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Chair: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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• (1205)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to the 25th meeting of the Special Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic.

[Translation]

I would remind all members that, in order to avoid issues with sound, members participating in person should not also be connected to the video conference.

[English]

For those joining via video conference, I would like to remind you that, when speaking, you should be on the same channel as the language that you are speaking.

[Translation]

As usual, please direct your remarks through the chair.

[English]

I understand that there are no ministerial announcements today.

We will now proceed to presenting petitions. I would like to remind honourable members that any petition presented during the meeting of the special committee must have already been certified by the clerk of petitions.

The first petition to be presented will be from Ms. May.

[Translation]

Members participating in person are asked to please come and drop the signed certificate off at the Table once the petition is presented.

[English]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Chair, it's an honour to rise in this place to present two petitions today.

The first is from a number of constituents and others who have signed the e-petition calling for the federal government to examine the need for a permanent federal funding mechanism for public transit. The petitioners note that the current 10-year transit plan will end in 2027 and that having low-emission public transport is very important for meeting long-term climate goals. They ask that the federal government provide a permanent federal funding mechanism to go well beyond the 10-year transit plan and to work with all

levels of government to provide sustainable, predictable, long-term and adequate funding.

The second petition speaks to the issue that gripped the country so much just months ago, but is not forgotten, which is the conflict on Wet'suwet'en territory over the Coastal GasLink and the need for the Government of Canada to uphold the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action. They call for the RCMP to stand down and note that the RCMP has violated the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The Chair: Next is Mr. Manly.

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Mr. Chair, this petition is put forward by constituents in my riding of Nanaimo—Ladysmith who are very concerned about climate change and government action on climate change.

They are calling upon the government, the House of Commons and Parliament assembled to update Canada's climate action targets to reflect science and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's 2018 report, eliminate all subsidies to the fossil fuel industry, invest in a just transition for oil and gas workers, cease from purchasing, subsidizing or supporting any future fossil fuel infrastructure and invest in clean, renewable energy and/or other climate and socially conscious investment opportunities.

I'd like to thank my constituent, Vic Brice, for putting this forward.

The Chair: We will now go to Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Mr. Chair, the 550 petitioners draw to the attention of the House the situation at two federally operated prison farms in Kingston. The plans of the previous government to shut down these prison farms were widely opposed in the community. The present government agreed to keep the farms open, but the petitioners believe that Correctional Service Canada's current plans for reopening the farms are very far from what the public had in mind. Current plans call for \$4.3 million to be devoted to an industrial goat milk operation under the supervision of a Chinese-owned multinational and used to manufacture infant formula to export to the People's Republic of China.

The petitioners suggest that a use that more closely aligns to Kingston's community values would be to grow fresh produce suitable for supplying food banks and distributing to members of the local community who are suffering from food insecurity. The petitioners point out that this would, incidentally, also cause our own export policies to align more closely with Canada's own practice of never importing goods produced in whole or in part by prison labour.

The Chair: We'll now go to Mr. Johns.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Chair, it's a privilege and honour to present a petition led by Cathy Van Herwaarden from the Parksville-Qualicum Retired Teachers' Association. They're calling on the Government of Canada to develop a comprehensive pan-Canadian single-payer and universal pharmacare program that ensures all Canadians can access medically prescribed necessary medications and supplies regardless of their ability to pay.

They cite that the cost of prescription medications and necessary medical supplies in Canada is excessive and varies greatly between provinces and territories. They cite also that the cost of prescription medications and medical supplies is continuing to rise significantly every year. They state that too many Canadians cannot afford to purchase their prescription medications and/or medical supplies or have to choose between purchasing prescription medications and medical supplies or providing for food and shelter. They cite that it's time now for a single-payer, universal pharmacare program for all Canadians.

The Chair: Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Chair, I'll be presenting three petitions today.

The first petition is with respect to firearms. The petitioners note that virtually all violent gun crime committed in Canada, including the recent terrible shooting in Nova Scotia, involved illegal firearms in the hands of those already not permitted to possess them. Given this clear data, taking property from law-abiding citizens is a distraction from the important work that needs to be done to keep guns out of the hands of criminals.

The petitioners have three specific asks: number one, reverse the order in council banning certain firearms imposed on May 1; number two, propose measures that will effectively address the illegal use of firearms by criminals while respecting the rights of law-abiding citizens; and number three, ensure that substantial changes to Canada's firearms laws are only ever made by Parliament and not by the government or the RCMP acting unilaterally.

The second petition deals with government Bill C-7. While there's growing discussion about the need to do better in the area of long-term care, the government's focus has been instead on expanding euthanasia, even doing so ahead of a mandated five-year statutory review. Part of proposed Bill C-7 is to do away with a 10-day reflection period and reduce the number of witnesses required to ensure patient consent. The petitioners are opposed to and don't see the logic in the government's focus on removing safeguards rather than providing seniors with dignified living circumstances.

The third petition is in support of Bill S-204, a bill that would make it a criminal offence for someone to go abroad to receive an organ without consent and also create a framework under which someone could be made inadmissible to Canada if they were involved in the horrific practice of forced organ harvesting.

I commend these three petitions to the consideration of the committee. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and have a good summer.

• (1210)

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now go to Mr. Lamoureux.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Chair, it's a pleasure for me to table yet another petition from the residents of Winnipeg North. They are calling for a national pharmacare program and they're asking, whether it's the Prime Minister or all members of all political parties, for us to understand and appreciate the importance of having a national pharmacare program. It's specifically to have the government work in co-operation with the different levels of government to ensure that we can have a program sometime in the near future.

The Chair: Presenting petitions.

[Translation]

We will now proceed to statements by members.

[English]

The first statement will be from Mr. Casey.

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Chair, in challenging times, we look to those who inspire. In Prince Edward Island, that includes Lorie Kane. Lorie is a tireless promoter of her beloved island. She's a four-time Ladies Professional Golf Association winner, a five-time Legends Tour winner, and a member of the Order of Canada. She has now been called to Canada's Sports Hall of Fame.

In addition to being a world-class golfer, Lorie is a genuine and generous person who has devoted vast amounts of time and energy to a multitude of charitable causes. It is no exaggeration to say that her work in fundraising for children's health charities has literally saved lives, and I cannot stress enough the role that she has played in inspiring islanders to get involved and to get moving.

Lorie has always carried herself with grace and humility in true Island fashion. Please join me in congratulating P.E.I.'s pride and joy, Lorie Kane, on her well-earned appointment to our national sports hall of fame.

The Chair: We'll now go to Mr. McLean.

Mr. Greg McLean (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Chair, today I pay tribute to COVID-9teen, not the pandemic but the youth volunteer organization that grew out of the recent crisis to serve our community. Nine is the number nine, and teen is the age of the volunteers.

Over the past month, these inspiring youth leaders took their efforts virtual. Through dance, music, arts and athletics, they kept us entertained through our lockdown with free presentations. Viewers contributed through the site to the Alberta Children's Hospital Foundation. These young leaders delivered.

Sadly, this past week's virtual talent show was hacked with vile and bigoted interventions. The online world allows cowards hiding behind their screens to present comments anonymously. To them I say, "Show yourselves. There are consequences to us all for your crossing the line, and there should be no medium in which words are not attached to the commentator."

To my friends in COVID-9teen, thank you for all you've done and for all you will continue to do. We are all so proud of you.

The Chair: We'll now go to Mr. Levitt.

Mr. Michael Levitt (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I offer my heartfelt congratulations to all the students—and their families—who are graduating from high school in my riding of York Centre. For the last six years I've had the honour of attending high school graduation ceremonies, and while COVID-19 has made this year different, the graduating students' achievements are even more meaningful as they have all faced this challenge directly and have overcome it.

Each year I look forward to seeing the look of excitement on the students' faces as they come up to receive their certificates, but also the immense pride on the faces of their parents, grandparents, caregivers and siblings.

This year our grads might not be able to see our faces, but we are beaming with pride more than ever. I want to congratulate every student. This is a huge achievement and something that you will always cherish. I hope you will each take the time to reflect on your high school experiences with teachers, friends and all the lessons you've learned and take those memories with you as you move on to your next adventure.

• (1215)

[Translation]

The Chair: Will now move on to Ms. Michaud.

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Chair, it will certainly be a unique end to the school year for students this year. That is especially true for those graduating high school. Having this important stage in their lives end so abruptly is heartbreaking.

When they should be spending the last few weeks of their graduating year having fun, laughing and crying, surrounded by the friends and teachers who defined their teenage years, they are instead isolated at home.

I want to wish them the best of luck in their next chapter. Soon, they will embark on a path that I sincerely hope will lead them to a career they are passionate about. In any case, the class of 2020 will always be remembered as a brave and resilient bunch.

I want all of Quebec's graduates, especially the young people of Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, to remember that and, above all, to keep their heads held high at every step along the way, no matter where life takes them.

I wish each and every one of them continued success.

[English]

The Chair: We'll now go to Mr. Louis.

Mr. Tim Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga, Lib.): Mr. Chair, our professional support workers are on the front lines of care and deserve our support. In the Waterloo region, we are making that happen.

Yesterday, in partnership with Cowan Foundation, Conestoga College announced Canada's first integrated strategy to support the training and education of personal support workers. This innovative collaboration will create the most technologically advanced PSW in supportive care program of its kind in Canada.

Building upon the college's existing Cowan Health Sciences Centre, an epicentre will be created for remote learning, which will eliminate many of the financial, travel and time barriers that exist today for PSW students. It will also leverage Conestoga College's first-of-its-kind living classroom model to provide PSW students with hands-on learning experience.

Thank you to the PSWs who play a vital role in our health care system as they promote client dignity and independence. This support would not be possible without the generous support from the Cowan Foundation and chairperson Maureen Cowan, for the amazing donation of \$5 million to benefit the wellness of Canadians.

May the memory of her grandmother, Frances, live on.

The Chair: We'll now go to Mr. Vis.

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Mr. Chair, Canadians living with disabilities are used to overcoming challenges, but they shouldn't have to deal with more COVID-19 struggles when others have been given the help they need. The Liberals waited for months to address this. Then, when they introduced legislation for Canadians with disabilities last week, they demanded that Parliament fast-track their bill. Conservatives support the initiative, but we know that rushed government legislation ultimately lets Canadians down.

We move to recall Parliament immediately to debate and pass the legislation, which could have been done last week but the Liberals denied it. This avoidable delay hurts Canadians with disabilities. The government even said it could have achieved the same ends through regulation, so do it.

Better yet, recall Parliament for the summer. The Liberals have used COVID-19 for their own political ends and have turned their backs on Canadians with disabilities, denying them the timely support they needed.

The Chair: We'll now continue with Mr. Schiefke.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Schiefke (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, Lib.): Mr. Chair, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a huge impact on entrepreneurs and small business owners, and my community, Vaudreuil—Soulanges, is no exception. That's why, now more than ever, we must support our local economies by choosing to buy local.

We have the good fortune in Vaudreuil—Soulanges of having an abundance of fantastic local merchants. I encourage the people of Vaudreuil—Soulanges to discover all that they have to offer by going to www.achatlocalvs.com. There, they'll find a whole section on buying local and a list of merchants in the community who can meet all their needs.

[English]

As our travel options are more limited than ever, I also encourage my constituents to rediscover all that our beautiful community of Vaudreuil—Soulanges has to offer. Whether it's hiking, biking, kayaking, boating, canoeing or just stopping to pick up a bite at a local restaurant and setting up a picnic in the park, by choosing to buy local and rediscovering our own backyard, we can support each other while making the most of our limited summer months.

[Translation]

The Chair: We now move on to Mrs. Mendès.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès (Brossard—Saint-Lambert, Lib.): Mr. Chair, the pandemic that has battered us since the beginning of the year has demanded superhuman efforts from health care and essential service workers. It has also demanded that the entire federal public service be creative and flexible. That is especially true when it comes to our work here, in the House, where the House administration, and IT and telecommunications teams have risen to the challenge with flying colours.

I can't adequately express my appreciation for the enormity of the work they've accomplished. Their hard work and ability to innovate are outstanding. We owe them a debt of gratitude. I am sure my fellow members will join me in extending a heartfelt thanks to all the teams who made it possible for us to carry on our parliamentary duties so effectively.

• (1220)

[English]

The Chair: We will now continue with Mr. Lobb.

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Mr. Chair, I'd like to recognize and congratulate all the 2020 graduates in Huron—Bruce, in high school, grade eight and even in kindergarten. Congratulations. You've worked very hard and we're proud of your accomplishments.

I'd also like to thank all the teachers, the administration, the support staff, as well as the parents, grandparents and the extended families. Your support has made the difference and supported these children towards their great accomplishment.

The great news is that the best is yet to come. We support, encourage, recognize and congratulate all your hard work. We look

forward to seeing you in the future and all your tremendous accomplishments. All the best, and we'll see you out there.

The Chair: We will continue with Mr. Scarpaleggia.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Chair, last Sunday I attended a wonderful gathering in the city of Pointe-Claire in my riding, in support of Black Lives Matter.

I would like to congratulate the organizers, Allison Saunders and Kathleen McAdams, who brought us together in such large numbers to take a knee in solidarity for change. The message was clear: We need to listen and take action to change our institutions.

The event was remarkable in many ways, but one thing that caught my eye was the number of parents who brought their young children. It made me think of the song, *Teach Your Children*. What better way to do that than bringing them to take part in such an inspiring show of community solidarity for ending systemic racism.

Thank you also to Reverend Christopher Belle, who graced us with his thoughtful words of unity, peace and hope.

The Chair: We'll now go to Mrs. Block.

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Mr. Chair, this coming Sunday I, together with many Canadians, will celebrate our fathers.

I am truly blessed to have amazing role models of fatherhood in my life. Both my father Ernie and my father-in-law Henry have been there as voices of wisdom and reason helping me navigate life. My husband Milton and his steadfast love for and dedication to our children, and now the next generation of fathers in our family, my son Theo and sons-in-law Jeff, Nic and Michael, have blessed me beyond measure as I watch them love and train our grandchildren.

This Sunday I hope that Canadians across the country will join me in showing appreciation to their fathers for loving, protecting and guiding their children, helping them flourish and be the best they can be.

Happy Father's Day.

The Chair: Ms. Dancho.

Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Chair, it's an honour to rise in the House today to commemorate Pride Month 2020.

With physical distancing requirements we won't be seeing large parades or celebrations, but instead Pride is moving virtual. I am thankful that we can come together in a new way to celebrate the freedoms that were hard fought and won by the LGBTQ community and its allies.

It is also National Public Service Week and I would be remiss if I did not mention the historic discrimination suffered by members of the LGBTQ community serving in the federal public service and the Canadian Armed Forces who, three years ago, finally received an official apology in the House of Commons for this historic discrimination.

It is things like this that remind us how important Pride is. Every person, regardless of sexual orientation and gender expression, deserves to be treated with dignity, compassion and respect.

We have come a long way, and I look forward to contributing to making Canada a more inclusive place where all can live, flourish and be free. On behalf of the Conservative caucus, Happy Pride Month, Canada.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mrs. Hughes, you may go ahead.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Chair, the residents of Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing are doing everything they can to fight COVID-19, whether it be staying home, avoiding crowds, following the guidelines, performing essential work, retooling their businesses or volunteering to make personal protective equipment. These proud northerners are rising to the occasion with their usual spirit, ingenuity and great determination.

[English]

Over the next month, that ingenuity will be on display again, while celebrating Pride, National Indigenous Peoples Day, Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day or Canada Day, all of which represent vibrant events under normal circumstances. People in the north are finding creative ways to connect and showcase their communities. I'm so proud to represent these big-hearted people.

I extend a special thank you to everyone providing essential services and doing their part amid exceptional circumstances. Please join me in thanking them. We're all in this together.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mrs. Gill, you may go ahead.

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Chair, next week, we'll be celebrating our national holiday in a unique way in these even more unique times, but wholeheartedly, nonetheless.

As a resident of the north shore and a Quebecker, I want to say, on behalf of the Bloc Québécois, how much I love my nation and my country, Quebec. Moulded by our traditions, our history, our common language and, of course, our present, we are the indomitable who, come what may, will always be left standing, strong, alive and invigorated.

No matter where in Quebec we call home, whether it be Sept-Îles, Gaspé, Valleyfield, La Prairie, Matane, Rouyn, Chicoutimi, Quebec City, Belœil or Montreal, we have a shared pride. That pride is evidenced as much by the vitality of our regions as by the majesty of the St. Lawrence, and is embodied by our artists, whom we are eager to see perform again in person, and our families, whom we are equally eager to hug.

On June 24, I encourage all Quebeckers, wherever they are, to come together, if only remotely, to celebrate their pride in belonging to the unique people that we are, people who make the world a richer place.

I want to wish all Quebeckers a happy national holiday.

• (1225)

[English]

The Chair: We'll now go to Mr. Warkentin.

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Grande Prairie—Mackenzie, CPC): Mr. Chair, my constituents believe that in a democracy, Parliament is an essential service. Accountability and transparency should never be optional for any government, but the Prime Minister has ignored the will of Canadians, and with the help of the NDP, has shut down Parliament.

Canadians will not be silenced. The voices of struggling energy workers, business owners, tradespeople, farm families, seniors and other Peace Country residents will continue to have their voices heard. I'll continue to fight for the people that the Prime Minister would rather ignore. Our Conservative team will continue to be the voice of those who have fallen through the cracks because of the Prime Minister's mismanagement, because in a democracy every voice matters, no matter how inconvenient for the Prime Minister.

[Translation]

The Chair: Ms. Martinez Ferrada has the floor.

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Hochelaga, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It has been more than 40 years since I emigrated here, to Quebec, with my mother. I am a child of Bill 101 and a proud French-speaking Quebecker.

Like my colleague, I want to recognize that, on June 24, all Quebeckers will come together to celebrate their national holiday. Quebec is a strong nation with a unique identity. Whether it's our arts community, our entrepreneurial spirit or our desire to build an energy-efficient future, all these things define us as Quebeckers. Our pride is not bound by political stripe, the colour of our skin or our country of origin.

As a member of Parliament, I work each and every day to improve Quebec's future. Let us all work towards a Quebec nation where generations, young and old, and new and existing Quebeckers come together as we continue our journey as a proud French-speaking nation that stands united.

I wish everyone a happy national holiday, especially the residents of my riding, Hochelaga.

The Chair: We will now proceed to questions to ministers.

[English]

Please note we will suspend the proceedings twice to allow employees who provide support for the meeting to substitute for each other safely.

The first question goes to the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Chair, the Prime Minister so badly wanted to win a seat on the United Nations Security Council, he made it a campaign promise in 2015, spent the last five years selling out Canadian principles, cozying up to dictators and despots, and even sent Canadian soldiers into harm's way to curry favour at the UN.

Last night must have been a devastating blow to the Prime Minister. Was it worth it?

The Chair: The right honourable Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, Canadians always expect their country to step up on the world stage, and that's exactly what we've done over the past five years with our engagement on fighting climate change, on peacekeeping, on advancing the cause of women's equality, on development assistance, and trade and economic growth.

Canada has continued to engage in the world, and we will continue to engage constructively and positively on the world stage.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Except, Mr. Chair, that's not what he did. He remained silent when standing beside leaders of countries with terrible human rights records because he was afraid of offending them and losing their votes. That is his legacy in chasing this vanity project.

The Prime Minister shook the hand of the Iranian foreign minister and even vowed just a month after that country's military shot down a plane with dozens of Canadians on it. Again, was it worth it?

• (1230)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, I will take no lessons on international engagement from a party that promised to cut foreign aid in the last election. Unfortunately, Canadians didn't agree with them and have returned to a government that continues to look at staying positive and engaged on the world stage. Yes, we have always stood up clearly and strongly for human rights, for our values, and we will continue to, even as we engage constructively around the world.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Chair, the Prime Minister has sent billions of dollars of taxpayers' money to countries with economies more advanced than Canada's or led by dictators with terrible human rights records. That is his legacy. He's also turned his back on our friends and our allies, voting in favour of one-sided anti-Israel resolutions at the United Nations in order to curry favour from countries that do not acknowledge Israel's right to exist. Again, was it worth it?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, every step of the way, we've continued to stand up strongly for Canadians' values and for Canadians' interest on the world stage. It is in our interest to see a more peaceful and a more prosperous world in which everyone has a real and fair chance to succeed, and that's what we've been contributing to.

With regard to the question of Israel, we have stood strongly by Israel as a friend, but we have also expressed our concern about the annexation policy that it has put forward. These are issues that are complicated, but Canada will always stand true to its values and to our approach on the world stage.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Chair, this House voted to list the IRGC, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, as a terrorist entity. The Prime Minister refused to take action and do that. He's also refused to impose any Magnitsky act sanctions on human rights abusers around the world, all in an attempt to curry favour with those dictators and despots at the United Nations, selling out Canada's values in pursuit of a seat.

Now he has come back empty-handed, having come in last. Again, was it worth it?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, it is always worth it for Canada to step up on the world stage. It is always worth it for us to reach out and fight for things like fighting climate change, like women's equality, like protecting our oceans, like opportunities for Canadians around the world and like opportunities for the vulnerable around the world. Canadians expect their government to step up on the world stage, and that's exactly what we did.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: That's not what he did, Mr. Chair. You see, when he was in the same room as dictators and despots and leaders of countries with terrible records, he was silent. In fact, he stood right beside the president of Senegal when that president defended Senegal's laws making homosexuality a crime. The Prime Minister said nothing. He was silent. He's even using Canadian tax dollars to invest in oil and gas projects in other countries in order to win favour as well.

Again, when we look at this government's record, when we look at his personal record on the world stage, we see that our relationship with India has been damaged by his actions. We have a worse trade deal than he inherited. He has angered, with his erratic behaviour, our partners in the Pacific area, and at the end of it, he came home empty-handed. Was it worth it?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, Canada has continued to stand strong on the world stage to engage with countries around the world in need of support, in need of economic opportunity. We have consistently stood up for our values, unlike the Conservatives, who have slashed protection for the world's most vulnerable women by not funding reproductive rights and services around the world, who have not stood up for LGBTQ communities. Canada has always stood up for progressive values on the world stage, and we will continue to.

[Translation]

The Chair: It is now Mr. Therrien's turn.

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Since October 21, the Bloc Québécois has tried to be a constructive opposition. As the lieutenant for Quebec, the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons knows it. He knows that we have always been constructive in all our efforts.

I made a list, because I didn't want to forget anything. It's a list of measures that can be attributed to us or that we contributed to, measures that, above all else, were achieved. They are all improvements, no matter whose idea they were.

Assistance for seniors, the ability for people to earn a bit of income without losing the Canada emergency response benefit, or CERB—that includes firefighters, dividends and councillors—CERB eligibility for self-employed and independent workers, enhancements to the emergency business account and wage subsidy, and commercial rent relief are all on that list. We would have liked to see more support for fixed costs. Unfortunately, it's been a rocky road. Dairy farmers received support through the increase in the Canadian Dairy Commission's borrowing limit. We were also the first ones to broach the idea of a virtual Parliament.

The problem, however, has to do with the CERB, clearly an integral part of the government's response to the pandemic. The CERB is supposed to provide income support to people who are struggling. That's understandable, but it should not be a disincentive to going back to work. On that front, it has failed.

Why did the government not adjust the CERB accordingly?

• (1235)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, to begin with, I want to recognize that, over the past few months, we have indeed seen parliamentarians of all stripes work together in a respectful and collaborative way to help Canadians during this pandemic. We have passed a number of bills, which were made better not just by our members, of course, but also by members of the opposition parties. That's a wonderful example of how strong Canada's democracy is. It also shows that we can continue to defend our institutions and make them work, even under extremely difficult circumstances.

Initially, the CERB was indeed meant to be a disincentive. We needed people to stay home. Now, we are encouraging people to make the transition to the wage subsidy, but we recognize that there isn't enough work to go around, unfortunately. Some three million people who would like to work still aren't able to.

That's why we need to maintain the CERB, but we are certainly exploring ways to incentivize people to work. As my fellow member mentioned, we want people to be supported, but we also want them to be able to work.

Mr. Alain Therrien: On April 29, we talked to people in the government. Back then, it was clear that the Canada emergency student benefit, or CESB, needed to have incentives built in and that the CERB should as well. We asked a question about that. We wanted the government to pledge to do so. We didn't include it in the motion, but we asked the Deputy Prime Minister about it. She said that the CERB and the CESB were being offered in a manner that meets their objectives while encouraging employment in all circumstances.

Why didn't the government keep its word?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Once again, I'd like to thank the honourable member for his question.

It is true that we wanted to make adjustments to the CERB to incentivize, even require, people to look for work. That was part of the bill we introduced last week. We were trying to further incentivize work and, to some extent, eliminate any disincentive in the CERB.

Unfortunately, some people were more interested in playing political games, especially the Conservatives, so we weren't able to move forward with that measure or even to help people with disabilities. It was shameful on the part of—

The Chair: Mr. Therrien, you may go ahead.

Mr. Alain Therrien: Mr. Chair, the Bloc Québécois was told that it was impossible to build incentives into the CERB owing to a lack of resources. Last week, the Liberals proposed the use of coercive measures, which weren't easily enforceable. They had the resources to implement coercive measures, but not incentives.

The Quebec government is calling on you to do this. Why are you not adjusting the CERB, which is currently hindering the economic recovery?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: We appreciate that many business owners want to rebuild their workforces. We are actually delighted at that. We know the recovery is coming, but a great many people won't find jobs this summer, no matter how hard they look because the economic recovery is not in full swing. As we speak, three million people are looking for jobs.

The Chair: Mr. Therrien, you may go ahead. Please keep your question very short.

Mr. Alain Therrien: I know it isn't easy to put incentives in place, but the Liberals have a responsibility to do the right thing in a difficult situation. We made that clear a month and a half ago. We warned them, because they needed it, and we told them that what they were doing was risky since certain people would refuse to work if they could make more money staying home. It's important to do things properly. We can't have people refusing to work when the economic recovery begins.

Everyone is asking for this. Are you going to adjust the CERB quickly?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: As the summer progresses, we are exploring ways to make sure the CERB and our other support measures do not serve as disincentives to work.

The underlying goal was and is to help people in need. That's the priority. Canadians' well-being was and remains our priority.

The Chair: Mr. Singh, you may go ahead.

[English]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

● (1240)

[Translation]

The Chair: Mrs. DeBellefeuille has a point of order.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Salaberry—Suroît, BQ): Mr. Chair, the member for Burnaby South used unparliamentary language yesterday. He insulted the member for La Prairie, Alain Therrien, and the Bloc Québécois.

Four times, he called him racist, and I also think he challenged your authority. When you asked him to apologize, he refused to do so. You expelled him from the House.

I am again asking you not to recognize him today.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Julian would like to comment on the point of order.

Go ahead, Mr. Julian.

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

I listened very carefully to your ruling yesterday. It applied to yesterday's sitting, but not today's. As you know, it wasn't conditional. The fact that the Bloc Québécois whip is trying to alter your ruling, which was quite clear, doesn't seem right to me.

Chapter 13 of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, by Marc Bosc and André Gagnon, states that the Speaker has the authority to name the member, that is, to address the member by name, and to order his or her withdrawal from the chamber for the remainder of the sitting day. That's what you did.

I'd like to move on to question period.

The Chair: I'm going to finish responding to Mrs. DeBellefeuille.

Yesterday's incident occurred during a sitting of the chamber, and I made my ruling clear in the chamber.

Just before today's meeting began, I received a letter from Mrs. DeBellefeuille. I'm going to take the time to consider it and I will provide a response to Mrs. DeBellefeuille before the next sitting.

For the time being, we will carry on with the committee's proceedings.

I'm going to let Mr. Singh ask another question.

Mrs. DeBellefeuille, you have another point of order?

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Mr. Chair, I understood your response. I am grateful to you for considering our request, given how serious the matter in question is.

If a member or a party leader is allowed to insult another member, what happens? We can insult a fellow member and simply be tossed out of the House for a day. That's not a serious consequence.

Today, I am deeply disappointed to hear the leader of the NDP speak. I thought he was a great democrat. Honestly, what kind of example are we setting today?

Mr. Chair, I am again asking you not to recognize the member for Burnaby South.

The Chair: Thank you for your comments, but I've made my decision.

Mr. Singh, you may go ahead.

[English]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to begin by acknowledging the words of the Prime Minister today and to thank the Prime Minister for those kind words.

I also acknowledge that the Prime Minister has again committed to change, but we need that change right away. Will the Prime Minister commit immediately to putting in place concrete policy changes to address the systemic racism in the RCMP?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Yes, Mr. Chair, we need to take concrete action right away to address systemic racism in this country. We have much work to do. We will do it with partners. We will do it with everyone in this House who wants to work with us on this.

I thank the leader of the NDP for his commitment to this. We will work together in short order on making this happen.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Thank you very much for that response.

I want to go into some details. Will the Prime Minister commit to what was in the motion, which was supported, it seemed like, by most of the members of this House, to do a full review of the nearly \$10-million-a-day RCMP budget to see where we can allocate funds to a health care response instead of a police response?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, I've talked about this over the past weeks. This is important for us to do. We need to make sure we are spending every dollar of taxpayers' money in the right way, to keep people safe and not to perpetuate unjust systems. It is not, however, either/or—either the police or community services. Obviously, we need both, but we need them done right.

We will work with everyone to make sure we are getting that balance right and we are getting the money spent in the right ways.

● (1245)

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Chair, we certainly, though, need more investments in non-policing interventions. That is where we have seen some serious problems. Families have raised the concern that we need to have more investments in non-police interventions, non-violent interventions, and health care responses to health care crises.

Will the Prime Minister commit to that course of action?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, we have heard those calls as well, and we agree that this is something we have to work on. We need to make sure that we are encouraging de-escalation programs and that we are encouraging front-line interventions around mental health and around care that isn't necessarily done by the police. These are things that we need to do together.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Chair, today, a report of RCMP use of force incidents was released. I'm glad to see that. We'll review that.

Will the Prime Minister also encourage a release of the associated costs of the settlement of cases that flowed from those uses of force?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, we will of course be taking a very careful look at this report. It highlights a real challenge that we've seen around systemic discrimination in our country and our institutions, including in the RCMP.

There are many concrete actions we need to take. As I've said many times, I'm committed to taking those actions. We need to make a significant change in our country for the better.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Chair, one specific element of the motion that was nearly passed yesterday was to commit to a full review, specifically of the use of force. Given the release of that report, will the Prime Minister commit clearly to a review of the use of force by the RCMP?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, these are important conversations that have to be had within the RCMP, between the government and the RCMP, and between Canadians and their police forces. These are some things that we will certainly move forward on together.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Chair, the Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council and the mother of Chantel Moore, who was killed by the RCMP, have requested a meeting with the Prime Minister to discuss and determine immediate actions to implement in order to prevent more indigenous people from being killed by the police.

Will the Prime Minister meet with Chantel Moore's mother and the tribal council of Nuu-chah-nulth?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, our government has continued to meet with Canadians who face extreme difficulties. Obviously, our hearts go out to Chantel's family and to the entire community. I will ensure that members of our government engage directly with her mother and the rest of the family and with the community. We need to work together on changing things for the better in Chantel's memory and in the memory of all Canadians who have fallen in this situation.

The Chair: Mr. Singh, we have about 20 seconds left.

[Translation]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Yesterday, the House recognized that systemic racism existed within the RCMP and that action was necessary.

Will the Prime Minister commit here and now to taking action swiftly? We need concrete action quickly.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Yes, we recognize that systemic racism exists in our country. We are committed to taking concrete action quickly to address the issue in partnership with others.

The Chair: We are going to take a quick break to allow those supporting the proceedings to substitute each other safely.

[English]

We will now go to Ms. Alleslev.

• (1250)

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Chair, the outcome of Canada's bid for the UN Security Council must be a wake-up call. Canada lost quickly and decisively on the first ballot. This was a report card on how the world views this Liberal government and this Prime Minister.

Can the Prime Minister answer for Canadians, if the world needs more Canada, why at the UN did the world say, "No thanks"?

The Chair: The honourable minister.

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of International Development): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would once again like to begin by thanking the incredible diplomats and everyone in team Canada who worked so hard on what was a truly excellent campaign.

Of course we are disappointed by the outcome, but Canada will continue to be engaged, will continue to believe in multilateralism, and will be a constructive partner in the United Nations, working with all those who are elected to be—

The Chair: We have a point of order.

Mr. Godin.

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): The French interpretation hasn't been working for a few minutes. Can we get that fixed? As a member from Quebec, I would like to be addressed in French, and as a parliamentarian, I think that's important.

The Chair: It's very important. We'll find out what's happening. It's probably the result of a technical issue. Thank you for bringing it to our attention.

Does it work now?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue): Yes. We can hear you very well.

[English]

The Chair: Are you hearing me in French now?

[Translation]

I see that everything is running well now.

We'll continue with Ms. Alleslev.

[English]

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Canadians value our commitment to preserving freedom and democracy. We've been known for punching above our weight, but under this government the number of Canadian peacekeepers has fallen to its lowest level in 60 years. Canada is among the lowest NATO defence contributors, and our allies have threatened to stop sharing critical intelligence since this Prime Minister has failed to ban Huawei.

Did our allies vote against us for the UN Security Council seat because they have no confidence that this Prime Minister will be a trusted ally and security partner?

Hon. Karina Gould: Mr. Chair, as I reiterated yesterday, Canada has continued to lead with its values. We have been continuously a constructive partner on the world stage and will continue to do that. With regard to peacekeeping, we were very proud to participate in the mission in Mali, as well as lead on the Elsie initiative. We have been a tremendous partner when it comes to women, peace and security, and we will continue to lean in, to engage and to work constructively for peace and security around the world.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Mr. Chair, Canadians are proud to be a nation that defends human rights. However, to win the UN security seat, the Prime Minister compromised Canadian values and failed to condemn anti-gay laws in Senegal and Uganda or to challenge authoritarian regimes for their blatant disregard for the rule of law.

Actions speak louder than words. Did the world vote against Canada because they couldn't trust the Prime Minister to stand and defend Canadian principles?

Hon. Karina Gould: Mr. Chair, Canada has always stood for human rights, and we have continuously stood up for LGBTQ2+ rights and women's rights on the world stage. It's a bit rich coming from the official opposition, who can't even stand for LGBTQ or women's rights here at home, let alone abroad. This government does. We have put our money where our mouth is, and we are supporting local organizations fighting for these rights everywhere around the world.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Mr. Chair, the Conservative Party is not afraid to stand for LGBTQ rights, and we stand proudly in defence of them.

Canada is a trading nation, and relationships matter. Countries trade with people they trust and respect, but the Prime Minister embarrassed Canada when he snubbed our Asia-Pacific partners by failing to show up at a critical trade negotiation meeting. He embarrassed Canada with a failed trip to India. Did the world vote against us because they didn't have the confidence that the Prime Minister would act with the decorum and diplomacy that a UN Security Council seat requires?

Hon. Karina Gould: Mr. Chair, I have to say that, as someone who has been engaged in representing Canada over the past six months as the Minister of International Development, I have had wonderful conversations with partners on every single continent who truly value what Canada brings to the table. I would also say that Canada is the only G7 nation to have free trade agreements with all the other G7 partners. This Prime Minister has brought in CETA, CPTPP and a renegotiated NAFTA. That is important for Canadians, and we are leading on the world stage when it comes—

• (1255)

The Chair: We'll now go back to Ms. Alleslev.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Mr. Chair, the loss of the UN Security Council seat is a sad day for Canada. Canadians must be clear-eyed about how the world actually views us.

If Canada is to be a reliable and dependable partner, the world must know what we stand for. By abandoning our allies and cozy-

ing up to dictators, the Prime Minister has eroded Canada's reputation and jeopardized our future security and prosperity. If Canada is back, then can the Prime Minister explain to Canadians why we are so alone on the world stage?

Hon. Karina Gould: Mr. Chair, I have to respectfully disagree with my colleague. Canada has played a constructive and engaged role on the world stage. It has been a privilege to engage with counterparts around the world who truly recognize Canada's leadership.

We have stood for our values. We have stood for human rights. We have stood for women's rights. We have stood for a free, open and transparent trading system. We promote democracy. We promote LGBTQ rights. We fight for climate change, and we will continue to do that, Mr. Chair. We look forward to continuing to play a constructive and engaged—

The Chair: Ms. Alleslev, we have about 20 seconds left.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: If Canada were playing a leadership role, the world would have wanted us in a leadership position on the UN Security Council. Instead, the Prime Minister has abandoned Canada's long-held principled foreign policy. Again, if Canada is standing up on the world stage, why did the world say, "No, thanks"?

Hon. Karina Gould: Mr. Chair, we will take no lessons from the Conservatives. In the 10 years of their governance, they disengaged from the world stage. They stood back from Africa. They stood back when it came to women's rights. They stood back when it came to fighting climate change.

We have done the exact—

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Rayes, you have the floor.

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Chair, Canada experienced a major failure at the UN yesterday by not winning a seat on the Security Council.

After five years, the Prime Minister, who made a promise, used all his resources and put his reputation on the line, failed to win the seat. Even worse, we've lost face in the eyes of the world. This is all the result of the Prime Minister's escapades around the world. We need only think of his trip to India to see that the Prime Minister's main concern is his image.

My question for the Prime Minister is simple. What was the cost of this campaign to try to win a seat at the United Nations, which has set us back in the eyes of the world?

[English]

Hon. Karina Gould: Mr. Chair, as the Prime Minister has stated clearly on many occasions, the UN Security Council seat was not an end in itself; it was a means to an end.

Canada will continue to engage on the values that we care about. We will continue to lean in and to step forward when it comes to promoting women's rights. We will continue to step forward and to lean in when it comes to promoting all genders and all sexualities. We will continue to lean in on the fight against climate change.

These are important endeavours. These are important pillars of our foreign policy that we will continue to pursue and would have pursued whether or not we were seeking a seat on the UN Security Council.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes: I'll repeat my question for the minister. I hope that she'll provide a shorter answer.

What was the cost of this campaign, which has set us back in the eyes of the public as a result of the failure of the Prime Minister, who wants to promote his image instead of Canadian values?

[English]

Hon. Karina Gould: Mr. Chair, Canada has continued to engage in diplomacy throughout. Our government has been strong on the world stage. We have made important investments in supporting a woman's right to choose, unlike the previous government. We have made important investments in climate financing, something the previous government decided to pull back on and pull out of.

• (1300)

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes: As usual, we won't get an answer. This seems to be the custom with these Liberals. We'll move on to another subject.

Let's talk about the CERB and its impact, while the economy is recovering and the lockdown is being lifted everywhere. We learned today that the very popular Cosmos restaurant in the Quebec City area will be closing its doors.

The owner says that the factor that influenced his decision to close the Cosmos on Grande Allée is the difficulty in finding staff. He thinks that the CERB is really competition. He says that few employees showed interest in returning to work when he put out feelers.

When will this government change the CERB to enable people to return to the labour market?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (President of the Treasury Board): I'm very pleased to be asked this question, since this is happening in my constituency.

I know that, in my constituency and across Canada, millions of Canadians are still having a hard time dealing with the crisis. We want a safe recovery that will allow for a gradual return to work. We also want a recovery that will ensure that everyone can make ends meet.

This is the case in Quebec City and across the country.

Mr. Alain Rayes: I hope that Minister Duclos will visit the owner and explain this. Right now, businesses and stores are closing their doors because the government is implementing measures that hamper economic recovery.

A movie theatre owner, who was quite happy to receive the government's permission to reopen, told us that 35 of his 40 employees are refusing to return to work for the reopening because they have access to the CERB and they don't want to work.

The minister even sent a directive to public servants telling them that, if employees don't want to return to work voluntarily, even though the health conditions are fine and everything is safe, they have the right to stay home and they'll be sent a cheque for \$2,000 a month.

Why isn't the CERB suited to the economic recovery?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Once again, I appreciate this question, which gives me the opportunity to say three things.

First, in my colleague's constituency, between 15,000 and 20,000 people have received the Canada emergency response benefit in recent weeks. Without that benefit, many families in his constituency would have been unable to put food on the table.

Second, an attestation will be issued soon that clearly states that people are expected to accept a job when it's reasonable to do so.

Third, for the economic recovery to take place, everyone must have the opportunity—

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The honourable member for Carleton.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

There won't be a budget, there won't be an update, but there will be a snapshot. I think that the French word is “égoportrait.” There will be a snapshot of our financial system.

Will the Liberal snapshot show that our debt for this fiscal year is now \$1 trillion?

Hon. Mona Fortier (Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance): Madam Chair, since the start of the COVID-19 crisis, the government's top priority has been to protect the health and safety of Canadians.

As a result of our strong fiscal position, particularly the lowest net debt-to-GDP ratio in the G7, the government was able to quickly address the situation by providing over \$150 billion in direct support to individuals, workers and businesses that need help getting through these difficult times.

That's why, on July 8, the—

[English]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The honourable member for Carleton.

[Translation]

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: I was asking whether the snapshot would show Canada's \$1-trillion debt.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): You have time to respond briefly, Minister Fortier.

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madam Chair, as I was saying, on July 8, the government will provide an economic and budget overview outlining what the national economy and—

[English]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The honourable member for Carleton.

[Translation]

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: For the third time, will the government's financial snapshot show a \$1-trillion debt for this year, yes or no?

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The honourable minister has 11 seconds to respond.

Hon. Mona Fortier: As the economies safely recover in Canada and abroad, economic forecasts are expected to keep evolving. Our government—

[English]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The honourable member for Carleton.

• (1305)

[Translation]

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: According to MNP, a prestigious company, half of Canadians were \$200 away from not being able to pay their bills at the end of each month. This was before the COVID-19 crisis.

Given the significant increase in personal and government debt, how many families would go bankrupt if the interest rate rose by 1%?

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): You have time to provide a brief answer.

Hon. Mona Fortier: From the start, the government has made sure to support families, workers and businesses so that they can get through these difficult times. We'll continue to support them during and after this crisis.

We'll inform Canadians—

[English]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The honourable member for Carleton.

[Translation]

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: A 1% increase in the interest rate would push how many families into bankruptcy?

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): You have 10 seconds, Minister Fortier.

Hon. Mona Fortier: Once again, no Canadian should have to worry about paying bills or increased child care costs. We'll continue to support them during this crisis.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: The Minister of Infrastructure claims that the government funded 52,000 infrastructure projects. Yesterday, the Parliamentary Budget Officer said that about 20,000 projects were missing from the list submitted by the government.

Will the government's financial snapshot provide all the details of each of these projects, yes or no?

[English]

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities): Madam Chair, I have decided to make my response in English in response to the misleading words that were spoken in the House yesterday by the member for Carleton. I'd like to believe the member would not deliberately mislead the House, so I would ask that he retract and correct his false claim that the PBO said infrastructure projects are missing. In fact, the PBO report confirms—

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The honourable member for Carleton.

[Translation]

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Thank you.

I have a simple question. If they exist, will the minister commit to providing the dates, amounts, locations and all the other details regarding the 52,000 projects, yes or no?

Hon. Catherine McKenna: I'm asking the member for Carleton in French to correct what he said in Parliament, because it's false. We certainly submitted the 53,000 projects. I'm asking the member to correct what he said.

[English]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The honourable member for Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, Mr. Albas.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Minister of Employment said on Tuesday that the CERB attestation will be changed. Could the government please inform this COVID-19 committee what the new attestation is?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to respond to this question.

The minister, and in fact the whole government, starting with the Prime Minister, did announce that the attestation would be changed. It will be changed soon.

Mr. Dan Albas: I asked, Madam Chair, for the new attestation. Would the minister please read out the attestation so Canadians can know what they will be attesting to?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: The member is correctly asking for information on that particular matter, and that information will be provided when it is ready.

Mr. Dan Albas: Madam Chair, is this a state secret? I asked a very simple question. Millions of Canadians have been attesting. Doesn't the government believe that the people should know what they will soon be attesting to?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Madam Chair, there are two different things. First, it will be asking whether Canadians have been able to seek and perhaps not been able to find reasonable work, and then the precise wording will be provided in due course.

Mr. Dan Albas: People who lose their jobs for reasons not due to COVID and who are EI-eligible are being told by Service Canada to apply for EI and they will get the CERB instead, despite not being eligible for the CERB. Are these people counted in the CERB totals, and how will the audits for these people work later, because they aren't actually eligible for the CERB?

• (1310)

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: This is another important question, and the brief answer is that we have delivered the CERB both with vigour and with rigour: vigour because approximately eight million Canadians have received assistance, and rigour because from the very start, we did say that we would be monitoring and eventually correcting the fraud, all the errors that would have been made in the process.

Mr. Dan Albas: Madam Chair, I would like to hear the minister answer with vigour and rigour. Are these people counted in the CERB totals, and how will the audits for these people work later, because they actually aren't eligible for the CERB?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: This is a good opportunity to remind the member that we are in National Public Service Week and we have full confidence in the abilities of public servants to do the work with rigour and with vigour.

Mr. Dan Albas: Madam Chair, I must say that these answers are not shedding very much light.

Is the department categorizing these applicants separately in the system, and are these people being paid out of the EI operating account? These are two very simple questions.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: I'm pleased that the member has such great interest in this very important program. Eight million Canadians have received the benefit over the last few weeks. We know how important it is to preserve the social and economic fabric of our country, and we look forward to providing more information as it becomes available.

Mr. Dan Albas: Madam Chair, I'm [Inaudible—Editor] every week that I'm here.

The issue of parents not qualifying for parental leave due to the loss of jobs due to COVID is getting worse. The government keeps saying they will fix the problem, but people are having children right now and are not qualified for benefits. When, please, will this be solved?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: This is another important question. I have two quick answers.

First, the issue that we had a few weeks ago of mothers being on maternity benefits and not receiving the correct amount was resolved on May 8. The other issue, to which the member alludes, is going to be resolved. The minister is fully aware of it.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): We can have a brief question from Mr. Albas.

Mr. Dan Albas: Madam Chair, this Parliament gave massive powers for the Minister of Employment to solve this problem. What is the holdup?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: We have put into place an emergency program, which is helping millions of workers and families across Canada. We are pleased and very grateful for the work of public servants in delivering those benefits. We look forward to continuing to deliver the important support that Canadians expect and require.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The honourable member for Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, Mrs. Block.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Yesterday, during committee of the whole, I asked Minister Anand to simply outline what PPE was being purchased with the \$500 million being requested in the estimates, but her answer was somewhat vague and full of generalities. Has Minister Anand been able to meet with her department to get the answer to my questions, and can she provide us with this list today?

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The honourable minister.

Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of Public Services and Procurement): Thank you, Madam Chair, and I thank the honourable member for her excellent questions throughout this sitting.

We are continuing to purchase face shields, gloves, gowns, hand sanitizer, N95 respirators, surgical masks, ventilators and other supplies that Canada's front-line health care workers need today, tomorrow and in the weeks and months ahead.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Madam Chair, unlike the NDP, Conservatives don't believe in giving the Liberal government a blank cheque. It is our job to demand transparency on behalf of Canadians. Over the course of this session, it has been troubling not to get the answers we've been asking for.

Will the minister of PSPC uphold the principles of transparency and open government and give us the names of the companies that have received hundreds of millions of tax money in sole-sourced PPE contracts?

Hon. Anita Anand: We are still in the middle of the pandemic, a period of extremely high global demand when our supply chains internationally are at risk. In the interests of protecting those supply chains to ensure we can get PPE to front-line health care workers who need it to protect themselves and Canadians, we must keep certain information confidential.

In the interests of transparency, however, we have placed a number of contracts on our website. My department and I have also appeared at committee a number of times, and we have a full website—

• (1315)

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Mrs. Block.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

It is better late than never that the Liberal government has come around to the concept of domestically sourced PPE. Yesterday, during committee of the whole, Minister Anand indicated that half of the face shields ordered would be made here in Canada.

Can she quantify her answer and tell us how many, at what price and by when?

Hon. Anita Anand: In fact, what I said at committee was that over half of the face shields that have been produced have been produced here in Canada, and we will continue to ramp up domestic production so we can ensure we have full-scale supply chains operating well into the future, if a future stage of this pandemic should occur.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Madam Chair, I thank the minister for that answer. Can the minister advise us as to how many Canadian manufacturers are producing PPE at this time?

Hon. Anita Anand: We have signed well over 25 contracts with domestic manufacturers for the production of PPE here at home. We will continue to engage with domestic manufacturers across the country—

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Mrs. Block.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Can the minister advise us how many contracts we have signed in total?

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): We need a brief answer from the minister.

Hon. Anita Anand: As I said, it's 25 domestic contracts here at home and hundreds across the world. We are ensuring that we meet Canada's health care needs.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Madam Chair, how frequently are departmental officials in communication with all the manufacturers to whom PSPC has awarded a sole-source contract for PPE, in order to receive updates on their progress?

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The honourable minister has 12 seconds.

Hon. Anita Anand: I can assure the honourable member that we are in touch with the manufacturers with whom we have contracts on a highly regular basis, because we want to make sure we have the PPE here in Canada to protect front-line health care workers.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Mrs. Block, you have time for a brief question.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Are there any companies with whom we have contracts and whom we have not had any updates from since signing a contract with them?

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): We need a very brief answer from the minister.

Hon. Anita Anand: Madam Chair, the implication is that we are not on top of this file. I can assure the honourable member and everyone in the House of Commons that we are on top of it, and we will make sure we have the PPE now and into the future.

[Translation]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Mr. Champoux, the honourable member for Drummond, now has the floor.

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Madam Chair, I'll be sharing my time with my colleague from Berthier—Maskinongé.

I'll start with an easy question for the government. If it found \$1.320 billion lying around, would it know how to use that money wisely?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madam Chair, from the start, our priority has been to help Quebecers and Canadians. Health and the economy were our top priorities—

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Mr. Champoux, you have the floor.

Mr. Martin Champoux: Thank you, Madam Chair. I like to see the same old platitudes interrupted.

Taxing the GAFA group would bring in over \$781 million. Charging GAFA royalties for content creators, which generate billions of dollars, would bring in \$540 million. These two amounts combined total \$1.32 billion. These are the pre-crisis figures reported by the Parliamentary Budget Officer. We know that the GAFA group's revenue soared with the crisis.

Why is the government waiting to pick up the money lying around and to ensure justice for journalists, the media, songwriters and artists, who are struggling like never before these days, and especially for all businesses in Quebec and Canada that are paying their fair share?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Canadian Heritage): Madam Chair, I want to thank my colleague for his important question.

I want to point out that the federal government has made almost \$3 billion available to the arts, culture and media sector in recent months to help it get through this crisis. We've contributed \$2.5 billion through the Canada emergency response benefit and the Canada emergency wage subsidy. We've provided \$500 million in emergency measures for the sector. In addition, we've committed to tabling a bill to ensure greater fairness for Canadian distributors—

• (1320)

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Mr. Champoux, you have the floor again.

Mr. Martin Champoux: I know that my colleague, the Minister of Canadian Heritage, wants this. I know that he wants to implement a royalty system, because we've already talked about it many times.

When will the government propose a fair royalty system? It would be only fair for content creators. I'm sure that my colleague, the Minister of Canadian Heritage, agrees with this.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The honourable minister has 20 seconds to respond.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Madam Chair, my colleague and I agree on this notion of fairness.

I had committed to tabling a bill before June, but the pandemic obviously prevented this from happening. I'm committing today to tabling this bill when we return in the fall.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Mr. Perron, the honourable member for Berthier—Maskinongé, has the floor.

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Chair, on World Milk Day, I called for two tangible measures for the dairy industry: the allocation of import quotas to processors and a concrete announcement regarding compensation payments. The first matter has been resolved, and we're pleased about this. A little concrete action is good.

However, we now need a concrete approach to compensation. Can we have a date for the announcement and the payment?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food): Madam Chair, I'm pleased to see that my colleague is happy.

Yes, we answered the call of the dairy farmers by giving the Canadian Dairy Commission the lending capacity needed to purchase more butter and cheese in order to regulate supply based on demand.

In terms of our commitment to compensation following the signature of the agreement—

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Mr. Perron, you have the floor.

Mr. Yves Perron: We weren't talking about the Canadian Dairy Commission, another great success that we achieved by working together. We were talking about quotas.

I'll address the compensation issue. Dairy farmers received an initial payment last year, but they haven't received anything since then. The other supply-managed sectors, poultry and eggs, agreed on the compensation amounts last August, almost a year ago.

We need a date.

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: I want to reiterate that we made a firm commitment. We're speaking with the representatives of these sectors. They also understand that we're currently focusing all our energy on immediately responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, we've taken various measures, including the establishment of the Canada emergency business account, which can amount to up to \$670 million for producers.

Mr. Yves Perron: I'm pleased that we're talking about the measures. Currently, almost all the assistance measures lead to farm debt. The farms need oxygen instead. We need the announcement and compensation payments now. The needs are urgent in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Can we have a date? We know about the commitments. We want a date.

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: I'm not in a position to provide a specific date at this time. However, I can assure the member that we remain firmly committed to compensating dairy farmers for the

agreement with the United States and Mexico. This also applies to all supply-managed producers for the three agreements.

[English]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): We will go to the honourable member for Bonavista—Burin—Trinity, Mr. Rogers.

Mr. Churence Rogers (Bonavista—Burin—Trinity, Lib.): Madam Chair, I'd like to begin by stating that I am sharing my time with the member for Davenport.

Madam Chair, in my riding of Bonavista—Burin—Trinity, many individuals and local businesses depend heavily on the fishing industry. We've been struggling since the onset of COVID-19. Many have seen a reduction in income and opportunities as a result of shortened catching seasons and increased costs from purchasing personal protective equipment to keep employees safe as they return to work, among other new and unexpected expenses.

Madam Chair, in April the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans announced a seafood stabilization fund to help processors increase their capacity and access the domestic retail market. This includes funds to improve and expand refrigeration and freezing systems and to purchase or operate manufacturing and automated technologies that improve seafood quality and productivity and will help harvesters and processors for years to come.

Can the minister update this House and the industry on how they can apply for this fund so that it will support the fishing industry and the local economy in my home province of Newfoundland and Labrador and throughout our coastal communities from coast to coast?

• (1325)

Hon. Bernadette Jordan (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard): Madam Chair, I want to thank the member from Bonavista—Burin—Trinity for the question. Being a member from a coastal community, he knows how important the fish and seafood sector is to our local economies.

Madam Chair, yesterday we were able to announce the opening of the seafood stabilization fund. People will now be able to apply for that fund starting on June 22. This fund of \$62.5 million is aimed at processors, who will be able to retool their facilities in order to increase capacity with fridges and freezers as well as make sure that they have available PPE to make sure that their workers stay safe.

We also opened the fish and seafood opportunities fund, which is going to give us an ability to directly market to the domestic market. Seeing as there are challenges in the export market and since we know that the fish and seafood sector is an extremely important part of our economy, we're encouraging Canadians to purchase local, healthy seafood.

Madam Chair, we're going to continue to work with our fish and seafood sector to make sure that they're able to provide for our rural and coastal communities.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Now we have the member for Davenport.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.): Madam Chair, pride season is in full swing here in my riding of Davenport, across Toronto, and indeed right across our nation. Many in June celebrate LGBTQ2+ communities from coast to coast to coast for their resilience, spirit and solidarity.

In true Canadian fashion, pride is celebrated year-round, throughout the summer and well into the winter months. This year, you and I may not get a chance to physically take part in the electric vibe of Toronto's streets during the annual pride parade, one of the largest, loudest and most fun parades in the country. We may also not get the chance to join the circus and the burlesque artists, singers, dancers, comedians and all the performers at the Montreal Pride Festival, and in other parts of the country we may not be able to gather to celebrate together as a community.

However, one thing's for sure. No matter where you are, no matter when and no matter how you participate, the message remains the same: Pride is the celebration of a resilient community, the vibrancy of its rich and enduring traditions and its relentless determination to fight for its rights.

Can the Minister for Diversity and Inclusion and Youth tell this chamber what our government is doing to make sure we are continuing conversations and working with LGBTQ2+ Canadians while helping them fight oppression and discrimination?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth): Chair, I thank the member for her commitment to Canada's vibrant and diverse populations, especially in her wonderful riding of Davenport. This pride season we reflect on the resilience, spirit and solidarity inherent in LGBTQ2 communities who have long fought injustice and oppression.

It should be known that pride events were started as a protest against injustice by black and racialized trans women, yet we still continue the battle to fight anti-black racism and other forms of oppression in our country. Our government is committed to supporting LGBTQ2 communities and to achieving equality and inclusion for all.

In 2017, Bill C-16 received royal assent. It enshrines gender identity and gender expression into the Canadian Human Rights Act and tackles discrimination against LGBTQ2 people. This year we tabled Bill C-8 to combat the destructive practice of conversion therapy, and for those who are working relentlessly on the ground, we invested a historic \$20 million in community organizations to build capacity.

This pride season, although we are celebrating and reflecting more virtually, we honour the people who have brought us to where we are and we look to where we want to go.

Madam Chair, while I'm on my feet, I'd like to wish all celebrating a happy pride.

[Translation]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Mr. Boulerice, you have the floor.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Chair, I'll be sharing my time with the member for Edmonton Strathcona.

Yesterday the Liberal government received quite a slap in the face when it failed to win a seat on the UN Security Council.

Did the Liberal government fail to win the seat because it's completely missing the greenhouse gas reduction targets?

● (1330)

Hon. Karina Gould: Madam Chair, I can confirm that Canada is part of the fight against climate change, because it is very important for us. It was also a part of our platform as we sought to win a seat on the United Nations Security Council. We have devoted a lot of effort to it because we feel that the fight is very important.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Did the Liberals fail to obtain a seat on the United Nations Security Council because they forgot Africa and because they put an end to the peacekeeping mission in Mali after only a few months?

Hon. Karina Gould: My thanks to my colleague for his question.

Canada is committed to Africa. I have had a number of conversations with our African partners.

As soon as we came to power in 2015, we made the major commitment—

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Mr. Boulerice, the floor is yours.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Madam Chair, did the Liberals fail at the United Nations because they did not stand up for the rights of the Palestinian people enough?

Hon. Karina Gould: Madam Chair, as I have said on a number of occasions, Canada is involved in finding a two-state solution in the Middle East. It is important to be a friend of the people of Israel—

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Mr. Boulerice, the floor is yours.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Madam Chair, did the Liberals fail at the United Nations just because they continue to sell arms to the kingdom of Saudi Arabia?

Hon. Karina Gould: Madam Chair, as I have said on a number of occasions, Canada will always stand up for human rights. We—

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Mr. Boulerice, the floor is yours.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Madam Chair, did the Liberals fail at the United Nations because the Liberal government's foreign aid is less than it was during the Stephen Harper government, going from 0.34% of GDP to only 0.28% of GDP?

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Madam Minister, this will be your final answer.

Hon. Karina Gould: Madam Chair, I am very proud of our investments in international aid. We have established a new feminist policy based on human rights and gender equality. We are proud—
[English]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): We will go to the honourable member for Edmonton Strathcona.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Like all Canadians, I was deeply disappointed to learn that Canada has once again failed to secure a seat on the United Nations Security Council. We failed under Stephen Harper's Conservatives, and Canada has now failed under this government as well.

When the Prime Minister announced in 2015 that Canada was back, it was an acknowledgement of how far Canada had fallen behind in our historical role on the world stage. Despite that proud declaration, this government has done little about it, and this rejection of Canada by UN member nations is a resounding condemnation of the failure of both the Conservatives and the Liberals to understand and seriously commit to a strong international effort.

I have a series of questions for the Prime Minister. You promised to increase Canada's support to UN peacekeeping efforts with 600 military members and 150 police officers, yet UN figures show there were only 35 Canadians deployed on peacekeeping missions at the end of April. Ireland, with a population equivalent to Alberta, had 473 peacekeepers in the—

[Translation]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Madam Chair, a point of order. I am not getting the interpretation.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Okay.

I will stop the timer.

[English]

Are you on the English channel?

Ms. Heather McPherson: I am.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): While we're waiting to fix this problem, I want to also remind the member that she is to address questions to the chair and not to individual members.

[Translation]

Is the interpretation working now?

Who raised a point of order?

• (1335)

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages): I did, Madam Chair.

The problem with the interpretation is not just because of problems with the technology. It's also because people are speaking very quickly. Our interpreters are having difficulty following what they are saying. Out of regard for the official languages and for the bilingualism in the House, but also sparing a thought for the work of the

interpreters, I feel that honourable members should take care with their delivery when they are speaking.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): My thanks to the honourable member for her comment.

We must make sure that the interpreters are able to translate what we are saying. If you have questions that are already written down, it is important to give them to the interpreters.

A number of honourable members do in fact speak very quickly. They must bear in mind that the translation has to be available to all members. To that end, everyone must use the headset they have been given, not the microphone in the computer. Let us move on.

[English]

Ms. McPherson, could you wrap up? Only a minute and 15 seconds are left. We did add the additional time, and we stopped the time while the intervention was going on. If you would like an answer—

Ms. Heather McPherson: Madam Chair, on a point of order, I didn't actually receive the answer to my question.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): That's right, and now you will want the answer. I am just saying that the answer may end up taking the full time of your question.

The honourable minister may reply.

Hon. Karina Gould: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to my honourable colleague for her question. I do want to recognize that she has a long history and a long experience in international affairs, and I appreciate that. I know that we share many of the same values and objectives.

When it comes to Canada's role on the world stage, she is right that we had a lot of work to do in terms of rebuilding from the decade when Canada pulled out under Stephen Harper. We had to do a lot of repairing of Canada's reputation, and those are all things we have been working on over the past four and a half years.

When it comes to peacekeeping, we were proud to participate in the Mali mission. Earlier this year, in January, I had the opportunity to visit Operation Crocodile and the incredible Canadian personnel who represent our armed forces, work there in leadership positions and are incredibly well received and valued. I know that all of our Canadian Armed Forces members who participate in peace operations are tremendously valued.

Canada has been very much engaged in creating the Elsie initiative to make sure we are supporting, encouraging and increasing the role of women in peacekeeping. When it comes to women, peace and security, Canada has leaned in, both in terms of our national—

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): We will go to the honourable member for Edmonton Mill Woods, Mr. Uppal.

Hon. Tim Uppal (Edmonton Mill Woods, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

This government continues to fund projects in Ethiopia. The Prime Minister actually met with the Ethiopian prime minister earlier this year. Were concerns raised about human rights abuses and political violence targeting the Oromo people, or were you more concerned about getting support for your failed UN Security Council bid?

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I remind the member that he is to address the questions to the chair.

The honourable minister may reply.

Hon. Karina Gould: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would remind all members that Canada always stands for human rights, and we raise them at every opportunity, all around the world. We are confident and committed in this endeavour.

I would also say that the work we have done in—

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): We will go back to Mr. Uppal.

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Chair, I've heard from several small businesses in Edmonton Mill Woods, and actually right across the country, regarding business bank loans they have that are now up for renewal. Because of COVID, their revenues are down, and the collateral they provide, which is most likely the building they operate out of, may not appraise at the same value. They are concerned that the banks will recall these loans and that they will lose everything.

Has the government had discussions with banks regarding this situation and encouraged them to work with businesses?

Hon. Mona Fortier: We've been working throughout this pandemic with the credit unions and the financial institutions to make sure that we provide the supports the businesses need, and we will continue to do that during the next steps.

• (1340)

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Chair, the CEO of Cequence Energy stated that the supports for the oil and gas sector are deceitful. He went on to say, "I feel like it was a fanfare by the federal government to try and provide window dressing to an industry that I am not sure it supports."

Simply put, Madam Chair, more needs to be done to support the oil and gas sector. Will this government provide real support for the oil and gas sector, as it promised to do back in March?

Hon. Dan Vandal (Minister of Northern Affairs): Madam Chair, the oil sector and its workers continue to be affected by COVID-19 and the global surge in oil supply. Our government has taken action, including providing funding to B.C., Alberta, and Saskatchewan, that will clean up as many as 40,000 inactive and abandoned wells while creating thousands of jobs.

In fact, a study by AltaCorp Capital said this money could double the entire market for well abandonment reclamation work in western Canada and is projected to create up to 15,000 to 21,000—

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): We will go back to Mr. Uppal.

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Chair, we have heard time and time again that the current support is just not enough. In fact, analogies

that many stakeholders are using include "loan sharking" and "pay-day loans" to describe the conditions for the help that is available.

The government has gutted Alberta's energy sector and taken advantage of its prosperity for far too long, and now, in a time of crisis, it is continuing to show them the cold shoulder.

On what date will this government provide real help to help Alberta's oil and gas sector get back on track?

Hon. Dan Vandal: Madam Chair, nothing could be further from the truth. Our government understands that businesses in the energy sector are dealing with unprecedented challenges.

Through the BCAP, we are helping SMEs that make up to 85% of the jobs in the sector have access to the liquidity they need to cover operational expenses during this very challenging time.

Many companies are indeed working with their financial institutions—more than 120 financial institutions, I may add—and we—

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): We will go back to Mr. Uppal.

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Chair, there's still no clarity surrounding the extension to the emergency wage subsidy. Small businesses still can't plan for their staffing levels because they don't know if they will qualify for the extension.

What will the extension of the emergency wage subsidy look like?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madam Chair, Canadians should be confident that their jobs are safe as we continue to fight the global COVID-19 outbreak. That's why we are working to expand the emergency wage subsidy until the end of August, and we will continue to monitor and—

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): We will go back to Mr. Uppal.

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Chair, the feedback window that this government provided for the emergency wage subsidy was less than two weeks.

Why was the feedback window so short, and has the government now compiled all of its feedback and decided on what the extension will look like?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madam Chair, we've been consulting businesses since day one. Yes, we did look at how the wage subsidy can be better, and we are always listening to businesses across the country to better understand how we can support them. It's our objective to support businesses across the country.

[Translation]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): We will take a short break so that the employees can change places.

We can now continue with our proceedings.

• (1345)

[English]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): We will go to the honourable member for Calgary Nose Hill, Ms. Rempel Garner.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Media have characterized the loss of the UN Security Council bid as Mr. Trudeau's, as opposed to Canada's. Is this because he preaches to the international community about racism, even though he has a history as a blackface practitioner?

Hon. Karina Gould: Madam Chair, Canada [*Inaudible—Editor*] on many occasions, always stands up for human rights. We stand against anti-black racism. We stand against any kind of discriminatory practices and we will—

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): We will go back to Ms. Rempel Garner.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Did Mr. Trudeau secure Iran's vote by bowing to its dictatorial foreign minister, failing to get answers on an alleged Iranian government missile strike that killed Canadian citizens and supporting measures that can harm Israel?

Hon. Karina Gould: Madam Chair, as I have previously stated, when it comes to the victims of the Ukrainian flight that was downed earlier this year, Canada has demanded justice and transparency. We have been firm and committed to this. We will continue to do everything we can to get justice for the families of the victims.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Does Mr. Trudeau think that he lost Canada's votes because he moralizes on women's rights while making female cabinet ministers answer questions about his diminishment of groping allegations laid out against him by suggesting that his accuser had experienced things differently?

Hon. Karina Gould: Madam Chair, we will take not lessons from the Conservative Party when it comes to women's rights. It was their government that cut funding for organizations that provided women a right to choose. It was their leadership that walked back women's rights around the world.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Does Mr. Trudeau think that he jeopardized India's vote for a UN Security Council seat because he pranced around India with a man who was convicted of the attempted assassination of an Indian state cabinet minister?

Hon. Karina Gould: Madam Chair, I would really like to take this opportunity to acknowledge all of the hard work team Canada put into the UN Security Council campaign. This was a collective effort, and we need to be thankful and so grateful for the incredibly talented—

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): We will go back to Ms. Rempel.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Does Mr. Trudeau think that he might have lost Canada votes because while he preached about feminism and indigenous rights and upholding the rule of law, he was simultaneously turfing Jody Wilson-Raybould for speaking truth to his privileged power in the SNC-Lavalin scandal?

Hon. Karina Gould: Madam Chair, Canada has taken a leadership role when it comes to transparency and openness, when it

comes to data collection and when it comes to governance. In fact, one of the top requests that I as an international development minister get is to provide technical assistance when it comes to—

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): We will go back to Ms. Rempel.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Does Mr. Trudeau think he lost Canada's bid because despots in authoritarian countries think that he will continue to hand out billions, steak dinners, and Celine Dion concert tickets with no strings attached while he racks up the Canadian national debt and people in Canada go without?

Hon. Karina Gould: Madam Chair, it's unfortunate that the member opposite thinks that providing emergency food security assistance to the world's most vulnerable is a waste of our money. It's unfortunate that she thinks that ensuring that women have a right to choose is a waste of our money. It's unfortunate—

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): We will go back to Ms. Rempel Garner.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: It's unfortunate that we lost the UN Security Council bid. Mr. Justin Trudeau is not respected on the world stage.

Now that Mr. Trudeau has lost, will he commit to pushing for reform at the UN, to securing the release of the two Michaels from China, to upholding Israel's right to exist as a state and to speaking against authoritarian countries' abuses of democracy or attempts to erode Canadian sovereignty?

Hon. Karina Gould: Madam Chair, I guess the honourable member has not been paying attention, because that is what the Prime Minister and this government have done over the last four and a half years. We have stood by Israel. We have stood by our commitment to a two-state solution. We have stood against authoritarianism. We have worked hard to—

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): We will go to Ms. Rempel Garner.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: What this government has done is voted against Israel at the UN and failed to stand up to China for the Michaels, all this for a bid that didn't succeed. Mr. Trudeau yesterday said Canada is large enough to make a difference, but we know we can't do it alone. Given everything that I've said and given that Mr. Trudeau received fewer votes than Mr. Harper did, does Ms. Gould think that perhaps Canada would be better off doing it without Mr. Trudeau?

• (1350)

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): We can have a brief answer from the minister.

Hon. Karina Gould: Madam Chair, Canada is committed to the UN system. We are committed to multilateralism. As a middle power, we know that this is how we will continue to have an influence in the world, and we will do that proudly with our Canadian values at the lead.

[Translation]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The floor goes to the honourable member for Mégantic—L'Érable, Mr. Berthold.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

On March 12, the House unanimously passed a motion I introduced, in which I asked the House to urge the government to offer consular services to Raif Badawi and work with the government of Saudi Arabia to give him access to those consular services.

Can the Liberal government, which now has time for Canadians after Justin Trudeau's failure to obtain a seat on the Security Council, tell us that it did provide the required consular services to Mr. Badawi?

[English]

Hon. Karina Gould: Madam Chair, the promotion and protection of human rights, including the rights to freedom of expression, conscience, and religion or faith are an integral part of Canada's foreign policy. We remain extremely concerned by the case of Raif Badawi. We have raised it at the highest levels and we have repeatedly called for clemency to be granted.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Can the minister guarantee that consular services were provided to Mr. Badawi as the House asked the government to do?

[English]

Hon. Karina Gould: Madame Chair, as I will reiterate, Canada remains extremely concerned by the situation of Raif Badawi. We have raised this situation at the highest levels.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Chair, since the start of this special committee on COVID-19, we have been asking Liberal ministers questions. As we have just seen, we very rarely get answers.

If the government does not want to answer questions from members, perhaps it might deign to reply to questions that residents of Mégantic—L'Érable have suggested to me.

Guillaume Nadeau asks how many billions of dollars they gave in the hope of obtaining a seat at the United Nations for nothing.

[English]

Hon. Karina Gould: Madame Chair, again, I find it so disappointing that the Conservatives view the incredibly important work that we're doing around the world as a waste of money. Whether it is supporting those in urgent need of food assistance, whether it is providing urgent health care needs that—

[Translation]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Mr. Berthold, you have the floor.

Mr. Luc Berthold: No answer for you, Mr. Nadeau.

Mélanie Bolduc asks why the CERB is continuing when a lot of companies are going to close because they need staff. She says she understands the assistance being provided, but you have to check

whether people really need it. Not a day goes by without people telling her that they are going to continue to get the CERB because they are better off and they can do what they want. She does not see that as right.

Does the government have any employment incentive measures in mind to encourage people to take the jobs that are now available?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Madam Chair, I would like to remind the honourable member that we are going through an emergency that absolutely requires us to achieve two objectives at once. The first objective is for those who have access to work in reasonable conditions to return to it. The second objective is to make sure that everyone has money to put bread on the table.

Mr. Luc Berthold: No answer for you either, Ms. Bolduc.

The Chambre de commerce et d'industrie Bois-Francs/Érable asks the following:

Adjusting the eligibility criteria for the CERB, which was first rightly established in an emergency situation, could have resulted in a program that would have supported the economic recovery and become a help to employers rather than another obstacle.

Does the government have any employment incentive measures in mind to encourage people to take the jobs that are now available?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Madam Chair, the honourable member probably heard my earlier answer, that, very soon, there will be a declaration process whereby people, workers, will have to confirm that they could not return to work, reasonable work.

However, millions of Canadians and many Quebeckers have no access to work and will not have access to it next year—

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Mr. Berthold has the floor.

Mr. Luc Berthold: “Soon” is vague; we do not know when “soon” will be. We are used to it.

Mélanie Paquette asks: “When will we be able to access the Canada emergency business account? The announcement was made a month ago now and we still cannot apply through our banks.”

What is the answer?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: My dear colleague, please tell Mélanie to go and see Canada Economic Development in her constituency, or to drop by your office. We will have a solution for her. You know that everything is available so I am counting on you to provide her with the information.

Mr. Luc Berthold: I will pass that information on to Ms. Paquette.

Marcelle Brière says the following:

If people really do not have work, they will be getting regular unemployment and those who have work will go to work because they are better off than having the CERB. Mr. Trudeau's little game is to win votes in the next election.

Does the government have any employment incentive measures in mind to encourage people to take the jobs that are now available?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Madam Chair, that allows me to inform the honourable member that, in his constituency, there must probably be about 20,000 workers who have been able to receive the Canada emergency response benefit in recent weeks.

Claiming that those workers did not need that emergency assistance is certainly not what the honourable member is suggesting. However—

• (1355)

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Mr. Berthold, the floor is yours.

Mr. Luc Berthold: The question came from Ms. Brière. She is wondering, and rightly so.

The only positive aspect of this special committee on COVID-19 is to show Quebecers and Canadians the extent to which Liberal government ministers avoid answering questions. It is impossible to get an answer on any subject at all.

Let me make one last demonstration.

Can the Prime Minister tell us how much Canada's deficit is, as of today?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madam Chair, from the outset, we have made investments to support Canadians in these difficult times. We are going to continue to do so in order to make sure that they can continue their work or help their families during this crisis.

The Chair: Let us continue.

[English]

We'll now go to Mr. McCauley.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's estimates week in Ottawa, so I thought I would take a look at some of the government's spending.

We had an Order Paper question come back recently, listing thousands and millions of dollars of Canadian taxpayers' money spent on hospitality in a period of just a couple of months.

I want to start with the CRA. In their departmental plan, they state that they're deeply committed to open and honest communication and to transparency. In the Order Paper, there are 620 items of hospitality listed and over \$1 million of spending, without a single detail released about the description of goods, number of employees, attendees or hospitality, except to mention a \$2,100 order for Subway.

Why is the CRA transparent on nothing except for Subway sandwiches?

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: I can tell my colleague that, at Revenue Canada, we are very proud of the work that we have done, whether it is on the issue of tax evasion or in terms of customer service. This is also National Public Service Week. We have arranged for 8.5 million people to be able to receive the CERB.

[English]

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Its own departmental plan stated that transparency. I'm sure Jared from Subway would be very proud of that answer.

The departmental plan for the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions, also known as OSFI, signed by Minister Morneau, states its mandate is to protect, strengthen and stabilize the financial environment for taxpayers.

Another Order Paper question we have shows that the money spent on office furniture for OSFI over the last four years was almost \$2 million for brand new furniture, despite the fact that PSPC has warehouses full of furniture available in Ottawa. How does almost \$2 million in furniture for a small department of barely 400 people strengthen the financial environment for taxpayers?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Mr. Chair, since the beginning of this crisis we've put the priority on Canadians' health and safety. We're continuing to make sure we provide those services and programs. We have been concentrating on making sure businesses and workers are being supported effectively. We will continue to do this, and we want to prioritize the health and safety of Canadians.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: That is laughable.

Does the minister realize that OSFI, in violation of Treasury Board Secretariat rules, broke up individual furniture purchases to just pennies under \$25,000 per purchase order so it could sole-source purchases and not go to competitive bidding?

[Translation]

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: I will answer that question because it is about the Treasury Board.

Clearly, all Treasury Board policies must apply both in normal times and in times of emergency.

[English]

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Does arranging purchases to avoid competitive bidding protect the financial environment for taxpayers, as noted in OSFI's departmental plan?

[Translation]

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Mr. Chair, I can answer on behalf of the minister concerned and assure my colleague that all the rules in effect and currently known in the government are rigorously applied—

• (1400)

[English]

Mr. Kelly McCauley: The President of the Treasury Board said all rules were in place.

There were four purchases made on December 30, from the exact same company, on the exact same day, every one of them pennies under the \$25,000 mark to avoid going to a competitive bid. Does the President of the Treasury Board consider that to be following the regulations and the rules?

[Translation]

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Mr. Chair, I can assure my colleague that the robust and regular processes apply in all circumstances, including in a time of emergency such as the one we have been experiencing for some weeks.

[English]

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I'm going to quote for the Treasury Board president from his own rules, because he apparently doesn't realize them. The Treasury Board guidelines state, "Contract opportunities for goods over \$25,000...must be advertised via the tendering service."

OSFI has clearly violated this with 75 individual purchases, at pennies below the \$25,000, often to the same company on the same day. Would the President of the Treasury Board perhaps consider doing his job and commit to taxpayers today that he will look at this disgraceful conduct of OSFI?

[Translation]

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Mr. Chair, this allows me to express my full confidence in the thoroughness and rigour of the public servants in the Treasury Board, who are doing the work we expect of them and who will continue to do so.

[English]

The Chair: We'll now continue with Ms. Atwin.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, GP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The cruel impact of systemic racism is not only felt through law enforcement; research, data and lived experiences have made it unequivocal. Racial discrimination immensely impacts the health of racialized and indigenous peoples. In some cases, it's an issue of life or death. Moreover, the intersection of gender and racism amplifies the consequences—for instance, the documented practice of forced sterilization of indigenous women; undiagnosed endometriosis, where symptoms were dismissed or ignored for years far more often for women of colour; and the persistence of transphobia in how the hospitals are caring for our 2SLGBTQ+ community.

The government made a commitment last fall to work to support studies that take diversity, race and gender factors into account to improve women's health care.

My question is for the Minister of Health. When will we see action on this commitment in an effort to eliminate racism and systemic barriers in the health care system?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Chair, I appreciate the question and the importance of this conversation. This is work that our government started doing when we were elected in 2015, and we will continue to build upon that work.

I agree with the member that there is more work to do, and that's exactly why I'm working with all departments and all agencies to make sure this work is happening. It's not just about public safety, it's also about health, it's also about equality and equity. It's about making better decisions informed by lived experiences. I can promise you that we are not only listening but engaging, and we're committed to actions and outcomes. This government, with everyone's help, will get it done.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Mr. Chair, Fredericton is a riding crossed by a river. On an official map, I will read that its name is the Saint John, but for the Wolastoqiyik people, it's name is Wolastoq, meaning the beautiful and bountiful river. It is indeed beautiful.

For centuries, the river has been a source of friendship, trade and identity. We are witnessing here and around the world a movement to reclaim spaces. Colonial stories have been imposed on mountains, statues, streets and rivers across Canada in an effort to erase and rewrite.

If we want a culture to not only survive but thrive, it must be an integral part of our environment. Indigenous names of spaces are a powerful way to inscribe the landscape with meaning and show reverence.

My question is to the heritage minister. By working with first nation communities and respecting their jurisdiction and priorities, will his government lead initiatives to create public policies in recognition of indigenous place names?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: I thank the member opposite for her question and advocacy in this matter.

As she well knows, in the last mandate we adopted a new bill, the Indigenous Languages Act, to help save, promote and foster indigenous languages and the revitalization of those languages. We are doing so in partnership with indigenous communities across the country and we will continue to do so, Mr. Chair.

• (1405)

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Mr. Chair, there are approximately six million people living with a disability in Canada. Before the pandemic, they were already struggling with inclusion, accessibility and poverty, and those issues have only been exacerbated.

This government prides itself on growing the middle class, but we must not forget that the true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members.

Can the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion share exactly how the government plans to support people living with a disability in the following months?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: This is a very important question. We are all mindful of the additional and significant barriers that people living with disabilities have to fight and to live with in their particular circumstances. That's why we announced just a few days ago that we would be sending up to \$600 of additional assistance to people living with disabilities.

Unfortunately, we didn't obtain the opportunity of debate on that last week—

The Chair: We go back to Ms. Atwin.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Will there be a new bill tabled in the near future that people can count on?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Mr. Chair, Canadians and all members of this House can count on the clear dedication and commitment of this government to support people with disabilities. We're going to look at all possible—

The Chair: We go to Ms. Atwin.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: For my last remaining time, I'd just like to wish everyone a happy Father's Day. To my father Bob, to my husband Chris, and my stepfather Ronnie, thank you for all that you do.

[Translation]

Happy Fathers' Day!

[English]

The Chair: We'll now go on to Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): I'll be sharing time with MP MacGregor.

There is massive confusion in the public about the eligibility rules for CERB. In the rules on the government's website, it says "are or expect to be without employment income or self-employment income for at least 14 consecutive days in the initial four-week period", yet Parliamentary Secretary Adam Vaughan tweeted "apply.... you don't need to prove 14 days without any income."

For those who followed Adam Vaughan's advice, can the Prime Minister confirm that they will not be penalized and criminalized under Bill C-17?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: That's a very relevant question, because it does allude to the important role of the CERB, the Canada emergency response benefit that has helped eight million Canadians in the last few weeks to put bread on the table.

We're going to continue doing this, knowing that there are challenges ahead, and still ahead, unfortunately, for millions of Canadians.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Chair, the minister refused to answer the question.

A disabled senior was not sure if he was eligible, so he called the CRA. The agent told my constituent that he should apply anyway. Now he is worried that he will be penalized.

Vulnerable people trying to survive the pandemic should not be criminalized. Will the Prime Minister stand down and withdraw all the sections penalizing and criminalizing people trying to get help through the CERB?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: I will say two additional things: First, this support is absolutely essential to millions of workers and families. Second, workers and their families, and members of Parliament as well, have the right, and sometimes the obligation, to get support from the CRA. We have committed public servants at the CRA to help those vulnerable Canadians.

The Chair: Ms. Kwan, you have about 38 seconds left.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Accepting that there is massive confusion and contradictory information, if the government proceeds with part 4

of Bill C-17, will it also be charging Parliamentary Secretary Adam Vaughan for being an accessory to fraud, or would there be another set of rules for the government versus the public?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Mr. Chair, all members of this House have not only the privilege but also the responsibility to assist their constituents in this particularly difficult crisis, and we know we can count on all of them to support our vulnerable people in our respective ridings.

The Chair: We will now go to Mr. MacGregor.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Chair, here we are, more than three months into the COVID-19 pandemic, and I am still hearing from many local small businesses in my riding of Cowichan—Malahat—Langford that the government supports on offer to date simply have not been working for them. Businesses such as Sports Traders in Duncan and A to Z Kids Consignment in Langford, both of which have been in operation for over 20 years, may have to close their doors forever because of landlords who are unwilling to participate in or don't qualify for the commercial rental assistance.

When will the government step up and fix this program?

• (1410)

Hon. Mona Fortier: Mr. Chair, our government is working closely with the provinces and territories to deliver the Canada emergency commercial rent assistance, and we welcome the steps that some provinces have taken to further protect commercial tenants. We expect that with these recent actions, the uptake will increase significantly. We will continue to monitor this program to support businesses across the country.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Mr. Chair, my next question is for the Minister of National Revenue.

My office has been working to help V2V Black Hops Brewing, which cannot access the much-needed emergency wage subsidy because of a mix-up with the CRA. I need the minister's assurance here and now that her office will commit to fixing this file so that this important social enterprise, which helps homeless veterans, can continue its operations. Will she do so?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Mr. Chair, I thank my honourable colleague for sharing that example.

We have been working on making the wage subsidy available, and the eligibility will extend until the end of August. We will come shortly with a new approach to make sure the wage subsidy can be taken by businesses across the country.

The Chair: You have time for a very short question, Mr. MacGregor.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Finally, in the midst of the pandemic, our country's opioid crisis continues its deadly scourge in our communities, especially here in B.C. The street supply of drugs is toxic, with record amounts of fentanyl present. Every single one of those deaths is a black mark on federal drug policy.

It's time to declare a national health emergency. Will the Minister of Health do so?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health): Mr. Chair, I had an excellent conversation with Minister Darcy, the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions in British Columbia, just last night. We agreed to continue our shared work to ensure that people in B.C. and indeed across the country have access to harm reduction supports, including safer supply, community-driven treatment, access to safe injection—

[Translation]

The Chair: The floor now goes to Mrs. DeBellefeuille.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As we know, we needed to concentrate our energy and our efforts in order to face the pandemic. However, we must remember that, just because we are in a pandemic does not mean that people stop being ill, stop being stricken with cancer or with serious diseases. Let us think about those who were in remission perhaps a few months ago and who have exhausted their employment insurance sickness benefits. Today, they find themselves completely lost and abandoned. In addition to fighting against a recurrence of cancer, they do not have the financial means to pay their rent or their electricity and telephone bills. They are going through a major financial pressure because we have not taken the time in the House to agree on a measure, an amendment to the Employment Insurance Act to increase employment insurance sickness benefits and extend them from 15 to 50 weeks. At this very moment, many members of this House have constituents who are fighting cancer and have nothing with which to do so.

Is the government going to use the next sitting of the House, on July 8, to introduce a bill to extend employment insurance sickness benefits from 15 to 50 weeks?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Mr. Chair, I would first like to thank the honourable member for expressing, with much compassion and much empathy, what she has heard from those in her constituency.

Unfortunately, there are families and workers who, for a number of weeks, if not years, have been living in difficult conditions of illness. The conditions endanger their ability to make ends meet and to take care of their loved ones.

We understood the situation; moreover, we have worked on it in recent years by making significant improvements to the special benefits in employment insurance, such as maternity and parental benefits, and compassionate and caregiving benefits. In fact, we have made significant improvements to all the special benefits in the employment insurance program.

We will continue to do that, including for the sickness benefits. It was a commitment we made in the last election campaign.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Mr. Chair, I do not think that the minister's words will provide comfort for those currently dealing with cancer and who have exhausted their special sickness benefits from employment insurance.

On February 18, a motion by the Bloc Québécois was passed unanimously with a view to extending the benefits from 15 to 50 weeks. The government committed to extend them from 15 to 26 weeks. At the moment, those who are sick, who are about to lose their subsistence income, or who no longer have any income and

who are struggling to survive, have no indication or encouragement from the government that, on July 8, by unanimous consent, we will together increase the sickness benefits in the employment insurance program.

Can the minister tell us, and make the commitment, that on July 8, he will use the sitting of the House to introduce this measure and arrange for it to be passed? The measure is simply an amendment to an act that already exists.

• (1415)

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Mr. Chair, that allows me to continue by once more thanking the honourable member for her ability to be fully aware of the sickness and economic difficulties that thousands and, currently, during the pandemic, millions of Canadians and Quebecers are experiencing.

That is why the government recently announced that it is enhancing the Canada emergency response benefit by extending it to 24 weeks. This is another example of the Government of Canada's commitment to help people not only to protect their health, but also to make ends meet.

The other example that the honourable member mentioned is the commitment we made in the last election campaign to increase the number of weeks of eligibility for sickness benefits. We look forward to working with all members of the House to fulfill those commitments.

The Chair: Mrs. DeBellefeuille, you have 20 seconds left.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Mr. Chair, I am going to correct the minister, if I may. Currently, those who are sick and who have exhausted their special sickness benefits from employment insurance are not eligible for the CERB; they are not eligible for anything.

I therefore encourage the government to come back on July 8 with a bill. The Leader of the Government may be assured of our cooperation in helping those who are sick.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Mr. Chair, we are very pleased to hear about the cooperation from honourable members of the opposition, because we need cooperation in order to take care of each other.

[English]

The Chair: We will now go to Mr. Steinley.

Mr. Warren Steinley (Regina—Lewvan, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The minister responsible for Chinese mortgages jumps into his chauffeured car, drives across the U.S. border for non-essential travel and then drives to New York City, the epicentre of COVID-19 in the U.S. Could the Prime Minister or the House leader confirm that when the minister gets back, he will be quarantining for 14 days?

Hon. Karina Gould: I can confirm that the minister will be quarantining for 14 days.

Mr. Warren Steinley: Mr. Champagne was able to attend the vote in New York City. Does the House leader know how many people were present at the United Nations for these votes?

Hon. Karina Gould: Mr. Chair, I can confirm that during the votes, appropriate measures were taken to physically distance. That's why the vote at the United Nations started at 9 a.m. and didn't wrap up until 2 p.m.

Mr. Warren Steinley: This is a very simple question. Were there more or less than 500 people at the vote at the UN?

Hon. Karina Gould: Mr. Chair, the reason the vote took from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. was so that a limited number—

The Chair: We'll go back to Mr. Steinley.

Mr. Warren Steinley: Were there more or less than 1,000 people at the vote at the UN?

Hon. Karina Gould: Mr. Chair, again, the United Nations, whose staff have all been working from home for the past three months, specially convened—

The Chair: We'll go back to Mr. Steinley.

Mr. Warren Steinley: I'm trying to make the point here that the Liberals are absolute hypocrites with respect to shuttering Parliament. They've told Canadians it is unsafe for members of Parliament to meet in this chamber. Then they attend and vote in person in New York City.

I'm asking this once again: Do they know how many people were involved in the vote at the UN?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): This is totally far from the truth, Mr. Chair. We're here, we're debating, and there are people on the screen. We answer questions every day. We've actually answered 2,965 questions from the opposition since the beginning of the pandemic, 67% more than in the usual Parliament.

• (1420)

Mr. Warren Steinley: Mr. Chair, I'd say they've responded, but they haven't answered one question over the last three months. I wouldn't say they've answered anything, and no one in Saskatchewan and Alberta thinks they answer a question any day in this chamber.

If the Minister of Foreign Affairs can go to New York City for an in-person vote and the Prime Minister can take a drive to an Ottawa business for a campaign stop, then surely the House should be able to operate safely in full Parliament.

When will the Liberals admit that shutting down Parliament was about avoiding accountability and hiding from Canadians, not about safety?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Chair, again, we answered almost 3,000 questions from the opposition, way more than in regular sittings, with our colleagues on the screen. Why is the member against the participation of his colleagues on the screen?

Mr. Warren Steinley: I'm not against my colleagues being on the screen. I'm against you guys being unaccountable.

Residents of Regina—Lewvan want to know how the government plans to pay for the programs that they've rolled out over the last few months.

The Chair: One moment. The clock is stopped, so we're not losing any time. We'll just give the minister some time to clock in. Sometimes technology is not the easiest.

The honourable minister may reply.

Hon. Mona Fortier: Mr. Chair, we have prioritized the health and safety of Canadians since day one. Our country is in a very strong physical position, and we will continue to support Canadians and workers—

The Chair: We'll go back to Mr. Steinley.

Mr. Warren Steinley: How high will the government have to raise the GST to pay for all of their reckless spending over the last five years?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Mr. Chair, we have been providing support and relief to Canadians since the beginning of this pandemic—

The Chair: We'll go back to Mr. Steinley.

Mr. Warren Steinley: With the little time I have left, I'll leave my honourable colleagues who are currently in government a little bit of advice.

Canadians will only tolerate inaction and being left leaderless for so long. If there's a second wave and another complete lockdown that will cripple our economy and suspend people's freedoms and personal decision-making abilities, this is not going to fly with Canadians. The Prime Minister will have to find some leadership and start making some tough decisions, instead of hiding under the bed in his cottage and poking his head out just for his 10-minute daily performance.

When will the government put pen to paper and bring forward a plan that puts Canadians first and puts Canada back on track?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Chair, this government has always put Canadians first. We have been helping our seniors, our students, our families, our workers, our businesses, all Canadians from each and every province, Mr. Chair, and we'll keep on doing that because it's the right thing to do, even if they don't think so.

The Chair: The two seconds remaining is not enough for a question and an answer. That's the end.

[Translation]

This therefore brings us to the end of the final meeting of the Special Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic.

I would like to thank the many members who have taken part in these proceedings, not only for their presence, but also for their patience as we learned to navigate through this very different world in which we are operating.

[English]

I would like to thank the talented and dedicated employees of the House administration for having made these unique hybrid meetings possible. Despite the many personal and professional challenges posed by the pandemic, they came together from across the organization to fulfill their commitment to support the work of members.

[*Translation*]

In closing, I would like to wish you a very good summer. It will doubtless be very different from what you had imagined. However, I hope that you will still be able to find some moments of leisure in the company of your loved ones.

[*English*]

I declare this meeting adjourned.

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