clerk.

I would seek unanimous consent to apply that solution.

The Speaker: Normally, when there are requests for unanimous consent, the Chair asks in the affirmative whether the members agree.

[Translation]

This being a hybrid sitting of the House, were the Chair to proceed in this fashion, if there were any dissenting voices, particularly for members participating via video conference, they may not be audible.

[English]

Therefore, for the sake of clarity, I will only ask for those who are opposed to the request to express their disagreement. In this way, the Chair will hear clearly if there are any dissenting voices and I will accordingly be able to declare whether or not there is unanimous consent to proceed.

All those members opposed to the hon. member's moving the motion will please say nay.

The hon. member for Yorkton—Melville is rising on a point of order.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Mr. Speaker, I am hearing multiple conversations at once: yourself, the house leader and many at once.

The Address

Something is wrong.

The Speaker: That is fair. I will ask everyone who is at home to place themselves on mute unless they have something to say.

There is no dissenting voice. It is agreed.

There have been many firsts these past few months, and today is no exception. While many had an opportunity last week to familiarize themselves with the new process, I want to briefly outline the next steps and avoid any confusion.

Before I read the question, I will ask the table to produce the list of members participating virtually, and who will later be called to vote. I will then read the question.

• (1940)

[Translation]

I will first ask those physically present in the House who are in favour of the motion to rise. I will then ask those physically present who oppose the motion to do the same. This is the normal procedure we are all familiar with.

[English]

Afterward, the table officer will call the names of those participating virtually by party in alphabetical order, starting with the party with the largest number of seats in the House, continuing with all the other parties and then independent members. It is essential that members' cameras are turned on for the duration of the vote. This allows the authentication of members, which is required by the House motion and is essential to the integrity of the decision-making process.

Once a member's name is called by the table, that member must turn on their microphone and indicate how they intend to vote by clearly stating either "I vote for the motion" or "I vote against the motion". I would ask members to limit themselves to those words only.

[Translation]

In French, you should clearly say, "Je vote pour la motion" or "Je vote contre la motion". I ask the members to use only these phrases.

[English]

I would ask members to please not turn on their microphones in advance. That can make their image appear in place of that of the person currently voting. Once they have voted, members should please mute their microphones.

[Translation]

You must remain connected to the sitting until the results of the vote are announced. If your name is not called by the table officer when the members of your party are being recognized to vote, please wait until all the members have been called. At that point I will invite any member who was not named but who heard the question to identify themselves. You can do so by using the "raise hand" function of the video conference application. I will then name each member who raised their hand in order to allow their vote to be recorded.

*The Address**[English]*

If at any moment during a vote, or when trying to join a sitting virtually, members experience technical difficulties, they should please contact the IT ambassador at the number indicated in the invitation. The IT ambassador will provide regular updates to the table.

The list of members voting by video conference has now been established for use by the table.

● (2035)

[Translation]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Mr. Speaker, I simply wanted to point out to you that with all the confusion around me I intended to vote for the motion, but I am concerned that you understood that I voted against. I would like to ensure that my vote is recorded in favour of this motion.

The Speaker: Usually when there is a request for unanimous consent, the Chair asks members to respond in the affirmative to determine whether there is agreement.

This being a hybrid sitting of the House, were the Chair to proceed in this fashion, if there were any dissenting voices, particularly for members participating via video conference, they may not be audible.

Therefore, for the sake of clarity, I will only ask for those who are opposed to the request to express their disagreement. In this way, the Chair will hear clearly if there are any dissenting voices and I will accordingly be able to declare whether there is unanimous consent to proceed.

I forgot to mention that it is necessary to have the unanimous consent of the House to change a vote.

All those opposed to the request of the hon. member will please say nay.

An hon. member: Nay.

The Speaker: There is no unanimous consent.

The hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé.

Mr. Yves Perron: Mr. Speaker, when I voted, and as is the case now, I could not see my face on the monitor. I just wanted to be sure that my vote was properly recorded.

The Speaker: Your vote was counted.

Order. Pursuant to order made earlier today, the table has contacted any members who were unable to participate in the vote because of technical difficulties. I therefore ask that the votes for the following members be recorded as follows: the hon. member for Beloeil—Chambly and leader of the Bloc Québécois votes in favour of the motion; the hon. member for Montarville votes in favour of the motion.

[English]

The member for Fleetwood—Port Kells votes against the motion.

● (2040)

The House divided on the amendment to the amendment, which was negated on the following division:)

*(Division No. 1)***YEAS**

Members

Beaulieu
Bérubé
Blanchette-Jonas
Boulerice
Chabot
Charbonneau
Desbiens
Fortin
Gaudreau
Julian
Lemire
Normandin
Perron
Savard-Tremblay
Ste-Marie
Therrien
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Bergeron
Blanchet
Boudrias
Brunelle-Duceppe
Champoux
DeBellefeuille
Desilets
Garrison
Gill
Larouche
Michaud
Pauzé
Plamondon
Simard
Thériault
Trudel

NAYS

Members

Aboultatif
Albas
Alleslev
Amos
Anandasangaree
Arnold
Arya
Atwin
Badawey
Bains
Barlow
Barsalou-Duval
Beech
Benzen
Berthold
Bezan
Bittle
Blair
Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)
Blois
Brassard
Brière
Cannings
Carrie
Chagger
Chen
Chong
Cooper
Cumming
Dalton
Dancho
Davies
d'Entremont
Dhillon
Doherty
Dowdall
Drouin
Duclos
Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)
Duvall
Easter
El-Khoury
Epp

Aitchison
Alghabra
Allison
Anand
Angus
Arseneault
Ashton
Bachrach
Bagnell
Baker
Barrett
Battiste
Bennett
Bergen
Bessette
Bibeau
Blaikie
Blaney (North Island—Powell River)
Block
Bragdon
Bratina
Calkins
Carr
Casey
Champagne
Chiu
Collins
Cormier
Dabrusin
Damoff
Davidson
Deltell
Dhaliwal
Diotte
Dong
Dreeshen
Dubourg
Duguid
Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Dzerowicz
Ehsassi
Ellis
Erskine-Smith

Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)
Fast
Fillmore
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Fisher
Fortier
Fraser
Fry
Garneau
Généreux
Gerretsen
Godin
Gourde
Green
Hajdu
Harder
Harris
Holland
Hughes
Hutchings
Jaczek
Jeneroux
Joly
Jordan
Kelloway
Kent
Khera
Kmicc
Kram
Kusie
Kwan
Lalonde
Lametti
Lattanzio
Lawrence
Lebouthillier
Lehoux
Lightbound
Lobb
Longfield
Lukiwski
MacKenzie
Maguire
Manly
Martinez Ferrada
Mathysen
May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)
McColeman
McDonald
McKay
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)
McPherson
Mendès
Miller
Moore
Morrison
Motz
Nater
O'Connell
O'Toole
Paul-Hus
Poilievre
Qaqqaq
Ratansi
Redekopp
Reid
Richards
Rodriguez
Romanado
Ruff
Sahota (Brampton North)
Sajjan

Falk (Provencher)
Fergus
Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock)
Finnigan
Fonseca
Fragiskatos
Freeland
Gallant
Gazan
Genuis
Gladu
Gould
Gray
Guilbeault
Hallan
Hardie
Hoback
Housefather
Hussen
Iacono
Jansen
Johns
Jones
Jowhari
Kelly
Khalid
Kitchen
Koutrakis
Kurek
Kusmierczyk
Lake
Lambropoulos
Lamoureux
Lauzon
LeBlanc
Lefebvre
Lewis (Essex)
Lloyd
Long
Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga)
MacGregor
MacKinnon (Gatineau)
Maloney
Martel
Masse
May (Cambridge)
McCauley (Edmonton West)
McCrimmon
McGuinty
McKenna
McLean
McLeod (Northwest Territories)
Melillo
Mendicino
Monsef
Morantz
Morrissey
Murray
Ng
Oliphant
Patzner
Petipas Taylor
Powlowski
Qualtrough
Rayes
Regan
Rempel Garner
Robillard
Rogers
Rood
Sahota (Calgary Skyview)
Saini
Samson

Sangha
Saroya
Scheer
Schmale
Seeback
Sgro
Sheehan
Shin
Sidhu (Brampton East)
Simms
Sloan
Soroka
Stanton
Strahl
Sweet
Tassi
Trudeau
Uppal
van Koeverden
Vandal
Vaughan
Vidal
Virani
Wagantall
Waugh
Weiler
Williamson
Wong
Young
Zahid
Zimmer

Sarai
Scarpaleggia
Schiefke
Schulte
Serré
Shanahan
Shields
Shipley
Sidhu (Brampton South)
Singh
Sorbara
Spengemann
Steinley
Stubbs
Tabbara
Tochor
Turnbull
Van Bynen
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The Address

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the amendment to the amendment defeated.

Mr. Blake Richards: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I noticed something about a number of members voting virtually during the vote tonight. I am not going to list names or ridings at this point, but I will bring it to your attention because it might be a good time for you to remind members of this. A number of members voted without jackets, for example, and there were a couple of props that I saw on people's screens.

It might be a good time to remind people that being virtual is much like being in the House and there is a dress code and certain decorum that is required. It might be a good time for you to remind members, for the following votes, that those things are still appropriate when they are voting virtually.

The Speaker: I want to thank the hon. member for a very good point.

I want to remind all members that when they are voting, what they have in the background cannot be a prop or promote a certain ideology. It has to be as neutral as possible, much like what we have in the House. When voting, male members have to be wearing a jacket of some sort in order to speak. Normally, we have to wear a tie in the House and I would encourage everyone to wear a tie.

While we are on the topic, I want to remind all members that it is up to them to be in an area where they have good connectivity. If they can plug directly into their network, it makes it that much better. If they are in a place where the Wi-Fi is not very strong, they should find themselves a place where it is strong enough to vote and be heard.

*Adjournment Proceedings**[Translation]*

I would like to thank all hon. members for their participation on this very historic evening.

[English]

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I want to make a clarification. I noticed that more than a dozen members turned off their video after they voted and before the count was read. My understanding of the instruction is that members must keep their video on from the beginning of the vote until the vote is counted. Is that correct?

The Speaker: That is correct. I remind all members that when they are voting, their video has to stay on from the beginning until the end of the vote.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I too rise on a point of order. I have been in touch with the hon. member for Fredericton and she believed her vote was counted and confirmed by the clerk, but I may have missed it. I did not hear you read it out. She had issues connecting through Zoom. The hon. member for Fredericton believes that she voted and that she voted against the motion.

The Speaker: Did she have a record of that?

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, she had a video conversation with the clerk separately and believes her vote was counted, so I want to make sure I register that.

The Speaker: Unfortunately, we do not have a record of that. What we will do is check with the technical crew and get back and see what the results are. Once we have that, we will count it if that is appropriate.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is bound to be a glitch or two, but it was confirmed by both the member and a member of her staff in separate emails to me that she had voted and they were surprised not to hear her name read out with those who voted by making independent calls to verify their vote.

The Speaker: I want to thank the hon. member for bringing that up.

[Translation]

Are there any further questions or comments?

Are there any other points of order? The hon. member for Banff—Airdrie on a point of order.

[English]

Mr. Blake Richards: Mr. Speaker, I am rising on a point of order. I did not think of this one earlier, but I am also aware that there were a number of members who were utilizing social media, for example, with pictures of the voting from the Zoom meeting. That is also something that is considered inappropriate, much like taking a picture within the House itself. It might be a good time to remind members about that as well, or maybe perhaps a ruling from you on that, Mr. Speaker, because it is new territory that we are in. I want to raise that with you as well.

• (2045)

The Speaker: That is an item that was mentioned when we first started, so I want to remind the hon. members. I know they are excited and this is a historic night and they want to take a picture but

they should not be taking pictures and posting them on the web. That is against the rules of the House while someone is voting.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

*[English]***FISHERIES**

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise in this place in Adjournment Proceedings to pursue a question I asked just last week of the Minister of Fisheries.

The response from the minister was far from adequate, but I did not expect to feel the rage I now feel in taking the question up again. The question last week was about whether the minister was prepared to act on the Cohen Commission's recommendation 19 to remove the toxic fish factories near Discovery Islands.

I feel as though I am experiencing déjà vu all over again. I am one of those people in the country who remembers the collapse of our cod stocks. I am a Maritimer. I remember the moment when it was really the large offshore dragger companies that declared the moratorium, because the cod stocks were gone.

In 1998, Michael Harris wrote the horrible narrative, the deep details of the corrupted science within the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, in his book, *Lament for an Ocean*. I read it and gave him a blurb for the back of the book, which was that after reading this book, I would not trust DFO with my aquarium.

I did not know that it was possible to be this angry again. I thought the Department of Fisheries and Oceans had begun to understand the notion of sustainability. However, the Cohen Commission, at a cost of \$25 million, commissioned by the previous government under Stephen Harper, looked at the collapse of salmon returns when in 2009 only one and a half million salmon returned up the Fraser River, instead of the five million that were expected. This year is the all-time low, a return of 270,000 salmon.

First nations up and down the Fraser, up and down the coast are declaring the collapse of Pacific salmon. It is a disaster. The committee on fisheries and oceans was studying this very matter until prorogation pulled the plug on it.

When I asked the minister if she was prepared to act by September 30, which is the deadline, she said that several steps were under way. I did not know those steps would be fiction from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. Once again, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans is cooking its science. How? It issued it today, to say that the risk to salmon from those open pen toxic fish factories was a minimal risk, that there was no need to close them down at the Discovery Islands. The minister has launched a consultation with some of the first nations involved, but not all of course.

How is it possible that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans could say such a thing? In March of this year, DFO gave those salmon farms virtual permission for out-of-control sea lice. As a result, three different academic studies found that 99% of the 2020 juvenile sockeye migration through the Discovery Islands were infected at levels we know will reduce their survival.

How could it be that DFO now says it is low risk? As marine biologist, Alexandra Morton, said, DFO did not assess the impact of sea lice, the most visible threat. If we are going to do a study to see whether an activity is dangerous to salmon, let us exclude the number one cause of disease and danger to the wild salmon populations, the burgeoning sea lice. There is a reason for these companies in our waters, Norwegian-owned fish farms, but in Norway they are moving to closed containment.

The Liberal government promised in its platform to end open pen fish farms. When will it happen?

• (2050)

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Madam Speaker, when I was first appointed as the parliamentary secretary in 2017, I read the Cohen commission report from front to back. As a person who came to the House to improve the lives and opportunities of future generations, the issue of wild salmon immediately spoke to me as an opportunity to contribute to something that mattered to many British Columbians. I spent time with stream keepers, first nations, fishermen and non-profits to better understand the potential impact of fish farms on wild salmon.

I was happy to serve as the parliamentary secretary who worked on passing all five major environmental bills through the House from the previous Parliament. This included changes to the Fishery Act, which restored protections for fish and fish habitat and created new modern safeguards. I acted to defend the salmon enhancement program and advocated to get more funding into ecosystem restoration through programs such as the oceans protection plan and more recently through the \$142-million B.C. salmon fund.

After a brief period in Transport, I returned to my current position during a time when our salmon are facing their most historic crisis. My earliest days on the file were spent on first nation's territory and on the site of the Big Bar landslide. This devastating slide is putting salmon further at risk and our government has made all possible investments to mitigate the effects of this natural disaster on wild salmon. I say this because I want the member and every member in this House, as well as British Columbians watching this at home, to know that wild Pacific salmon are a top priority of our government.

In the last election campaign, we promised to transition away from open-net pen finfish aquaculture on the B.C. coast, and the minister is committed to delivering on that promise. The minister took some steps in that direction by announcing today that we are committed to an area-based management approach to aquaculture, starting in the Discovery Islands. I know that the member and others in British Columbia were hopeful that the announcement today was going to be an announcement to immediately withdraw the net pens in the Discovery Islands. While this is well within the minister's control and power, there are a number of important factors that

Adjournment Proceedings

were not immediately considered when the recommendation was first drafted by Justice Cohen, the primary of which is our government's commitment to first nations reconciliation and to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

First nation communities have rightfully acknowledged the urgency of the response to the Cohen recommendations, but have also been very clear that they cannot accept unilateral decisions on what happens in their territory. This is an opportunity for us to work together with all affected first nations and stakeholders to build a better future for everyone, and that is exactly what our government is doing.

In terms of determining the risk level posed by farms in the recommendation, DFO created a formal scientific assessment framework and conducted nine scientifically peer-reviewed risk assessments on pathogens that are known to cause disease. I want to be very specific here. We are a government that takes science seriously, and it is important for anyone listening to or reading this speech to understand the entirety of what I am about to say. For each of the nine risk assessments, DFO found that each individual pathogen provided a minimal risk to the abundance and diversity of wild Fraser River sockeye salmon. Their assessment does not include further analysis of the cumulative risk of all nine pathogens taken together, either independently or in conjunction with other cumulative risks on wild salmon, including sea lice, climate change or overharvesting.

We continue to build on our body of science and on our understanding of the marine environment. This includes how we manage aquaculture. While there still remains no direct smoking gun that I can point to today, I can say our government is committed to a precautionary approach and moving forward with a responsible transition from open-net pen finfish aquaculture on the west coast of British Columbia.

Mr. Brad Vis: Madam Speaker, I have a point of order. I would like to respond to the parliamentary secretary.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): There is no point of order at this time, unless there is a technical problem. This is the late show. I am sorry.

The hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

• (2055)

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, if there was a way to add insult to injury, I suppose it would be to invoke the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to block the very thing that first nations throughout British Columbia are urging the minister to do, which is to act.

Adjournment Proceedings

Chief Judy Wilson of the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs said, “When a department fails so miserably as DFO, it's time the federal government says we need a reform here, it's not working.”

To be very clear, the nine pathogens studied by DFO in deciding there was minimum risk did not include sea lice. I am sorry that the parliamentary secretary is willing to say that this is a top priority for his government. It makes me wonder what could be worse. I guess we need to dig more graves for Canadians, because COVID is our top priority. If Pacific salmon is a top priority and the Liberals continue to allow sea lice to contaminate the wild salmon population, then they do not know what a priority looks like.

Mr. Terry Beech: Madam Chair, the protection and restoration of wild Pacific salmon is a top priority of our government. It is why we have taken such strong and immediate action on passing environmental legislation, including the Fisheries Act, and why we have moved to protect 25% of our marine habitat by 2025. It is also why our government has invested hundreds of millions of dollars into habitat restoration and innovative programs like the \$142-million B.C. salmon restoration and innovation fund. Our government is also committed to transitioning away from open-net pen finfish

aquaculture in B.C. and is moving forward on this file in a responsible way.

Our approach must include meaningful consultations with local first nations and communities, and preferably with an approach that is aligned with the Government of British Columbia as well. The future of finfish aquaculture in British Columbia must be clean and sustainable, and prioritize the health and abundance of wild Pacific salmon and the biodiversity of our marine ecosystem.

I look forward to working with British Columbians, including first nations, local communities, the province, the member and all members of the House to find that responsible path forward. Our kids—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I am sorry but the time is up.

The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 8:56 p.m.)

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