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Thursday, May 13, 2021

Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, May 13, 2021

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: The hon. member for Salaberry—Suroît on a point of order.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 43(2)(a), I would like to indicate that all of the Bloc Québécois's speaking slots for today's debate on the opposition motion will be divided in two.

* * *

[*English*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fifth report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, entitled "Immigration in the Time of COVID-19: Issues and Challenges".

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this report.

I would like to thank all members of the committee for their collegiality and hard work in addressing this important issue and coming forward with comprehensive recommendations.

I thank everyone who addressed and wrote to the committee to share their difficult stories.

As well, I would like to thank our analysts, Julie Béchar, Madalina Chesoi, Martin McCallum and Graeme McConnell, for the many long hours spent drafting this report.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the following two reports from the Standing Committee on International Trade: the sixth report, entitled "Trade Between Canada and the United Kingdom: A Potential Transitional Trade Agreement

and Beyond"; and the seventh report, entitled "Canada and International Trade: An Interim Report Concerning the Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond".

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to each of these two reports.

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be responding to the Canada-U.K. report.

I would like to express my appreciation to the analysts, the clerk and my colleagues on the Standing Committee of International Trade for their work in preparing this final report on trade between Canada and the United Kingdom, and I want to thank them.

Attached to the report is the supplementary opinion of the official opposition Conservatives. In this report, we highlight that we are pleased to see the Canada-United Kingdom Trade Continuity Agreement come into effect on April 1, 2021, though we are disappointed that the government was not able to meet the initial deadline of December 31, 2020, when the CETA's application to the United Kingdom ended. It is truly unfortunate that the government left this critical trade agreement to the final sitting week of the final month of the final year the CETA's term no longer applied to the U.K., having to sign an interim memorandum of understanding to provide trade stability due to this delay.

The Conservative Party of Canada is pleased to see recommendations in the report on negotiations for a successor Canada-U.K. trade agreement, which we hope to see begin negotiations this year, including to address gaps raised by small businesses and those in the agriculture and agri-food sectors. Conservatives support the recommendations in the report and we look forward to the government's response.

Conservatives also recognize that we were in a unique situation where we did this Canada-U.K. trade study and we also had a separate study on Bill C-18, the Canada-United Kingdom Trade Continuity Agreement Implementation Act, where we also heard from witnesses whose testimony is regrettably not included in this report. We, in the Conservative caucus, do hope that the government takes the time to review the input from stakeholders from the Bill C-18 study, including concerns around non-tariff barriers, as well as non-indexation of frozen British pensions.

Routine Proceedings

● (1010)

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Jaime Battiste (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans, entitled “Implementation of the Mi’kmaq and Maliseet Treaty Right to Fish in Pursuit of a Moderate Livelihood”.

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this report.

I thank all the witnesses and all the people who put a lot of hard work into this.

Mr. Richard Bragdon (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the communities across Canada that feel that the government has left them behind.

After extensive work at committee, we have issued a dissenting report here today in response to a report that perpetuates the neglect and indifference faced by communities across Canada by the current government and the fisheries minister. After nearly half a decade of mismanagement, fisheries in southwestern Nova Scotia are at a tipping point. As a committee and as elected representatives of these communities, we will not stand idly by.

Rather than inviting all parties to one table to build a common understanding of interests, rights and laws, the minister has failed to respond to escalating tensions and uncertainty that have developed under her leadership. The government's continued failures are eroding decades of relationship-building established with the Marshall decision and, to this day, are failing to maintain the important dialogue with everyone involved.

As the official opposition, we will continue to call on the minister to fulfill her duties and responsibilities as laid out in Marshall and take immediate action to resolve the current situation. From coast to coast, our communities are at stake, and we will not stop fighting for them.

* * *

DEFENCE OF CANADA MEDAL ACT (1946-1989)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-296, An Act respecting the establishment and award of a Defence of Canada Medal (1946-1989).

She said: Mr. Speaker, the pandemic has offered us a view into other moments when Canadians came together to ward off a common foe. One of those was the Cold War, which lasted from 1946 until the dismantling of the Berlin Wall in 1989. That event signalled an end to the arms race and the anxiety that accompanied the period.

In order to properly acknowledge the work and sacrifice of those who protected us from within our borders during the Cold War, I am introducing an act respecting the establishment and award of a defence of Canada medal for the men and women who served Canada during the Cold War. These individuals served in the protection of Canada from threats posed by countries behind the Iron Curtain.

[Translation]

These Canadians were trained and prepared to defend their country by any means and, fortunately, they never had to intervene on our soil. This medal will be awarded to those who served in the regular force, the reserves, police organizations, the Emergency Measures Organization and civilian assistance organizations.

[English]

This act represents the vision of an Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing resident, retired Captain Ulrich Krings, and has widespread support across the country, especially from those who worked so hard to keep us safe and prepared during those unsettling times.

I am pleased that my colleague from North Island—Powell River, who is also the NDP critic for veterans affairs, is seconding my bill.

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

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● (1015)

PARLIAMENT OF CANADA ACT

Ms. Lenore Zann (Cumberland—Colchester, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill S-205, An Act to amend the Parliament of Canada Act (Parliamentary Visual Artist Laureate).

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to table Bill S-205, the national artist laureate act, an act to amend the Parliament of Canada Act. I wish to thank Senator Bovey of Manitoba and Senator Moore of Nova Scotia for creating this bill that brings us together from across the nation and reminds us that art is a shared experience. Bill S-205 would appoint a parliamentary visual artist laureate for successive two-year terms to promote the arts in Canada through Parliament by fostering knowledge, enjoyment, awareness and development of the arts.

Art speaks in a visual language and our own perceptions translate the stories. Whether it is a simple handprint on a cave wall 60,000 years ago, petroglyphs carved in the rocks, a sculpted form, a sketch, a cartoon, a photograph, art endures. Like the artists who enrich our lives, art strives, art inspires, art thrives long after we have shuffled off this mortal coil.

(Motion agreed to and bill read the first time)

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KINDNESS WEEK ACT

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC) seconded by the member for Saint-Laurant, moved for leave to introduce Bill S-223, An Act respecting Kindness Week.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to speak today and introduce Bill S-223, an act respecting kindness week. The pandemic has reminded us of the need for kindness in our society, and when passed, this bill would designate that throughout Canada, each and every year the third week of February is to be known as kindness week.

I want to thank my friends Senator Munson, who ushered the bill through the other place; the member for Saint-Laurent, who is helping to usher the bill through this place; and Rabbi Reuven Bulka, the inspiration for this bill, having set out on this journey of kindness week 17 years ago here in Ottawa.

On the need for kindness, I think all members in this place can agree. I respectfully ask that members pass this bill expeditiously.

(Motion agreed to and bill read the first time)

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PETITIONS

OPIOIDS

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the opioid crisis is one of the most deadly public health emergencies of our lifetime. Heartbreakingly, the death toll has soared in 2020 and 2021, with twice as many overdoses.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, Alberta has seen overdose deaths outpace COVID deaths. Overdose deaths are premature and preventable, and they are the leading cause of death in Alberta for 15- to 59-year-olds by a margin of more than 30% compared to any other cause.

Today, on behalf of many of my constituents, I call on the government to declare the overdose crisis a national public health emergency, and I ask that the government take the urgent steps needed to end overdose deaths and overdose injuries by immediately developing a well-funded and comprehensive pan-Canadian overdose action plan.

TRAVEL ADVISERS

Mr. Chris Lewis (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition on behalf of Canada's 12,000 travel advisers. They earn through commissions only and can wait up to 11 months to receive their pay after booking a trip for a client. It has been over a year since these 12,000 Canadian travel advisers have earned any commissions, because of COVID travel restrictions.

With no plan in sight to reopen or lift these restrictions, the petitioners are asking the House to, one, extend the CRB for six months past the lifting of all travel restrictions and, two, keep the CRB at its current amount for sectors hit the hardest, like our travel advisers.

• (1020)

[Translation]

ST. LAWRENCE SEAWAY

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Salaberry—Suroît, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to present a petition to the Minister of Transport in the House of Commons today. It was initiated by Daniel Pinsonneault, a constituent in my riding.

Routine Proceedings

This petition calls for the modernization of the St. Lawrence Seaway Management Corporation's website to improve the culture of communication between the St. Lawrence Seaway and its users, whether they be motorists, cyclists or recreational boaters.

Over 600 people signed this petition. That is in addition to the 12 municipalities in my riding that are also calling for these changes.

I encourage the St. Lawrence Seaway Management Corporation to take note of this. It is possible to do more. I thank the corporation in advance for making a genuine effort to build closer ties with our community.

[English]

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I stand today in the House of Commons to present a petition on behalf of my constituents, who express their concerns about and their desire to immediately end the lockdowns.

Petitioners acknowledge that workers want to feed their families with paycheques and do not want government handouts. They acknowledge there are a variety of different opinions on lockdowns and approaches to scientific evidence and that the WHO admits lockdowns are needlessly destructive on both long-term health and the livelihoods of people.

Therefore, petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada to work with all levels of government to immediately rescind harmful lockdown measures and reopen the economy so paycheques can feed families.

WILD ANIMAL TRADE

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am tabling a petition today on behalf of my constituents in Kelowna—Lake Country. To briefly summarize, animal suffering occurs at every stage of the commercial wildlife trade and Canada imported at least 320,081 wild animals in 2019. Over 75% of the imported animals were not subject to any import restrictions, and 80% were destined for the exotic pet industry.

The petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to commit to end the international and domestic trade in wild animals and their products, which causes immense suffering of wildlife globally.

Business of Supply

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured today to stand virtually in the House of Commons to table petition e-3303.

The petitioners cite that Canadians care deeply about the health of the ocean and depend on a thriving ocean ecosystem. In 2019, over one million cruise ship passengers travelled along coastal British Columbia on their way to Alaska. These ships generate significant amounts of pollutants that are harmful to human health, aquatic organisms and coastal ecosystems.

Currently, Canada's regulations under the Canada Shipping Act that address the discharge of sewage and grey water are less stringent than those in U.S. Pacific coastal states. Petitioners cite that Canada has zero no-discharge zones off the coast of British Columbia. It does not require third party independent observers on board cruise ships, as are required by Alaska. Canada also has less stringent regulations encouraging cruise ships to discharge their waste off British Columbia.

The petitioners call on the government to set standards for cruise ship sewage and grey-water discharges equivalent to, or stronger than, those in Alaska; to designate no-discharge zones to stop pollution in marine protected areas, the entirety of the Salish and Great Bear Seas, and in critical habitat for threatened and endangered species; and to require independent third party monitoring while ships are under way to ensure discharge requirements are being met.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

● (1025)

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—ELECTIONS DURING A PANDEMIC

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ) moved:

That:

(a) the House remind the government that a general election was held in October 2019 and sadly note that more than 1.3 million Canadians, including almost 360,000 Quebecers, have been infected with COVID-19 and that nearly 25,000 people have died as a result; and

(b) in the opinion of the House, holding an election during a pandemic would be irresponsible, and that it is the responsibility of the government to make every effort to ensure that voters are not called to the polls as long as this pandemic continues.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it would be irresponsible to hold elections during a pandemic. I think that this word that we included in the motion, is appropriate. I repeat that it would be irresponsible to do so, when for the last 14 months we have been asking people to keep their activities to a minimum. They are making sacrifices and refraining from seeing their loved ones. Often, parents do not see their children and grandparents do not see their grandchildren. Nevertheless, we are telling people that they have to go vote in spite of all that because it is important to fulfill their civic duty.

Elections are important, but holding an election during a pandemic is like playing with fire. We do not need that. We are not suggesting the end of the pandemic is not in sight. Well, we hope it is, anyway, despite vaccination delays. We are on our way to putting this pandemic behind us.

Just to qualify what I said though, the situation has improved in Quebec, and we are all knocking on wood. However, the situation elsewhere in Canada is problematic. Last week, we had an emergency debate here about the situation in Alberta. Does anyone think Albertans want an election? I doubt it.

Ontario is in the grip of its third wave and is struggling with variants because the Liberal government did not close the borders, which is how those variants got in. The Prime Minister repeatedly said he closed the borders and was being really strict and so on, but 84% of the COVID-19 cases in Quebec are caused by variants. How did those variants get here? Did they leap the Atlantic?

No, they came through the airports because the government did not instruct workers to make sure travellers quarantined. Travellers did not quarantine, and now the pandemic is still here because of the variants. That is the truth of the matter.

After letting the variants in and failing to get vaccines until two months after nearly everyone else, the government is suggesting that holding an election might be a good idea. Of course, it has not explicitly said that.

Mr. Trudeau is going around telling anyone who asks that the Liberals do not want an election.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands on a point of order.

[English]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, I am sure the very experienced member of the Bloc Québécois knows he cannot use the Prime Minister's name in the House. Perhaps he would want to retract that.

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Parliamentarians sometimes need to be reminded that they must not refer to other members, the Prime Minister or the ministers by name, but rather by their title or riding name.

The hon. member for La Prairie.

Mr. Alain Therrien: Madam Speaker, I would like to apologize to the hon. member. I am truly sorry. I have indeed used someone's name a few times. When I was in the Quebec National Assembly, members never referred to anyone by name. Here we do in some cases, for example during committee meetings. I will try not to do it again.

The Prime Minister keeps saying that he does not want to hold an election during the pandemic. He said on television that the government did not want to call an election, that that is clear and that he can be trusted. It is not clear at all.

Then, the Liberals held a convention, where everyone was celebrating. What were they talking about? All they talked about was an election. At some point, the leader of the government, who says that it is the opposition that keeps talking about an election, did a feature on Radio-Canada. All he could say was "election". As he spoke about the election, he was as excited as a kid on Christmas morning. He says that we are talking about an election, but I think he is projecting.

Although he says he does not want to call an election, we think he does—maybe a little less now, because the polls are not looking as good.

The Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs worked on an election report during the pandemic. We met with dozens of witnesses, in particular public health officials, professors and people from various backgrounds. They explained that we should not hold an election during a pandemic but if we were going to, they had a few recommendations. Everyone said they did not want to trigger an election.

According to Professor Blais, there should not be an election during a pandemic, and the minority government should not call an election during the pandemic. He also said that a minority government should only call an election every four years. I found that interesting, but I am not saying that I agree. I am merely giving him a nod.

The leaders agree that we should not hold an election. The Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs looked at the possibility, and its members voted unanimously that they did not want an election. The Liberal members on the committee said that they did not want an election. If that is true, why do they not tell their leader? I have my doubts. The government's good will is as short-lived as a balloon at a porcupine party.

The government says that it does not want to call an election, but that it will introduce a bill. If it does not want to call an election, why is it introducing a bill? I do not understand. We were told that it was just in case. Then, the government brought the NDP on side. When the Liberals asked the NDP members what they thought, they said it was reasonable. They do not want to call an election, but they are introducing a bill to prepare for an election during a pandemic. That is what they said.

The members on the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs were very upset. We worked very hard to issue a report. We wanted to release it quickly to provide clarity. We wanted our work to have a positive impact. However, the government introduced Bill C-19 before we could table our report. What does that

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mean? It means that we worked hard, but they did not care. They introduced their bill. We were upset and wondered why we were working so hard. Such is life.

I would now like to lend my voice to a few political analysts in order to show my colleagues that this does not come from the member for La Prairie or the Bloc Québécois party member, but rather from analysts commenting on the possibility of holding an election during a pandemic. Political analyst Emmanuelle Latraverse said that the government waited until December 10 to introduce a bill. When was the bill debated for the first time? In March.

They rushed to introduce a bill in December, but the bill was not examined until March. We wondered why they did not wait until March to introduce the bill. That way, we could have started working immediately, and we could have tabled our report. That appears to be too complicated, however.

• (1030)

They said that the bill was introduced on December 10 and never explained why.

Even if this is as important as they claim it is, they did nothing about it until March 8. In the past 51 days there have been only three hours of debate.

All of a sudden the government wakes up, realizes this has become a national emergency and imposes time allocation. Our constituents must be wondering what the motive is here. Why did the government not negotiate and find a compromise?

This type of mismanagement of the parliamentary calendar is what poisons relations between the parties. We are in this position because of prorogation, because of WE Charity. When the government prorogued Parliament, every bill on the order paper died. We had to redo the work and we lost a lot of days. We had to go back to square one because the government decided to prorogue Parliament. Suddenly the government hits the panic button and imposes time allocation.

This is a government of legislative chaos. The Liberals are scrambling. They do not know where they are going. There is not much on the calendar because the government does not know how to manage it. The fundamental problem is that the Liberals are increasingly using closure because they find it hard to manage their bills.

I like what Pierre Nantel had to say once. He said that to pass a certain bill, it seemed that the Liberal members were following a script written by a drama teacher.

Then, Pierre Nantel named the Prime Minister and said that the Liberals' handling of the bill suggested that their sole purpose was to show the Conservatives as always being opposed to everything.

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I could go on and on, but, in closing, I would like to say that tinkering with the election law, especially during a pandemic, requires a consensus. We would have needed it, but we are dealing with a government of cowboys that likes to run roughshod over the House, unfortunately.

● (1035)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, if the opposition members are going to continue to vote non-confidence in the government, it is irresponsible for them not to have measures in place to protect Canadians. It is a minority government, which means that we do need to have support from opposition. That is one of the reasons that we were able to get it to the committee stage.

My question for the member is about consistency. Last year, the Bloc Québécois members were demanding and brought in a motion of confidence. They wanted a federal election unless the Prime Minister resigned. The Prime Minister did not resign. Have they changed and now does the Bloc fully endorse the current Prime Minister?

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: The Liberals often claim that the Bloc Québécois always votes non-confidence in the government, which can trigger an election. That is what the government does. We vote in favour of bills that will be good for Quebec. When the Liberals introduce bills that are less than good, we vote against them.

The Liberals like to threaten us, saying that a vote against will trigger an election. The government uses confidence votes to push through its bills, which are not good bills. If I could give them a tip, it would be to draft good bills. This way, we would not have to vote against and they would not need to make them confidence votes.

Furthermore, if the Prime Minister stops playing the villain in a bad ethics movie, maybe we will leave him alone at some point.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have to say from the outset that I agree with the motion moved by our friends in the Bloc Québécois.

However, I would like to know what my colleague thinks about how some people are saying that the Bloc Québécois would not want an election because they are polling lower than they were in 2019 and Bloc members fear they would lose their seats to the Liberals. What does the member have to say about that?

Mr. Alain Therrien: There are times when partisanship has no place. In a pandemic, it is important to think of the well-being of our constituents. We must rise above the fray. Using Parliament for electioneering and partisan purposes is unacceptable.

We in the Bloc Québécois do not do that. We are proud and happy to represent Quebecers, and we will continue our work in that regard. That is our sole focus.

[English]

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Bloc for bringing for-

ward this motion; I think it is vitally important. My colleague from La Prairie talked just now about the emergency debate we had in the House of Commons regarding the COVID-19 situation in Alberta. It is very scary and very dire here right now. It would be completely irresponsible to have an election right now, and we in the NDP would not support an election.

I have a question that I think I know the answer to but I would like his comments. Does the member believe that it should be an urgent priority to adapt election rules to the pandemic, or do they trust that the Prime Minister will put the public good ahead of his own partisan interests?

● (1040)

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Madam Speaker, if the government wants to change the rules in case an election is called, it should not be done under a gag order. It should be done by consensus.

The tradition here has been that election laws and the foundations of democracy cannot be changed by forcing a government decision down our throats. It is important to work together to build a consensus, but that is not at all what is happening in this case.

The government has teamed up with the NDP to impose legislation that does not at all reflect what we want. This legislation needs work, but doing so requires a consensus from the outset. Unfortunately, the government is not taking that approach.

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to be able to speak on this opposition day about Bill C-19 and the government's firm desire to have it passed under a gag order, without the agreement of any of the parties. At least, that is its desire at the moment, but it was not the case a few weeks or months ago.

Personally, I would call this move selfish, irresponsible and even arrogant, and I would like to explain why. Obviously, there are several reasons. My colleague from La Prairie mentioned some earlier, and I agree with what he said, but I would like to build on his remarks.

The first thing is the issue of democracy. I am having flashbacks to the prorogation of Parliament last summer. The same explanation was offered, that it was a matter of principle. The government is doing this on the pretext of exercising its democratic duty to ensure that Canadians can vote if necessary.

The absurd thing is that, ironically, what they are doing actually goes against democracy. They are imposing a gag order for a bill about holding elections during a pandemic, a bill that concerns all Quebecers and Canadians. The government says that it wants people to be able to exercise their democratic rights, yet when it comes time to represent the people and reach an agreement with all of the members of the House of Commons and all parties, that is another story.

I think the government is being totally inconsistent. I am not necessarily surprised, because there has been a lot of inconsistency to date. In this case, however, the inconsistency is so blatant that it raises valid questions about why the government is eager to pass a bill so quickly this spring, when the bill was not even on its legislative agenda. It was forgotten for months and now, all of a sudden, it is urgent.

I think this is only a pretext. If a majority of members currently support the bill, they are supporting it despite themselves. We saw that with the gag order. My colleagues in the NDP previously said that they were not in favour of an election and that they did not want one.

We can work on a bill, because that is why we are here, but no one wants an election. If the Liberals want to pass a bill, let them do it properly and hear what all the parties have to say. Earlier, my colleague mentioned that they did not even take into account the work done by the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. Once again, the government is refusing to do the job properly because it wants to pass this bill quickly.

We are not quarrelling or refusing to collaborate. On the contrary, we are talking about consensus and working together to come up with a solution that represents everyone. I think that that is a responsible and transparent way of doing things that leaves out any disgraceful partisan considerations.

Yesterday, the leader of the Bloc Québécois proposed a solution for Bill C-19 that would avoid the imposition of a gag order. His idea is very simple. He proposed that the Prime Minister meet with, for example, the leaders of the different parties behind closed doors. They could then talk it over and arrive at a consensus. Of course, there would be compromises, because that is what a consensus is. All parties must take something away from the process. Then the members of the House would continue to work to pass the bill. That would be the only right way of doing it.

We did not hear the Prime Minister agree to the proposal. However, when the rules of democracy are changed, they are changed for everyone. It is not up to a single party to make these rules. While I am at it, I should add that Quebec is leading the way in this area, since that is how it operates. When Quebec changes the Election Act, it does so with the participation of everyone, because it wants to represent all Quebecers. It is a transparent process.

I will say it again: there is no emergency. I know that the government is saying two different things at once. On the one hand, it is proposing this bill to trigger an election, but on the other, it is saying that it does not want an election and that it is the opposition that is pushing it in that direction.

• (1045)

As my colleague from La Prairie so eloquently put it, when we vote against a bill, it is because it is a bad bill. I think that the opposition still has the right to vote against bad bills.

Next, I would like to talk about the government's ivory tower and the reasons it wants to call an election. Due to the pandemic, it has spent money all over the place. The government looks so generous. It gave money to everyone, and it seems like it was doing some-

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thing extraordinary. I would like to point out that even though help is needed, the money it is throwing around belongs to the taxpayers. Some of my colleagues will agree with me. The government also has a responsibility. It is important to remember that it is the taxpayers who are giving themselves money during the pandemic.

The government is trying to make itself look generous by stamping its flag on the cheques. If it is being generous, it is only towards itself, so it can propose a bill like this one and trigger an election, hoping that the numbers are good enough to give it a majority government. I think that demonstrates that it is incapable of governing, because if it were, it could govern in a minority situation, or at least I hope it could. The problem is its lack of collaboration. That is why quarrels break out.

I would like to talk about my own situation. Yes, we are the middle of a pandemic, but we also have a job to do. I must be present in the House to represent my constituents on the North Shore and all Quebecers. I must continue to work, and we should be working twice as hard.

As it showed when it prorogued Parliament, the government would rather disappear in the middle of a pandemic. It would rather call an election and prorogue the House than do its job, by which I mean not only what it needs to do during a pandemic, but its regular work as well.

I would like to give some real-life examples of what is happening in my riding right now. A person from Baie-Comeau called my office because they needed help. This person's application for the Canada recovery benefit, or CRB, was rejected simply because they had mistakenly applied for employment insurance. They are now forced to seek help from an organization that works with homeless people because they cannot pay the rent and buy food. The government should be working on glaring problems like this one, especially during a pandemic, instead of taking a break.

There is also a CEGEP student who was scammed and was asked to give back what she received. She is from outside my region. She cannot buy food. We are talking about essential needs as defined in Maslow's hierarchy. She needs to eat, and her life plan and study plan are in jeopardy. That is what is happening right now, and the Minister of National Revenue is not doing anything about it. Our region has not been spared by the pandemic, either. These are real cases.

I could tell you about Cap-aux-Meules, where some fishers no longer have a wharf, which is putting their safety and their lives at risk. The government is not really working on that either, and it wants to call an election. The fishers do not even know if they will be able to fish next year. They did not even know if they would be able to this year. It makes no sense. There are other things to do than impose gag orders and say that there will most probably be an election. Seriously, if they did not want to call an election in August, they could take the time to work on the bill rather than impose a gag order.

There is a lot I could talk about. I could talk about the forest back home on the North Shore that is dying. We could work on that.

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If the government really wanted to work for Canadians, it could have done two things in the last budget without having to wait for an election. I said two, but there are many. First of all, we need to look at health transfers. It did not mention them and is not talking about them. Second, there is Bill C-19. Third, there is the issue of seniors. The government is creating two classes of seniors: those 65 and over and those 75 and over. Not all of them are entitled to the same things. That is discrimination.

I fail to understand where the government is going, but it is certainly not working for Quebecers or people on the North Shore. It is simply working for itself. What the Liberals want is to call an election and be totally irresponsible. I cannot think of a more accurate word than “irresponsible” to qualify the government.

I would simply remind the people I represent, the people of the North Shore, as well as all Quebecers, that I would like to stay in the House during the pandemic and work twice or even three times harder than necessary to help them, and not work for partisan interests like the government.

• (1050)

[English]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the Bloc Québécois for bringing forward this very important motion. It is a great opportunity to set the record straight on how the different political parties feel and the actions they have taken to date regarding their positions on elections.

In that spirit, I ask the member the following question: If the Bloc Québécois is so against an election, why on Tuesday, in response to an answer given by the Prime Minister, did the member for Beloeil—Chambly, the leader of the Bloc Québécois, say, “I am not afraid of an election; bring it on”?

Why would he say to bring it on if he does not want an election? It is as though he is teasing and tempting the government, asking it to bring on an election.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Madam Speaker, I did not know that simply teasing the government, which is something we do every day, could trigger an election.

That said, concerning the fact that the leader of the Bloc Québécois said “bring it on”, I think that every political party and every leader is always ready for an election. I have been an MP since 2015, and I feel like I have been campaigning ever since I was elected. I am in this all the way. All the leader of the Bloc Québécois was saying was that he is here to defend his constituents and that he will always be ready, and that is what we should ask of every member in the House.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for her speech.

I think there many signs that the Liberal government is in a hurry to hold an election during the pandemic.

Does my colleague agree?

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Madam Speaker, I completely agree with my colleague.

Earlier the member for La Prairie mentioned the calendar.

A bill is proposed, it gets passed, and then it gets shelved, along with all the other bills the Liberal government forgot about. Come May, it is suddenly a matter of urgency. Summer is coming, so we need to have a bill.

As I was saying earlier, why do we need this bill now if an election is not being called and the public does not want one? There is something fishy going on.

[English]

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Madam Speaker, of course we totally agree that, if an election were to be called now, that would be irresponsible and unsafe. We have all been elected with a mandate, and New Democrats are dedicated to making Parliament work, which has resulted in a far superior pandemic response than a Liberal majority would have delivered.

We saw what happened in Newfoundland and Labrador when an election was called for February 13. Ultimately it was not finished until March 25, after 90% of the election workers refused to work on election day because of fear of the pandemic outbreak taking place. I guess that was a precursor to the third wave happening across the country now with the new variants.

Why would the Bloc member not want to ensure that, if the Prime Minister was irresponsible enough to call an election for his own political purposes, it would be a safe election?

• (1055)

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

I would answer my colleague's question with a question. I am all in favour of safety, but the solution for ensuring public safety is to simply not have an election. We are not ready, and we see that with this bill.

If public safety is so important to the NDP, then my question is: Why did the NDP vote in favour of time allocation to pass a botched bill that will result in an election?

[English]

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am here today to discuss the motion presented by my hon. friend from La Prairie on the possibility of a pandemic election.

Let me begin by saying our focus as a government, since the beginning of the pandemic, has been on delivering for Canadians. Canadians expect their Parliament to work to deliver for them through the pandemic and, indeed, over the past many months, the government has done just that.

The government has no interest in an election. We have repeatedly said that. The Prime Minister has said that. However, as the House is well aware, an election could happen at any time in a minority Parliament. It is our responsibility as parliamentarians to be prepared for such a scenario, which is why the government introduced, following a report from the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada, Bill C-19, which would allow for temporary amendments to the Canada Elections Act in the context of a pandemic.

We agree with the opposition that holding an election during a pandemic would be unfortunate without first implementing these provisions that would ensure that Canadians are able to vote in a way that is safe and secure. The opposition has demonstrated a reckless disregard for the health and safety of Canadians in recent weeks. It has voted no confidence in the government 14 times, which is 14 times in favour of an immediate election. If the opposition feels strongly about not taking Canadians to the polls, perhaps it should stop voting for an immediate election.

The government wants the House of Commons to work constructively, as it has over the past number of months. Part of that includes a timely study of Bill C-19 to ensure that if an election were held, the obvious desire of many opposition members, it would be safe and secure, and accessible to as many electors as possible.

We are ready to work with all parliamentarians to ensure that these temporary changes to the Canada Elections Act address our collective goals, but that requires the opposition to also work constructively at parliamentary committees. The current tactics by the opposition to paralyze the work in the House and in committees can sometimes be nothing short of dysfunctional.

Allow me to quote the Right Hon. Stephen Harper, who said, "It's the nature of the opposition to oppose the government but at the same time I hope we can concentrate our efforts on real issues, issues of public policy."

Every responsible prime minister has to make a decision on the effective functioning of Parliament. I would encourage our colleagues in opposition to focus, as the government has, on delivering real results for Canadians. From investing in PPE to increasing capacity for testing and tracing and delivering more than 20 million vaccine doses for Canada, we have spared no effort in fighting the pandemic and providing support to those most affected by it.

A team Canada approach is clearly the best way of beating COVID-19 and keeping Canadians safe and healthy. I would urge my colleagues in the House to continue to work productively in our shared work to protect and support Canadians.

• (1100)

[Translation]

I would like to touch briefly, as the motion compels us to, on the situation in Quebec over the last year. The COVID-19 pandemic has had widespread and unprecedented effects on Canadians, including, of course, Quebecers. That is why our government has provided significant support to all the provinces and territories, including Quebec.

Under the safe restart agreement, Quebec will receive over \$3 billion for necessary measures like rapid testing, contact

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tracing, help for municipalities and public transportation, as well as child care services for parents returning to work.

In addition, through the safe return to class fund, Quebec will receive over \$432 million, and Quebec's funding allocation under the new COVID-19 resilience stream, which is part of the infrastructure program, is also over \$432 million.

Finally, over two million Quebecers applied for the CERB.

[English]

I believe our support for Canadians throughout this pandemic has been clear, and we are grateful to the opposition parties that have helped us put forward these programs that have benefited so many Canadians.

This motion also presents an opportunity to discuss the measures in Bill C-19, which would help ensure that if Canadians go to the polls while Canada is in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, they could do so with the full confidence in their safety and security and the integrity of the election. I am optimistic we can find similar support from the opposition for many of these common-sense measures. I note that all opposition parties voted in favour of the bill at second reading.

From the earliest days of the pandemic last year, electoral administrators across the country began to consider how to hold elections that would be safe for both electoral workers and volunteers and that would maintain the high standards of integrity that Canadians expect. Since March 2020, general elections have been held in four provinces and one territory. COVID-19 may have restricted many aspects of life in Canada, but elections carried on, albeit modified, and with the safety interests of everyone in mind. Additionally, the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada oversaw the administration of two federal by-elections in Toronto in October, 2020.

[Translation]

Bill C-19 is based on the October 2020 recommendations of the Chief Electoral Officer regarding holding an election in the context of a pandemic and the essential work of our colleagues, who carried out a study on the same topic.

Bill C-19 contains four measures that I will explain in greater detail: a three-day polling period, the safe administration of the vote to residents of long-term care facilities, increased adaptation powers for the Chief Electoral Officer, and the strengthening of measures related to mail-in voting.

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[English]

Before I move onto these measures, I would like to highlight the unique nature of the legislative changes outlined in Bill C-19. I will reiterate that none of these proposed amendments would be permanent amendments to the Canada Elections Act, and that the bill does include a sunset clause. These measures are written so that they will cease to be in effect six months after the Chief Electoral Officer, following consultation with the Chief Public Health Officer, determines these measures are no longer necessary.

As we have seen throughout the country, this pandemic has not stopped Canadians from expressing their democratic rights. It is our role as elected representatives to ensure that if the time came for Canadians to go back to the polls, they would be able to do so in a manner of their preference and be assured of their safety and the health of their communities.

In every modern general election and by-election, the Chief Electoral Officer has been provided with adaptation powers that can be applied to the Canada Elections Act to ensure that electors can exercise their right to vote. These adaptation powers can assist in running elections in the event of an emergency or other unforeseen circumstances.

• (1105)

[Translation]

The Chief Electoral Officer exercised this power in the last election, for one to allow workers temporarily residing outside their electoral districts to vote. However, the ongoing uncertainty generated by the current pandemic justifies broadening the grounds for adapting the act. This bill would strengthen the Chief Electoral Officer's power to adapt provisions of the Canada Elections Act to ensure the health and safety of electors and election officials, including volunteers.

[English]

This would enable them to put in place protective measures in polling places to minimize the spread of COVID-19. These measures are particularly important when considering that Canada's election workforce largely skews toward an older cohort that we know are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19.

These adaptation measures will help support another key measure outlined in Bill C-19, which is the extension of the polling period from a single Monday to three days.

[Translation]

To facilitate physical distancing at polling stations, this bill provides for two additional polling days consisting of the Saturday and Sunday before the traditional voting day on Monday. This measure would reduce the number of people in a polling station at any given time. It will be particularly useful in ridings where public health authorities have established strict limits on the number of people allowed in public places.

[English]

We have heard from some colleagues that the three-day voting period is too much time or that the election should be held either only on the Monday or only on the weekend. From work and fami-

ly obligations to religious observance to the need to access adequate child care or public transportation, there are a number of reasons somebody may have difficulty reaching the polls. The three-day polling period would provide the Chief Electoral Officer and local election officials greater freedom in identifying adequate and accessible polling places.

During an election period, Elections Canada becomes Canada's single-largest employer. Over 250,000 workers were hired for the 2019 election. While Bill C-19 does not address the challenge of electoral worker recruitment, I would like to emphasize a change that was made through the Elections Modernization Act in 2018 that would allow Elections Canada to hire 16 and 17 year olds as election workers.

I would now like to turn to another key part of the bill, which I know interests all colleagues, and it is the way to protect some of Canada's most vulnerable people to exercise their democratic right to vote. Across Canada, long-term care facilities have been hit hard by COVID-19. Even with rising vaccination rates, these facilities must still be protected against the threat of the virus.

[Translation]

Bill C-19 would make it easier for residents of long-term care homes, who are particularly vulnerable and have borne the brunt of the pandemic, to exercise their right to vote safely. Bill C-19 provides for a 13-day period prior to polling day that would facilitate the administration of votes in these facilities. This period would enable Elections Canada to coordinate with long-term care home staff to ensure residents could vote safely.

[English]

As it currently stands, election workers travel from one facility to the next administering the vote only on election day. The safety implications of this practice are obvious in the context of COVID-19, and were highlighted also by the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada as a challenge in his special report last October.

The flexibility of this 13-day period would allow Elections Canada to work closely with individual facilities to find dates and times that would be most convenient and safe for residents to vote. These facilities are essential to the safety of Canadians and these flexibilities will also assist vulnerable persons.

If there were to be a general election during the pandemic, the Chief Electoral Officer expects we would see an increase in the number of mail-in ballots, possibly as high as five million ballots. Indeed, we saw a significant rise in mail-in ballots in British Columbia's October 2020 general election and in the United States presidential election last November.

Mail-in voting is safe and secure for Canadians to exercise their democratic rights. The electors in Canada have long had the ability to vote by mail, but in recognition of its clear importance during a pandemic, Bill C-19 introduces measures to ensure that the mail-in ballot system in Canada is as simple and as accessible as possible.

• (1110)

Currently, registration to vote by mail can only be done through the mail or in person. Bill C-19 would allow electors to register online for the first time. I should note that providing this option would not inhibit those without access to the Internet to register to vote by mail or in person. By allowing online registration, we would simply be giving Canadians one more option to register to vote.

[Translation]

The bill proposes the installation of secure reception boxes at all polling stations and returning officers' offices. This way, people who are not able to mail in their ballots will have a way to submit them securely. These measures will ensure that, should an election be required during a pandemic, it will be more safe and secure and will give electors as many options as possible to exercise their democratic right.

[English]

My final comment on mail-in ballots is for colleagues who have expressed a concern whether the expected influx of special ballots could lead to delays in the counting or the announcing of the election results. I can assure the House that we have heard from the Chief Electoral Officer and he does not expect any delays in the results of a general election based on the increase of mail-in ballots.

The pandemic has affected every aspect of the lives of Canadians. No one has been spared the incredible difficulties of the past year, yet we have also seen the remarkable resilience of Canadians. We have seen that Canadians have not been stopped from exercising their democratic rights in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Newfoundland and Labrador, Yukon, and even in my home province of New Brunswick. Our role in the House should be to ensure that, if required, Canadians are able to carry out their democratic rights in a way that ensures their personal safety and the public health of their communities as well.

If the opposition members are going to continue to vote non-confidence in the government, it is irresponsible for them not to work with the government to ensure these measures are in place to protect Canadians. The current hyper-partisanship of the opposition risks paralyzing the agenda of the government and the supports we urgently need to put in place to help Canadians. While we have no desire to go to the polls, the Prime Minister, as any responsible Prime Minister in a minority Parliament, needs to understand when he has and when he does not have the confidence of the House and be able to act accordingly.

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs for explaining everything in the bill.

However, he concluded by talking about hyper-partisanship. I want to point out that the House did not resume debate until

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March 8. Parliament was prorogued for a month, and two days of the debate on this bill were on a Friday, when debate in the House is already limited. Nonetheless, the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs is talking about filibustering and hyper-partisanship.

Is the minister not embarrassed to say such things? His government is responsible for setting the legislative agenda and has been incapable of managing it.

• (1115)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Repentigny.

As a responsible government, we managed the legislative agenda in such a way as to protect Canadians during the pandemic. With the help of the opposition parties, we adopted measures to protect Canadians during the pandemic, and we are very proud of those measures.

However, the government cannot help but notice that the opposition parties, including the Bloc Québécois, regularly refuse to put their confidence in the government during votes, which could trigger an immediate election. I therefore find the Bloc Québécois's motion today to be a bit hypocritical.

[English]

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the minister for giving me an opportunity to speak to Bill C-19, because after four hours of debate, the government shut down the debate on it so it could get the bill to committee. However, the Liberals on the committee are filibustering, so the committee cannot get to that legislation. They are filibustering because the government is trying to cover up the Prime Minister's involvement in the WE charity scandal and will not allow any of the witnesses to come forward.

Will the minister intervene to get the Prime Minister to come to committee, so we can stop the filibuster and get to talking about Bill C-19?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Madam Speaker, when my colleague from Sarnia—Lambton talks about prorogation, she is confusing the actions of Mr. Harper who prorogued the House of Commons to avoid confidence votes and added weeks and weeks of additional time to the parliamentary recess.

I am interested perhaps in my colleague from Sarnia—Lambton telling us in the House of Commons how many times she has voted no confidence and in favour of an immediate election since the pandemic began. Was it (a) one to four times; (b) five to nine times; (c) 10 to 14 times; or (d) more than 15 times? I suspect my colleague from Sarnia—Lambton has voted in favour of an immediate election more than 15 times since the pandemic began.

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Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague spoke a lot about being there for Canadians, particularly vulnerable Canadians. I disagree with that and I will give an example. In Winnipeg Centre, trench fever is a disease of extreme poverty not seen for 100 years. They have tried to work with the health minister on this health crisis. There was no response. It is an example of how the government is not here for the most vulnerable Canadians.

The Liberals continue to filibuster at committee while the NDP and certainly my colleagues are fighting hard to keep people alive during the pandemic. They continue to play political games.

Now we see another game around calling a potential election. I am wondering if my colleague can confirm that his government will not call an election. Nobody needs an election right now. Lives are on the line.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Madam Speaker, I obviously share the member's view that the government needs to continue to work with all parliamentarians in the interests of protecting Canadians including the most vulnerable Canadians. I know her city of Winnipeg well. I know the riding of Winnipeg Centre. My colleague from Winnipeg North often discusses with us the challenges that people in that great city face. That is why our government, including the Minister of Health, is constantly looking at ways that we can improve the protection and the safety and security of Canadians.

My colleague spoke of political games. Once again, I would draw to her attention that in a vote on the budget on the Bloc Québécois subamendment, which was a vote of confidence, a number of NDP members stood and voted no confidence in the government. Had that subamendment passed with some of the NDP members voting in favour of it, we would be in an immediate election today. I do not think my colleague would find that helpful for the people of Winnipeg Centre as well.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to go back to the multiple choice question that the minister was asking of the member for Sarnia—Lambton. I believe it should be on the record that the answer to that question is, in fact, (d). More importantly, there seems to be some confusion in the House as to why we might want to perhaps be prepared for an election and then during question period on Tuesday, the leader of the Bloc Québécois said, "I'm not afraid of an election; bring it on."

Does the minister not agree that when rhetorical statements like that are being made in the House, threatening an election, that perhaps it is in the best interests of the government to be prepared to protect Canadians should that actually happen?

• (1120)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Kingston and the Islands for drawing attention to some of the hypocrisy we have seen in the House of Commons.

I remember the leader of the Bloc last summer saying that he was going to defeat the government. He wanted the Prime Minister to resign or he was going to defeat the government. Obviously, neither has happened. The Bloc Québécois has, as have the Conservatives, since the beginning of this conversation about a pandemic election, endeavoured to be both the pyromaniac and the fire chief.

I do not think Canadians are fooled by that kind of hypocrisy. They want government to focus on what is important for Canadians and that is exactly what our government has tried to do. I thank my colleague from Kingston and the Islands for his exceptional work in that regard as well.

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Madam Speaker, it is rather fascinating to hear my colleague talk about hypocrisy when everything the Liberals are doing indicates that the government wants an election now. The government imposed a gag order on Bill C-19, which makes no sense.

It is as though the government has nothing better to do, as though it is looking for work and as though it is saying that 18 months have gone by so it is now time to have an election because that is the way things have been done in the past.

However, there is plenty of work to do. We are in politics to help people. Right now, with the pandemic, there are no health care transfers, there is no help for seniors and there is no solution to the current housing crisis in Quebec. If the Liberal government is looking for work, we have a laundry list of things it could do to help people during this pandemic. What does my colleague think about that?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague claims he does not want an election. Perhaps he has not spoken with his leader.

I will ask in French the same question I asked in English. How many times has my colleague voted no confidence and in favour of an immediate election since the pandemic began 15 months ago? Was it (a) one to four times; (b) five to nine times; (c) 10 to 14 times; or (d) more than 15 times?

I suspect my colleague from the Bloc has voted in favour of an immediate election more than 15 times since the pandemic began. The Bloc's hypocrisy on the issue is obvious.

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to make a small clarification, because I do not like insults nor untruths. Our leader said he was ready for an election, but specified that he would not want one during a pandemic. There is a difference between what is quoted, "bring it on", and the truth.

That said, will the mail-in ballots be counted in Ottawa or in the ridings? Will it happen the night of or the day after the elections? How will the necessary verifications be carried out?

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Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague from Beauport—Limoilou said that her leader just wants to be ready for an election, but does not really want one. Perhaps she could explain to him how dangerous it is to constantly vote against the government on confidence votes, which is basically a vote in favour of an immediate election. If what she says is true, the Bloc Québécois and its leader are on the wrong track. It is obvious that Bloc members want an election, which is why today's motion is a bit hypocritical.

[English]

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Mégantic—L'Érable.

What we are debating today is a motion put forward by the Bloc Québécois. The House of Commons is calling upon the government to ensure we do not have an election. This is the motion we are debating today.

For those who are watching who maybe do not follow Parliament all the time, it is important for people to understand we are in a minority Parliament situation right now. What that means is no party has an absolute majority of seats in the House of Commons, so in theory, because we are in a minority Parliament, the government has to work with other political parties to get support for its legislation.

The Liberal Party had a majority from 2015 through 2019 and then lost that majority in the 2019 election. During that four-year period when Liberals were in government and had a majority, they were very used to just ramming things through the House of Commons, not really working with any opposition party and also having control of parliamentary committees.

For those who may not know what parliamentary committees are, they are groups of members of Parliament that have specific mandates to review legislation and different topics. They are very important to the functioning of Parliament. Again, to explain the finer points of how Parliament works, it is every member of Parliament's responsibility to hold the government to account. What I mean by government is of course the executive branch, the cabinet, made up of members of Parliament who hold positions in the executive.

If one does not hold a government appointment, one's job is to question the government and ask if something is in the best interest of the Canadian people, if we could be doing something better, if we are taking the best path forward and why things are being done. That is the job of Parliament.

That type of dialogue leads to good public policy, but under the Liberal government, we do not see that happening. Liberals became accustomed, under their majority years, to whipping their backbench, to not having any sort of debate and moving forward.

I have now been in opposition for several years and I fully take my responsibility to hold the government to account very seriously. I vigorously question the government about its policies. I review legislation to see whether it is in the best interest of my constituents. I use parliamentary committees to get answers, I use par-

liamentary procedure to do that, which is what every parliamentarian should be doing.

Back to this motion today, the Liberal minister responsible for it just gave about a 30-minute speech with a bunch of almost Orwellian language. If what he was talking about came to pass, Parliament really would not function at all. Let us talk about the first talking points the Liberals are using today.

Liberals are saying everybody wants an election because opposition parties might vote against legislation and that it is confidence. If the government is putting forward bad legislation or there are parts of the legislation the opposition does not agree with, this goes back to what our roles are as parliamentarians to not support it. The government has to earn my vote and it should have to earn the vote of every member of its backbench and not just expect it through a whip or the threat of a party nomination. That talking point is so egregiously bad. For somebody who is the former government House leader to put that forward is shameful, so let us not expect that.

Let us talk again about this minority situation. The government does have to work with opposition right now. It has to earn the support on confidence matters of another party so legislation can pass. Liberals do not want to do this. Of course they do not want to do this. They do not want to have to negotiate with the Bloc Québécois, the NDPs, the Conservatives or the Greens. They do not want to do that.

What do Liberals want to do? They want to go back to the polls in order to get a majority government. Any time anybody hears speculation about an election during a pandemic, it is because that is what the government wants to do. The Liberal minister in charge of this file was just asked point-blank by a colleague in the Bloc Québécois if he could confirm that the government does not want an election. In typical Liberal form, he danced around the question and did not answer.

● (1125)

I think it was fair of the Bloc Québécois member to point that out today. For those who are watching, the Liberals have put forward a bill called Bill C-19. It significantly changes the Election Act. They used something called "time allocation". That means that they limited debate on this bill, because they want to push it through prior to the summer. A lot of pundits are saying that this is because the Prime Minister wants to trigger an election.

This has nothing to do with a confidence vote in the House of Commons. A lot of speculation has been made in the media and by pundits that it would not be about a confidence vote in the House of Commons. The Prime Minister would ordinarily go to the governor general to call an election, but he kind of messed that one up too. That is really what is at stake here, so when we hear Liberals using talking points today about this, it is complete bunk.

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Let us talk about an election in the pandemic. Right now, people in my constituency want hope and a way forward. I have been very pleased to be the opposition health critic since September. I am very proud of the fact that I have used every tool at my disposal to force the government to get answers on vaccine procurement and rapid test procurement. I will never forget the moment at the health committee when Pfizer said that the government had not negotiated delivery of our vaccine until the end of February. It only went back to Pfizer in November to renegotiate a contract to get a few doses in December. Why is this? It is because Parliament put political pressure on the government to ensure that vaccines were available for Canadians. I think the sponsor of this motion today is my colleague from the Bloc Québécois, who sits on the health committee with me.

This is how our Parliament works. When the government is not doing what it needs to do, other members of Parliament use procedure to force the government to do the right thing or to consider a different option. That may not be convenient for the Liberal government. I understand that, but that is how our democracy works. We can see the things that the government has done, such as prorogation, when it actually shut down Parliament.

The other talking point today that Liberals are using is that the opposition needs to work collaboratively with committees. Whenever we hear the Liberals say “work collaboratively”, it means we should not ask questions: just shut up and vote the way they want us to. Unfortunately for the Liberal government, that is not how Parliament works. However, it is fortunate for the Canadian public.

Lastly, regarding committees, if a Liberal gets up today to say that committees are not functioning, it has been Liberal Party members who have filibustered committees every time. I sat through many filibusters at the health committee during the pandemic on motions that provided information for the Canadian public, brought ministers to committee and generated news stories, so that Canadians could actually see that maybe this was not going well and maybe they deserved better. In turn, that political pressure forces the government to act.

To be clear, we are talking about an election right now with only 3% of Canadians being fully vaccinated. We see the United Kingdom opening up. Yesterday, I saw that the Governor of California, a very Democratic state, would be lifting the state's mask restrictions in the middle of June because of their forward progress on vaccination. Canada is not anywhere near there.

The federal government has not even provided any benchmarks for what vaccinated persons can do in this country. A lot of people are watching this today and saying, “Enough is enough. I demand safety. I demand health. I demand the right to work. I demand the right to see my family. I demand the right and the freedom of movement. It has been for well over a year now that my freedoms and my safety have been questioned, and the federal government has not delivered on any of these things.”

That is why the Liberal government wants an election. It wants an election because it does not want those voices to punch through and to demand better. I can say on behalf of every opposition person here, whether from the Bloc Québécois, NDP or Greens, that even though we may disagree across party lines on items of policy,

we can all agree that the government needs to do better on the pandemic. That is what it needs to be focusing on.

I do not think any of us are going to apologize for the work that we do to get answers for Canadians. I sure am not. That is why my constituents pay my salary: to fight, to ask the tough questions and to be a champion for these things.

• (1130)

If Justin Trudeau wants to go to our non-existent governor general and trigger an election, he will have to answer for that, but for now, what we are going to continue to focus on is getting a way forward through the pandemic.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, on a point of order, the member used the full name of the Prime Minister within the last 20 seconds. I thought the Speaker might want to address that.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): It is a matter that was addressed earlier this morning with a previous speaker. I would ask all members to ensure they refrain from using the first or last names of parliamentarians, ministers or the Prime Minister in the House of Commons.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

• (1135)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, in my opinion, misinformation is continually being spread, particularly by the Conservatives and Bloc Québécois, as it relates to Bill C-19. The member did it when she said this piece of legislation intends to significantly change the way that people vote in Canada. That is not what this legislation would do. The Chief Electoral Officer said back in the fall that he needed a plan in case there was an election during a pandemic, and asked the government to ensure that he had one. This bill is a response to that.

However, more importantly, both the preamble and clause 11 address the fact that these are only temporary measures to deal with an election being called during a pandemic. Will the member at least admit that this is the case and that the bill calls for the measures to only be temporary?

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Madam Speaker, first, the member opposite is a perfect example, for people who are watching, of a member who does not question the government, but just repeats talking points and stands in the House of Commons with scripted questions on behalf of the government. That does not really serve his constituents.

The second point is that the member talked about a bill regarding an election during a pandemic. There is only one party talking about an election during a pandemic, and that is the Liberal Party of Canada.

[Translation]

Mrs. Louise Charbonneau (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Madam Speaker, yesterday our leader suggested that all the parties should try to build a consensus so as to avoid the need for a gag order. Does my colleague's party see that as a good suggestion?

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Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Madam Speaker, I love a good debate in the House of Commons. Anybody watching this, even the Liberals, would agree with that. It is very important that government legislation is given due scrutiny in every instance. It is also important for government backbenchers to scrutinize what is coming out of their cabinet, which we really have not seen happen.

When I see the Liberals giving away speaking spots because they cannot find backbenchers to debate, it really shows sort of a disintegration of what Parliament could and should be. Yes, of course, I support vigorous debate of government legislation.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, there was a lot in the remarks of the member for Calgary Nose Hill that I agreed with, particularly the importance of the opposition holding the government to account and the need for the government to avoid obstructing the work of Parliament.

We find ourselves in a funny place. Does the member for Calgary Nose Hill not agree that as long as we are in a pandemic, and as long as the Prime Minister has the discretion to precipitate an election, we should do the responsible thing and ensure there are election rules in place that protect Canadians, as per the request of the Chief Electoral Officer?

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Madam Speaker, I have some very good friends in the member's riding. One owns a tattoo shop and one owns a hair studio. What they want the member to be focusing on is a plan to get vaccines into the community and to get the government to have benchmarks, so they can fully work and realize the potential of the community as well as ensure that their businesses survive.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for an amazing speech as always. I thought she made a very good point about how the government is trying to shame the opposition today for holding the government to account by bringing up the number of times it voted against a confidence motion, when the government has failed to work with other parties to come up with legislation that is good for Canadians.

Would the member like to comment on that?

● (1140)

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Madam Speaker, I always feel like the Liberal members are trying to beat me, as if they want to own me somehow, when in fact they should realize that I am a formidable opponent in Parliament because I will always champion the rights of my constituents and their interests.

I have never seen, in my time under the current Prime Minister's government, the Liberal Party seek to work across party lines in any meaningful way.

I want to give a shout-out to my former colleague Megan Leslie, who was my opposition critic when the Conservatives were the government. We always tried to do something that resembled work. Unfortunately for Canadians, I think the Liberal government has lost that capacity and has lost the respect of Parliament because of it.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is my turn to speak and I think it is important to rise today to support this motion, which states:

(b) in the opinion of the House, holding an election during a pandemic would be irresponsible, and that it is the responsibility of the government to make every effort to ensure that voters are not called to the polls as long as this pandemic continues.

I have not met anyone in my riding who wants an election in the middle of the pandemic. On the contrary, I truly think that people will be upset and very disappointed in this government if it remains determined to trigger an election in the middle of the pandemic.

Canadians do not need to be reminded that the vaccine rollout got off to a slow start and suffered many delays because of the government's mismanagement. The government was late signing agreements with vaccine manufacturers, did not act quickly enough to ensure domestic production capacity, and did not manage to protect Canadians by getting them at least one dose. The slogan "a one-dose summer" does not really appeal to Canadians.

The absence of border controls allowed variants of concern to take hold in our communities. Since last week, 90% of all coronavirus cases in Canada have been the British variant. Three dozen cases of a variant discovered for the first time in India have also been identified.

In short, it is clear that the Liberal government did not manage to prevent the pandemic from entering the country or to get Canadians out of this crisis. In other countries, things are going far better than in Canada. The responsibility for this public health crisis therefore lies squarely on the government's shoulders, and the last thing Canadians need is an election during the third wave.

I would like to point out that more than 1.3 million Canadians have been infected by the virus, including 360,000 in Quebec alone, that there are still 78,000 active cases, and that 25,000 people have died. That is a good indication of the severity of the pandemic. Given the restrictions placed on Canadians since March 2020 and those still in effect, it is astonishing to see that the Liberal government has only one objective, and it is certainly not to have all Canadians vaccinated by the summer.

The Prime Minister is going full steam ahead toward a general election. The efforts made by the government to distract from its disastrous pandemic response are appalling. Rather than getting Canadians to the polls at all costs, this minority government should be doing everything it can to ensure Canadians' safety during the pandemic.

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Of course, we understand and we know why the Liberals want an election. First, from the very start, the government failed miserably in its management of the pandemic, particularly in terms of the economy. Canada has suffered major economic damage from coast to coast since the virus arrived within our borders.

The numbers do not lie when it comes to jobs. Before the pandemic, the unemployment rate in Canada was 4.5%. By the end of April 2020, the number had quadrupled. The rate of job losses in Canada was unprecedented. Statistics Canada had never recorded such a high number of job losses in its history.

In 2020, job opportunities in the restaurant sector decreased by 40% in Quebec, and there was a 13% decrease in the retail sector. Losses in these sectors have been shown to disproportionately affect younger and more vulnerable workers, including women, who lack job security or high wages.

Now, 14 months into the COVID-19 pandemic, the national unemployment rate is 8.1% and this Liberal government's mismanagement has led to the reintroduction of lockdown measures in many parts of the country.

Right now, we are stuck in what has been called the Prime Minister's third wave because of the government's inability to ensure the vaccine supply and its slowness in using rapid testing technology and closing the borders. It is because of this government's incompetence and lack of leadership that COVID-19 continues to devastate the Canadian economy.

Doug Porter, the chief economist of BMO Capital Markets, noted that this current episode of unemployment hit Canada a little harder as more full-time employment and private sector employment fell. In other sectors, the people we meet in our regions in the hotel, restaurant and entertainment sectors have suffered as a result of the reinstatement of lockdown measures caused by the Liberals' third wave.

● (1145)

Numbers do not lie. Leah Nord, senior director at the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, suggested that labour force scarring is starting to show in Canada, as long-term unemployment has increased 4.6%, to 480,000 Canadians. She said that the job prospects for displaced workers grow slimmer with every month in lockdown as more businesses throw in the towel.

It is not hard to guess why the Liberals might want to turn the page by calling an election: They are trying to distract from their failures. The Liberals are the ones responsible for the unacceptable situation in which Canadian workers find themselves. Because of the Liberals' inability to plot a coherent course to get out of the pandemic, Canadians ended up facing a variety of lockdowns and closures.

The Liberals can try to distract from the impact their failed pandemic response has had on Canadians, but the fact is that an election will not make people forget, not when the damage is this bad and when the hurt caused by their failure is still being felt across the country. From a general standpoint, 2020 will go down in history as the worst year ever recorded for Canada's economy. What is the government's solution to all of these problems?

Rather than working hard to solve the real problems facing Canadians, and despite the pretty words the Prime Minister spouts everywhere he goes, notably in the House of Commons and in the media, saying that he does not want an election, the Liberals have done everything they need to do to hold an election in the middle of a pandemic. I agree with my colleague from Calgary Nose Hill, who said that the Prime Minister is disconnected from reality.

The Liberals want an election so badly that they passed their pandemic election bill at second reading under a gag order and with the tacit abetment of the NDP. When it comes to changing election regulations, the least a minority government can do is to try to reach a consensus, not form a self-serving alliance. What the Liberals are doing is not helping Canadians' view of politicians.

Earlier, my Liberal colleague spoke of hypocrisy. I heard him say the word about 15 times in his speech. However, the Liberals are primarily responsible for the fact that Canadians' trust in politicians is at an all-time low and that government ministers rank 73rd in the 76 occupations assessed by the Institut de la confiance dans les organisations. The ultimate irony is that the Liberals are in such a hurry to pass a bill to change the election rules in the midst of a pandemic, when they are all saying one after the other today that there is no way that they will hold an election in the midst of a pandemic.

They keep saying that they are not talking about an election, that it is the opposition parties that are talking about it, but it is not the official opposition that tabled a bill to hold an election in the midst of a pandemic. The Prime Minister has said on many occasions that the opposition parties voted against confidence motions, such as those on the budget and the economic statement. They are talking about 15 or so votes, as if our vote had anything at all to do with holding an election.

If the government had wanted the support of the opposition parties for its budget, it would have tried to reach a consensus. It would have tried to focus on an economic recovery plan and assistance for Canadians, rather than on its ideological values and election platform, but that is not the case. The Prime Minister is so obsessed with power and so upset at being the leader of a minority government that he made his budget an ideological platform, spared no expense and showed no desire to present an economic recovery plan. The budget is all over the place. Many analysts have said so. The word "billion" will soon become a common word in the House. We are talking about a trillion-dollar deficit in Canada.

Now that he sees that Canadians are not stupid and that they did not fall for his ploy, the Prime Minister wants to call an election as soon as possible, even if that means refusing to listen to Parliament and refusing to try to reach a consensus. His claims are ridiculous. However, the role of the opposition is to defend Canadians, who need defending during a pandemic. We do not want an election. The leader of the opposition does not want an election, the leader of the Bloc Québécois does not want an election and the leader of the NDP does not want an election. If the three leaders of the opposition do not want an election, the only one who can call an election unilaterally is the Prime Minister himself.

I invite my Liberal colleagues, whose constituents are experiencing the same problems as mine, to stand up and vote in favour of this motion, which only makes sense.

• (1150)

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

Over the past several months, the NDP has been saying that holding an election in the middle of a pandemic is really absurd and dangerous for people's safety. We are therefore in favour of this motion.

However, I would like to ask my colleague what he thinks of the attitude of the Bloc Québécois, which threatened to call an election a few months ago. Last week, the Bloc said that they are ready for an election campaign. They use blackmail, puff out their chests, and sort of flip-flop in the end.

What does this attitude of blowing hot and cold, saying one thing and then the opposite, tell us about the seriousness of the leader of the Bloc Québécois?

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, this is not the first time the Bloc Québécois has done this. All the Bloc wants is to draw attention. It is trying to take credit for things that it will never be able to do itself.

However, I must admit that the motion is very relevant. It will allow us to see the true face of the Liberals and whether they really mean it when they say that they do not want an election.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we have witnessed some unbelievable spin coming from the Conservative Party, which is trying to give false impressions on what has transpired in the last 12 to 14 months. It is absolutely incredible.

From day one, the government and the Prime Minister in particular have been talking about the primary focus being on the coronavirus, and all our actions to date clearly demonstrate that.

Why does the Conservative Party continue to support votes of non-confidence in the government?

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, imagine if the Liberals were to introduce a bill to get rid of the Conservatives. Would it

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come as a surprise to them if we were to vote against the bill? They would have called a confidence vote.

This is a minority government, and it does not want to work with the opposition parties. As I said, neither the Conservative Party leader, nor the Bloc Québécois leader nor the NDP leader want an election. I look forward to seeing how the Liberals vote on this.

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Madam Speaker, I agree with what my colleague just said. I too look forward to seeing how the Liberals vote. I also look forward to seeing how the New Democrats vote.

What we have here is democracy denied, not once, but twice. The Liberals shut down debate with the NDP's help and introduced Bill C-19.

What does my colleague think about this situation where democracy was twice denied?

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, I look forward to seeing the outcome of the vote.

The Liberals are going to talk about hypocrisy all day. However, the legislative agenda is their responsibility. It is up to them to secure a consensus on the need to avoid an election in the middle of a pandemic.

It is the responsibility of every party in the House to try to avoid an election while Canadians and workers are suffering. People have lost their jobs. That is the priority for Canadians. Their priority is not an election. The Liberals want an election in order to propose a budget, a Liberal platform, that will not please everyone and is not serious enough to ensure our economic recovery.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his excellent speech.

In my view, if the government really wants to avoid an election during the pandemic, it needs to have a plan to get us out of the pandemic. It does not have one.

What does the member think the government should do?

• (1155)

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, the government can do whatever it wants, but the Liberal members could show that they support Canadian workers by voting against having an election in a pandemic. That way, the government could focus on the health and safety of Canadians.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to start by informing you that I will be sharing my time with the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie.

[English]

I am very pleased to rise today to speak to a motion that states the obvious, which is that holding an election during the pandemic is not a good idea.

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People in Elmwood—Transcona and across Manitoba are experiencing a serious tightening in pandemic restrictions. Store capacities are being severely restricted, our schools are closing, visiting outside on the property of family and friends has just been prohibited. The last thing on the minds of people, just as my Conservative colleague said was true for his riding is true as well in Elmwood—Transcona, is having an election.

Even if constituents are not necessarily impressed with the response of the government to everything in the pandemic, I think they recognize that it is better that Parliament continue to work and put pressure on the government to get things right rather than suspend Parliament, allowing the government to govern with a free hand during an election. We also do not want the outcome of that election will be both in terms of who might form a government afterward and whether we will be able to elect a full House of MPs. We have the example of Newfoundland and Labrador, which was unable to complete its election as foreseen, and a lot of disputes about the legitimacy of political outcomes arose from that. What Canada cannot afford right now is to add a political crisis on top of a health and economic crisis, which is why this motion is so important.

As I said, restrictions are getting more serious in Manitoba. In some cases, that just means we are implementing things that have already been the case for some time now in the third wave in other provinces. There are some provinces where restrictions are still looser. However, the point is that even though we have seen some provincial elections take place during certain times of the pandemic, the challenge of pulling that off from coast to coast to coast, across 10 provinces and three territories, is far more than pulling it off at the provincial level. We have seen, even at that level, it can fail.

The logistics of a federal election are orders of magnitude more complex than a provincial election. That is why it is all the more important that we avoid, if we can, a federal election.

What does that take? It takes some good faith and good will by all players in the House, but particularly the government, which has to find a way forward. It does not mean that the government needs to always have a consensus among all the parties, but it at least has to have a meaningful partner on each of the initiatives it moves forward with. It also has to recognize that when it cannot find a meaningful partner, it does not have the mandate to move forward on a particular issue.

How does that fall apart? The only way it should fall apart is if the other parties all end up voting against the government at the same time. This is the only real proof that the government cannot find a consensus on an important or key part of its mandate. That is the real test. It is not how the Prime Minister feels when he wakes up in the morning, or whether he is upset because certain members of the opposition have criticized him too much on something or whether they are speaking more than he might like to certain things. If he can find another partner, certain things can be expedited, and we have seen that. It came up earlier. The NDP recently worked with the government to try to get Bill C-19 to committee, because we think it is important the bill passes. I will have to more say on that in a bit.

However, for the time being, I would like to know if the Bloc, in putting this motion forward, and not for the first time, does not think an election should occur in the pandemic and if it is committed to not cause an election during the pandemic. The Conservative Party has been on record for a long time now, at least back to February when the leader of the Conservative Party said very clearly in the *Toronto Star* that he would not trigger an election. Yes, the Conservatives voted against the budget and against other things, but they have done that knowing another responsible party would pick up the slack, do their job and ensure that there would not be an election. We all have strong feelings about what the government does, but we are very mindful of the consequences of our actions in the New Democratic caucus and we are willing to be the adult in the room.

● (1200)

We have said it for a long time, going back to June 2020 when I wrote to my colleagues on the democratic reform file, saying that we needed to talk about what would happen if the situation in Parliament lead to an election. We did not hear back for the summer, but we did eventually get a study at the procedure and House affairs committee. The outcome of that study was an all-party recommendation, no one dissented, which is in black and white in the final report of the procedure and House affairs committee. It says that there should not be an election in the pandemic unless the government loses a vote of confidence in the House of Commons, which it has not yet done.

It does not matter if some parties vote against the government. What matters is whether the government can find a partner to get its vital business through the House. So far, it has been able to do that, and our opinion is that it should continue to try to do that. As long as it is willing to make reasonable compromises, it can do that until we get out of the pandemic.

If the Conservatives, the Bloc members and the New Democrats are saying they do not want an election in the pandemic, how could it possibly happen except if the Prime Minister unilaterally decides to exercise the powers of his office and call an election even though the opposition parties do not think we should have one. After repeated calls for him to commit to not taking that road, putting Canadians who are worried that we might end up having a political crisis on top of a health and economic crisis at ease, the Prime Minister refuses to make that commitment, which is a point of serious frustration.

This leads me to the point about Bill C-19 which came up earlier. Yes, the NDP worked with the government because we saw a consensus around the principle of the bill. That is the same consensus that I witnessed around the table at PROC from an all-party point of view, which members can read about in the final report by the affairs committee. Under the current rules for an election, if we try to run an election just as if it is any other election and the pandemic did not happen, it will lead to failure, if not failure on the health side, then on the democratic side. We need to try to have some accommodation. Why is that a matter of urgency? It is urgent because the Prime Minister refuses to commit to not call one.

To some extent, I am surprised at the level of trust my Conservative and Bloc colleagues seem to have in the Prime Minister to put the public good ahead of his private political interests. The New Democrats do not share that faith. We are willing to negotiate with a government, which we often disagree with, to get things done and to make Parliament work. However, that in no way leads to any kind of naive faith on the part of our party about the Prime Minister, a Prime Minister whose right-hand man, Bill Morneau, through a large part of the pandemic, was just found to have committed ethical violations in respect of the WE Charity scandal; a Prime Minister who, himself on many occasions on a number of issues, whether it was billionaire island or other things, has been found to be in breach of the Code of Ethics for members of Parliament and for government. That has not happened with a lot of Prime Ministers, so this is not the guy to put our faith in when it comes to making decisions to put the public good ahead of his private interests.

We are not naive about that, and it is why we think it is important that Bill C-19 continue to make progress. Whether opposition parties and Canadians want it, the Prime Minister has made it very clear that he will defend his right to call an election whenever it suits his purposes. If he were not committed to that view, he would already have come out and said, "I'm not going to call an election unless I lose a confidence vote in the House of Commons", but he will not say that. We are all good at reading between the lines on Parliament Hill. We know exactly what that means.

I never heard in the debate we had either at PROC on a pandemic election or in the several hours of debate we had in the House on Bill C-19 anyone disagree that the rules need to be changed. The point is to get those changes right. That work should happen at committee. The bill can be there now, once the Liberals stop filibustering at that committee, and then we can get on with that work. We need to get on with the work because we know the Prime Minister cannot be trusted to put the public interests of Canadians ahead of his private political gain.

• (1205)

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I acknowledge my colleague's intellectual honesty, so could he honestly tell us how many times he has had to vote with the government, against his own convictions, just to prevent an election?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, we have always clearly stated that we do not agree with every item in the estimates and that it is in the public interest to avoid an election.

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In this Parliament, when the government was willing to negotiate with the opposition parties, the NDP was able to get concrete initiatives adopted to help Canadians. I am thinking of the CERB for those who lost their jobs, students and people with disabilities. There is a slew of programs that helped Canadians, and I am satisfied with our performance during this Parliament.

Unless the government refuses to negotiate with the other parties, we believe that we can make Parliament work and avoid an election.

[English]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member talked about reading between the lines. I do not think he needs to read between the lines. He said in his own speech that the PROC committee, all members, including the Liberal members, agreed to the recommendation about having an election during a pandemic. Indeed, this side of the House has not even said that we will not vote in favour of this motion. This is a fairly good motion and there is a good possibility that we will vote for it. I would not sell this government short with comments about reading between the lines.

However, I did appreciate his comment about being the responsible adult at the table. Unfortunately, by being the responsible adult at the table, that means the irresponsible people at the table will start to rely on that responsible adult to carry this government.

I hope the member will continue to exercise good judgment in being a responsible member at the table so we can continue to do good work for Canadians.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, I do not recall having made any allusion to how the government side might vote in respect of this motion. I have witnessed many occasions where government members voted for motions in the House which the government had no intention of honouring. I can fully appreciate that Liberals may well vote for the motion, but that does not tell us what the Prime Minister will do.

If Liberals were really serious about not having an election, we would hear a crystal clear commitment from the Prime Minister himself saying that he will not call an election unless he loses a confidence vote in the House of Commons, as per the final recommendation of the final report by the procedure and House affairs committee on a pandemic election. That would put it beyond a shadow of a doubt. That is very much what I would like to hear.

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It is the Prime Minister's decision alone. It is not up to any other member in the House on the government's side, just like with his decision to prorogue, which is why I had been adamant that we needed to hear from the Prime Minister on that decision at PROC. He has also refused to appear to defend how he exercises the powers of his office, whether it is by pausing Parliament—

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

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I want to shift gears a bit. The hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona happens to be an expert in an area that I find fascinating, which is the confidence convention.

When a government falls, do we automatically go into an election? I would welcome any comments from the hon. member.

• (1210)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, we do not need to go right into an election if a government falls. That is why it would behoove us all to have a system where a government can only fall on what is sometimes referred to as constructive confidence motion or a constructive motion of non-confidence as the case may be. This is when the House indicates a preference for what is to happen next, whether it is the formation of some other kind of government backed by a coalition or confidence and supply agreement, where members can say they do not like this budget, they do not think it did the trick and provide a solution for how to move forward rather than leave it to the discretion of the Prime Minister.

The problem here is too much discretion for the Prime Minister and not enough explicit, transparent statements by him about how he will conduct himself for which he can be held to account.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in today's discussion on the Bloc Québécois's opposition motion.

It gives me an opportunity to comment on something that New Democrats care a lot about, and that is the ability to stay the course and be consistent. Not every political party has that ability, and I find myself in a rather unusual position in that I support the motion but am struggling to understand the Bloc Québécois's approach.

I would like to reread the motion:

That:

(a) the House remind the government that a general election was held in October 2019 and sadly note that more than 1.3 million Canadians, including almost 360,000 Quebecers, have been infected with COVID-19 and that nearly 25,000 people have died as a result; and

(b) in the opinion of the House, holding an election during a pandemic would be irresponsible, and that it is the responsibility of the government to make every effort to ensure that voters are not called to the polls as long as this pandemic continues.

That is good. That is what the NDP has been saying for months, but is it what the Bloc Québécois and the member for Beloeil—Chambly have been saying for months?

I have here a Radio-Canada article from about six or seven months ago. I will read the end of the article, which shows that things have changed dramatically.

The article says, “As for whether a second COVID-19 wave could interfere with his plan, [the Bloc Québécois leader] says there are ways to keep people safe at the polls. He thinks COVID-19 itself is not enough of a reason to avoid triggering an election. ‘If we follow that reasoning to its logical conclusion, that would mean that as long as we are in a pandemic, we live in a dictatorship.’” That was the Bloc Québécois leader's conclusion then.

I wonder what happened. The only explanation I can think of is that the Bloc Québécois caucus and members did a little soul-searching and thought about whether holding an election during a pandemic would be the safe, sensible and responsible thing to do, given the presence of the virus and its variants. I am happy that the Bloc Québécois has come on side with the NDP and its leader, who have been arguing for months that it would be unwise.

An election could put people at risk. Hundreds of cases are being diagnosed every day. Not long ago, Quebec, Ontario and other provinces were reporting thousands of cases. The Bloc Québécois's change of heart is hard to comprehend.

A short while ago, the Bloc Québécois was boasting that it would hold to its convictions, that the NDP would save the Liberals and that it would be all right if there were an election because the Bloc was standing tall. Today, the Bloc is presenting a motion saying it would be a bad idea to hold an election. What happened?

I get the impression that the member for Beloeil—Chambly had a road to Damascus moment. He saw the light and fell off his horse. Something must have happened to him for him to say that he would avoid an election out of respect for Canadians. I find it extremely interesting to see the Bloc Québécois finally come around to the NDP's sensible, reasonable and responsible arguments. We have been saying over and over for months now that we will not risk our constituents' health and safety by holding an election no one wants.

None of my constituents in Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie are telling me that it is time to hold an election and that it is really a priority. No one is telling me they would be happy about it, that it would be a good thing, that it would be easy and fun. We saw quite clearly what happened with the election in Newfoundland and Labrador.

For months now, the Bloc Québécois has been threatening to trigger an election. They did it during the first, second and third waves. Today, they came around to the NDP's arguments, and that is just fine. I will take it, but I am having trouble following the Bloc's reasoning. That is why I said how important it is to stay the course and be consistent.

This week is National Nursing Week, a time to recognize the work of nurses, who are doing a fantastic job. For over a year now, nurses have been on the front lines in our health care facilities, saving lives, often at the risk of their own. Let us not forget the other health care professionals either, like physicians, orderlies and technicians.

● (1215)

I think that, out of respect for these people, the work they do and the risks they take, the Bloc should have said from the outset, as the NDP did, that it would not increase the risk of spreading the virus by triggering an election, which involves door-knocking, rallies and line-ups to vote. That would have been the right thing to do from the beginning.

In the article I quoted from a few months ago, did the leader of the Bloc Québécois forget to respect the work of these professionals? I am not accusing anyone. I am simply asking valid questions. It seems to me that this is something that can be done, since I have already heard it somewhere.

If we want to avoid putting the people who work in our health care system at risk, people who have had it tough for months, who are dropping like flies and whose working conditions are challenging, the right thing to do is to say that there should not be an election as long as the pandemic continues.

I sincerely wish the Bloc Québécois had said so much sooner and shown consistency out of respect for health care professionals and the health and safety of all Canadians. It is good that it got there in the end.

Going back to health care professionals and National Nursing Week, I think we obviously need to talk about the federal government's responsibility to provide the best possible working conditions for these professionals. They are working extremely hard to care for our seniors and our sick. They are saving lives and caring for patients who have been suffering intensely for weeks, if not months.

I must draw my colleagues' attention to the Liberal government's failures with regard to provincial health transfers. We unanimously agree that the federal government needs to do more and increase its share of funding for the public health care system to cover 35% of the total. Right now, federal funding is hovering around 20%, which is woefully inadequate and puts tremendous pressure on the provinces, including Quebec. Austerity measures have been introduced in recent years, and they have had an impact on working conditions, particularly orderlies' wages and nurses' schedules, making their job all the more challenging and difficult.

The pandemic revealed the extent of the crisis and exposed just how badly our health care system needs more funding and a better structure, and how the people who work in it deserve more respect and recognition. The federal government needs to contribute to this effort, but it is not doing so, preferring to inject funds on an ad hoc and temporary basis so as to avoid responsibility. Injecting billions of dollars here and there is all well and good, but it all comes to an end eventually. Then the provinces, the hospitals and the health care professionals are left with the same problems.

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What we are asking for is stable and permanent transfers from the federal government to the provinces in order to improve our capacity and our health care and to ensure proper care for our seniors, so that the carnage we saw in long-term care centres never happens again.

Working together is the least we can do. We have a shared responsibility, as representatives of our constituents, to work hard to ensure a modicum of decency for our seniors, so they can live out their lives in dignity, without their rent becoming someone else's profits.

As the NDP leader keeps saying over and over, profit and the private sector have no place in long-term care facilities. That is what we need to fix to help our seniors. We must prevent the problems we saw in Dorval, where some people were pocketing thousands of dollars in profits every year on the backs of these seniors, only to abandon them when the crisis came. These seniors ended up alone, dehydrated, lying on the floor, with rotten food and no one to take care of them. We have to work together to prevent this from ever happening again.

A day will come when there will be an election and people will have choices to make. This government's preferences for billionaires, big business and web giants are bad choices that do not serve the public interest, public services or the common good. Until that day comes, however, let us be responsible and avoid having an election. I am pleased that the majority of parties have come around to the arguments that the NDP has been making for months now.

● (1220)

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague's argument, which is based on false logic, is elegant but disingenuous. There is absolutely no contradiction between the motion before us today and stating, as the leader of the Bloc Québécois has been for months, that we must be ready for an election because we have a minority government. That is what my leader has been saying these past few months.

However, with respect to contradictions, the NDP is a good example of that. The Canada emergency wage subsidy, which was launched a year ago, was designed to help workers who are struggling during this pandemic, and God knows that there are a lot of them. The Bloc Québécois is the only political party that did not use this program, because we believe it is important that government money, taxpayers' money, be used to help workers. The NDP used this program. Will my hon. colleague see to it that the NDP repays the money that should have gone to struggling workers before the next election campaign?

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Speaker, I think we would all agree that a political party must be prepared for an election. However, that is not the same as threatening to trigger an election.

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As the leader of the Bloc Québécois said, if you look at the reasoning from another perspective, it would mean that we are living in a dictatorship until the pandemic is over. Logically speaking, then, does this mean that the Bloc Québécois would now be okay with a dictatorship? That would surprise me, unless the party is doing an about-face.

As for the wage subsidy, I am proud to say that, if not for the NDP, the wage subsidy would have remained at 10%, which is what the Conservatives, or rather the Liberals, had originally planned. Pardon my mistake, since they are no different. The NDP caucus fought to ensure that businesses had access to a 75% wage subsidy.

[English]

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, nobody wants an election. I think we can agree on the fact that nobody wants an election.

Certainly, in Winnipeg Centre, rather than looking to an election, I am still focused very much on trying to keep people in my riding alive. I am focused on making sure they have what they need, now that we are on complete lockdown and many families have lost their complete income during the pandemic.

I know there has been criticism of the NDP for supporting this specific bill, but we know, just from Liberal behaviour, that we cannot trust the Liberal government, whether it is due to the number of ethics scandals the current Prime Minister has been involved in, or the fact that the government continues to filibuster in PROC, a very important committee that makes sure we are doing what is necessary to get supports to Canadians.

Could my colleague can expand on that?

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her comment and question.

Just as there are people who are suffering in Winnipeg, there are also people who are suffering in Montreal. We are experiencing a completely untenable housing crisis. The restaurant, tourism and cultural industries are in shambles. People are desperate. They are not happy to see that the Liberals' assistance measures will decrease this summer and end in September. The NDP caucus helped implement those measures because we negotiated with the government. We managed to achieve real gains for people, whether it be self-employed workers, students, people with disabilities, seniors or small businesses. That is our record, and we are proud of it.

We need to continue to work to really help people on the ground. The day will come when we have an election and then we will see why the Liberals do not deserve to return to power.

• (1225)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last year the leader of the Bloc party at one point basically vowed to force an election if the Prime Minister did not resign. I am wondering if my

colleague could provide his thoughts on the commitment coming from the Bloc back then and how that might be in contradiction to the motion we are debating today.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. parliamentary secretary for his question.

That is why I spoke of inconsistencies and flip-flopping. It is dangerous to threaten to hold an election in the middle of a pandemic. It was not a responsible thing to say. The Bloc Québécois members finally realized how ill-advised it was. I imagine they listened to people on the ground, in their ridings, who told them they did not want an election. That is great, but it is true that when they constantly say one thing and then constantly say the exact opposite, they are losing their credibility, bit by bit.

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am really surprised by the tone of my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie. I understand his bitterness, because he had to betray his convictions.

Politics is a balance of power, but I will not give him an intro to politics course. The leader said that he is ready to go, for integrity reasons, and that there will be provisions to ensure the safety of the vote. I understand that the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie and his party preferred to lie down and abandon the issues of integrity, which are fundamental in a democracy, in order to make small gains here and there. In the end, they are letting a minority government that behaves like a majority government by using the pandemic and [Technical difficulty—Editor]. I understand my colleague's bitterness.

That said, I would like to rise above partisanship, because the Liberals have sent in a big gun, someone experienced in the person of the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, who is very non-partisan, to oppose and debate the Bloc Québécois motion. I think the debate should be refocused, first and foremost. Today is about trying to strike a balance between access to voting, health security at polling stations and the integrity of the vote.

Let me reiterate what the motion says. The first part is depressing. It reminds us that more than 1.3 million Canadians have been infected with COVID-19 and that 25,000 Canadians have died as a result. The second part tells the government that, in the opinion of the House, holding an election during a pandemic would be irresponsible and that it is the responsibility of the government to make every effort to ensure that voters are not called to the polls. That means we have to honour the decision the people made on October 21, 2019, and remember what the Prime Minister said that night, which is that he understood and heard the people's message.

Hearing the people's message does not mean engaging in hasty negotiations with the NDP behind closed doors to secure that party's support so the Liberals can save their skin and avoid an election, thereby freezing other parties out of negotiations altogether.

Another thing hearing the people's message does not mean is making sure the Liberals have the support of a particular party to carry a vote, nor does it mean overturning a vote. Let me remind everyone what happened when we had a vote on tax havens. The House defeated the government because 67% of voters voted against this government, which said it could govern with a minority, which is absolutely not the case. The Prime Minister decided to seize the golden opportunity to trigger an election in an attempt to secure a majority government. That is the issue here.

The Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs called the Bloc Québécois hypocritical. Personally, I find that the Prime Minister was hiding his intentions with the answers that he gave yesterday to the leader of the Bloc Québécois, who had a solution for him. It is pretty obvious. This government is incapable of doing its job as a minority government. If the government wants to trigger an election, we will stand tall for our convictions, and we think that seniors aged 65 and older deserve a \$110 monthly increase to their old age pension. If the government wants to call an election over this issue, we will have no choice, but I would really like to know what the Liberals will say to those seniors during the election campaign.

Regardless of this government's inability to govern in a manner worthy of a minority government that has accepted the results of the previous election, we also need to be aware that this bill is flawed. However, the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs said that he only wanted to reassure us by saying that the Chief Electoral Officer had confirmed that there would not be any undue delay in announcing the election results.

• (1230)

I am sorry, but he should have reread the bill. The government introduced this bill without considering the recommendations of the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada. The Chief Electoral Officer did not recommend three polling days, but two, because the third day, Monday, poses logistical challenges for room rentals.

In addition, the government decided that mail-in ballots, which would likely be preferred if an election were called during a pandemic, could be cast until 6 p.m. on the Tuesday following the Monday votes. Imagine the following situation. There are mailboxes at the offices of the returning officers in the ridings. People hear the partial results from Monday. On Tuesday morning, they drop off their envelope at the office of the returning officer and the vote will be counted. Has the integrity of the voting process come to this?

There are major flaws in this bill. The government is out of touch with the reality on the ground. It should call the returning officer, the Chief Electoral Officer, and ask him what is going on. I do not know if this is the case in other provinces, but in Quebec, the school service centres, which used to be called school boards, do not want to rent out their rooms on Mondays. Not only will it be hard to find rooms big enough to ensure a safe vote, but it will also be tough to recruit people for three days.

Opening the polls is all well and good, but we need to think twice about this. Under the current provisions of the Canada Elections Act, voting is allowed any day of the week and there are four advance polling days. In addition to the four days provided under

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the act, the bill adds three days of polling, although the Chief Electoral Officer said that, for optimal logistics, the polling should be done over two days instead of on the traditional Monday.

When the government introduces a bill under time allocation, that means it wants to move quickly and is not prepared to compromise. The Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs says that it is scary that the opposition parties have voted against his government 14 times and that they have defied the government. A minority government that acknowledges the result should amend its bills. It should give the opposition parties some room to manoeuvre since they represent 67% of people who did not vote for the government. That way, those people's views can also be reflected in the legislation.

The current government is incapable of doing that. That is why it is bound and determined to hold an election as soon as possible. The government thinks it has the pandemic under control and that the vaccines will eliminate the problem. However, given the new variants from coast to coast to coast and the fact that the circumstances are different everywhere, we have no idea what the situation is going to look like. It is no secret that there is talk of an opportunity in August, but we do not know where things will stand in August.

Will the Prime Minister travel from one province to another and land in Quebec? Will such travel be safe during a pandemic?

To avoid sending voters to the polls, the government needs to assume its role as a minority government, which it has yet to do. In fact, prorogation helped it to avoid taking responsibility for the ethical and political scandal surrounding the WE Charity. It is important to stand up for what you believe in. Quebecers are behind us on that and they will prove it during the next election.

• (1235)

Let us accept the proposal of the leader of the Bloc Québécois and let us sit down with the advisory committee, as Quebec did, and reach a consensus. Then, we could celebrate the fact that everyone worked together to support the democratic rules. We cannot change the rules of democracy unilaterally or by using closure. That is a denial of democracy.

Mr. Richard Lehoux (Beauce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a very simple question for my colleague.

Does he think the current government does not want to negotiate with the opposition parties? This appears to be the case on a number of issues. I would like to hear his thoughts. Why does he think the government does not want to negotiate in good faith with the opposition parties?

Mr. Luc Thériault: Mr. Speaker, as I said, the Prime Minister is using this opportunity to trigger an election so that his party can form a majority government. That is clear, and I am not the only one saying so. The commentators are even saying it. The fact that he is cutting a \$500 cheque to seniors over the age of 75 right before an election is a clue.

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The polls are making him think that he could win a majority. Running a majority government is the only thing he is capable of doing. He is using the pandemic to act as though his government has a majority. He will not negotiate with the other parties on old age security and health transfers, for example. These issues are very important to Quebec and Quebecers, however. He is dismissing that and is clearly focused on an election.

Can we rise above partisanship? I hope so, since we are running out of time.

• (1240)

[English]

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I think there is broad agreement in this House that an election during a pandemic would be patently irresponsible. My question is, can we both call on the government to avoid an election during the pandemic and ensure that we have election rules in place to protect Canadians in the event that the Prime Minister does not respect the intent of this motion and goes ahead with a self-interested election during the pandemic?

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Thériault: Mr. Speaker, I look forward to seeing how the Liberals will vote on the motion. Will they vote against the motion, claiming that it is self-serving and hypocritical, or will they go after the wording of the motion?

I would remind members that, in a 2014 debate, the current Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons said that the Elections Act and the Parliament of Canada Act are fundamental to our democracy, and changes to them must be achieved by a broad consensus.

Achieving a broad consensus is not simply a matter of agreeing with the NDP to pass the bill. Broad consensus means accepting the amendments and improvements to the Canada Elections Act proposed by all parties. In my view, at least three out of four should be accepted.

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoulu, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my colleague raised the issue that mail-in ballots would be counted the day after voting day. The last I heard, not only would they be counted the day after, but they would also be counted in Ottawa, not in the ridings.

If that happened, how would the apparent legitimacy of an election be affected?

Mr. Luc Thériault: Mr. Speaker, there will be mailboxes in the offices of the returning officers, and right now, the votes that will be counted directly and centrally from Ottawa will be the votes of those who are unable to vote normally by mail because they are outside the country, for example.

Within the ridings, the returning officers are not just responsible for getting the ballots to where they need to be. They are responsible for the ballots until they are counted, which must be done in their ridings. If that is not the case and someone understood otherwise, I think that we are going to have problems on election day.

Those voting by mail should have only until Friday to submit their ballots. There will be problems if those ballots are accepted

any later than the Friday before the Saturday, Sunday and Monday voting days. A person who requests a voting kit needs to be crossed off the list and cannot go vote in person.

There will be people who did not send in their ballot and who show up, which will result in crowding at the polling stations. That is why we need to make amendments and we need to all come to an agreement so that, if we really do hold an election during the pandemic, we follow the public health rules and protect the integrity of the vote.

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, from time to time, it is good to remember what we are debating.

The motion moved states the following:

(a) the House remind the government that a general election was held in October 2019 [not even two years ago] and sadly note that more than 1.3 million Canadians, including almost 360,000 Quebecers, have been infected with COVID-19 and that nearly 25,000 people have died as a result; and

(b) in the opinion of the House, holding an election during a pandemic would be irresponsible...

We chose our words carefully.

...and that it is the responsibility of the government to make every effort to ensure that voters are not called to the polls as long as this pandemic continues.

I have been listening to the debate all day and I note that we are drifting away from the issue. Once again, there is a lot of partisanship, unfortunately.

There is one thing that everyone agrees on: If an election were to be held during the pandemic, changes would obviously be needed. That is why we agree with making changes to the Elections Act. What we are asking is that we do so without closure. What we are asking is that it be done democratically. What we are asking is that we do so by consensus. That is the real difference.

I want to set aside all of the demagoguery I have been hearing all day. Instead, I want to talk about what comes next. The existing act is significantly flawed and vague, which I will discuss later on in my speech. We need to talk about this. We need to debate it. However, less than four hours of debate is not enough.

From a public health perspective, calling a snap election would be ethically irresponsible. From a democratic perspective, which is what I am talking about here, it is rather ironic for a minority government to bulldoze through and unilaterally change the democratic rules. It makes no sense.

I have questions about the NDP's support for this time allocation. New Democrats enjoy virtue signalling, but it seems to me that they are talking out of both sides of their mouths. How can they demand that the government not call an election but at the same time so quickly support the government with this time allocation? They have been the government's lackeys for far too long, since October 2019. I am putting that out there as food for thought.

All the party leaders have said they do not want an election, but the Liberal government is looking at the current environment. They are in a good position. Actually, I think we would be in an election campaign right now were it not for the surging cases in Ontario. It would have been difficult, if not impossible. The Liberals are not happy. They have been seeing good results in the polls for a while, but the polls are starting to slip. They are therefore thinking they have to hurry up or they will miss the opportunity to form a majority government and control everything.

The mandate that the people of Quebec and Canada gave the 338 elected members of the House in October 2019 is a minority government. In real life, that means sitting down, talking to each other and getting along with each other to compromise and seek out consensus. That is the magic word today: consensus.

We are being accused from all sides of wanting an election because we vote against government motions. Wait just a second; we vote against measures when they are not good for Quebec. Period. We are not going to start voting for anything and everything, certainly, but we are not so irresponsible that we would drag people into an election.

Right now, things are better in Quebec, but there are provinces where that is not the case, such as Ontario and Alberta. Let us remember that and let us remember the example of Newfoundland and Labrador, which had to halt its election while it was in full swing. Is that what we want?

Many commentators and journalists asked questions about citizen participation in elections during a pandemic. There are major concerns, which I think are justified and serious. Our duty is to take action every day for the common good and to communicate with each other.

• (1245)

Many people referred to the leader of the Bloc Québécois earlier. We have an excellent leader. I think he is the best, so I like it when members talk about him. I am never shy about quoting him or defending him because he always takes a reasonable position. Just yesterday, my leader reached out to the Prime Minister. He told him that the situation had gotten out of hand with the motion to impose a gag order but that there was still a way to set things right.

Several weeks and a few days ago, our leader, who is always looking for reasonable solutions that everyone can agree on, proposed a negotiated solution to the labour dispute at the Port of Montreal. That solution would have gotten workers back to work more quickly than passing special legislation. I will not get into that debate again, but that is how the Bloc Québécois leader is. As long as he is my leader, I will be very pleased to hear any member of the House talk about or quote him because I will always be able to answer them with a smile. I will now get back to talking about the matter at hand.

If the government is in a hurry to pass an election bill, it probably wants an election this summer while the House is not sitting. How will the Prime Minister go about calling the election? Will he go see the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, who is sitting in for the governor general, to dissolve Parliament?

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That brings me to another fun tangent. We have heard a lot of passionate speeches here about the governor general's role and how important it is. If it were so important, that person would have been replaced already, because the position has been vacant for over a month. The message is clear: the governor general is kind of pointless. However, here we are with the Chief Justice, who is sitting in for the governor general, assenting to bills that he might one day have to rule on as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, which is his actual function. How is that situation acceptable?

The answer is self-evident, and the question itself points to yet another in a long list of ways the government has let things slide, dragged its feet, been neglectful, failed to take action, and been oblivious to what is going on. I just wanted to send the government that message.

Rather than rushing us—or forcing us—to vote on electoral reform, the government could try another solution. The leader of the Bloc Québécois has suggested that we all meet to work this out. We could come up with a solution that all parties agree on, pass it quickly and move on to the next debate.

What might the next debate be about? Is should be about health transfers.

This is National Nursing Week, and everyone has been delivering beautiful, emotional speeches, with their hands over their hearts, about how great a job nurses are doing. I agree, but can we come up with the funding that the provinces and Quebec need to properly manage health care? That is what might actually improve working conditions for these men and women. That might not be a bad idea.

I must have talked about seniors in the House about ten times now, and every time I raise the subject, I get myself so worked up. I will repeat this as often as I possibly can because it is important for the public to know. I cannot fathom how a federal government that is setting itself up to run a deficit of nearly \$400 billion cannot be bothered to respect those who built this society and who shaped the relative comfort in which we live today and treat them with dignity. It is more than just unacceptable; it is disgusting.

We could talk about CERB, because there are people who received a T4 for \$10,000, but they never received that money. They are being told to pay their taxes and that they will be refunded. Meanwhile, the Liberals are keeping an eye on the polls and thinking that they should get the bill passed quickly because there will be a window of opportunity this summer, and if an election is not held this summer, they will miss their chance to win a majority.

I will close by saying that members have talked a lot about the way the Bloc Québécois voted on various bills. I repeat: we vote in favour of good bills, and we vote against bad bills. We do not want to trigger an election, but we are not afraid to say that we would be ready if an election were to be called. There is a difference between the two.

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• (1250)

[English]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member from the Bloc referring to the context of the Liberal Party as looking good. I would suggest to him that the reason has nothing to do with a desire for an election, but because of how this government has been responding to the needs of Canadians over the last 15 months. However, we will let the electorate be the judge of that, whenever that happens to be.

I find it fascinating that the member talks about consensus. Does he know what else is steeped in consensus? It is changing our Standing Orders, but somehow it was okay to go against this idea of consensus on March 20, 2020, when the Bloc voted in favour with the NDP and the Conservatives to change the Standing Orders to give them more opposition days. Now they will say that it was just temporary. Guess what, this legislation is just temporary too.

Could the member explain to me the hypocrisy coming from a position of great consensus that only seems to matter to him when it is relevant to his argument?

• (1255)

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron: Mr. Speaker, I have a big smile on my face because I can only laugh when I hear such things.

I would like the Liberals to understand one thing: when I criticize the fact that the Liberals want to trigger an election because they think the polls are favourable, I do not mean that I am happy that they can form a majority government or that I have confidence in them. I have been told that two or three times now, but that is a misinterpretation of what I am saying.

It is the voters who will choose. I will have the same pride standing before my constituents that I have when I stand before the House and quote my leader.

As for opposition days, I can understand. Why are the Liberals doing this? It is because all they want to do is control the House agenda. Of course, they do not want to increase the number of opposition days, but we are working for democracy. Our party has made a number of constructive suggestions, and we always reach out to come to a consensus.

[English]

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government cannot seem to manage its legislative agenda. Important legislation is not tabled, or it is tabled at the last moment and then there is limited debate or the Liberals shut debate down.

Now we see the government trying to put through this election bill quickly, rather than prioritizing small business owners and families, getting people back to work and rebuilding our economy. Could the member comment on the rushing of this election bill as a priority?

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her very interesting question.

I am glad she asked me a question about the legislative agenda because it gives me the opportunity to address a few things.

The discussions surrounding Bill C-19 started on October 5, 2020. On October 22, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs initiated a study. On December 8, it tabled a preliminary report. On December 10, the government hastily introduced a bill. That was a blatant show of disrespect for the committee and its elected members because they had not yet finished their work. It also demonstrated a serious lack of respect for the many witnesses who spent hours preparing their testimony. Witnesses made a conscientious effort because they thought they were contributing to something important. That is what the government did.

The government introduced this bill on December 10. Since then, the bill has barely been debated in the House. Barely four hours have been spent on debate. It is now May 13.

Why is the bill so important to the Liberals? It is because they want to hold an election in order to become a majority government.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Berthier—Maskinongé.

I am going to ask him a very simple, factual and non-partisan question. Today, the Bloc Québécois is telling us that it would be irresponsible to trigger an election during a pandemic, that is, in the middle of the third wave. Last August, the same party said that it was fine to trigger an election and that it was not irresponsible.

Why would it be responsible to trigger an election during the second wave and irresponsible to do so during the third wave?

Mr. Yves Perron: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie for his question.

Those comments were taken out of context and distorted a little. What happened was that we voted against bills because they were not good for Quebec. Every time, the Liberal government held up the threat of a confidence vote. Our philosophy is very simple: if a bill is good for Quebec, we vote for it; if it is not good for Quebec, we vote against it.

We are discussing contradictions. The NDP members are rising to ask the Prime Minister not to call an election during a pandemic, yet they voted for closure. If all the opposition parties had voted against closure, the Liberals would have had to compromise. We could have debated the bill at length. That is the real issue.

*Business of Supply**[English]*

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to be able to provide some thoughts on the opposition motion. There has been a great deal of misleading information, if I can put it that way, so let me start by being crystal clear for those following the debate that the Government of Canada, headed by the Prime Minister, has been very, very clear: Our focus since the beginning of the pandemic has been on delivering for Canadians.

Canadians expect their Parliament to work to deliver for them through this pandemic, and indeed over the past many months, we have put in extra effort to make that happen. If we go back to the very beginning, we see the creation of programs that have assisted millions of Canadians, programs that have provided a lifeline to many small businesses, preventing bankruptcies and keeping people employed. We have seen support programs for seniors and people with disabilities, and enhancements of youth employment opportunities. We have seen provincial restart money, money being put into our school systems and the speeding up of infrastructure programs.

The government has taken a team Canada approach. For the first couple of months, there was a high sense of co-operation coming from the House of Commons, but that changed. For the Conservative Party, it started to change toward the end of June. For others, it took maybe a bit longer. Let there be no doubt that from the very beginning, the Government of Canada's focus has been the pandemic and having the backs of Canadians day in and day out, seven days a week. Let there be absolutely no doubt about that.

It is the opposition that continues to want to talk about elections. Further, we have even seen threats of elections coming from some politicians in opposition parties. What is really interesting about the motion today is that we have the Bloc party saying that it does not want to have an election during the pandemic. That is what it is saying today publicly.

I challenge Bloc members to share with Canadians what they truly believe. Last year, the leader of the Bloc party made it very clear. He vowed that if the Prime Minister of Canada did not resign, he would force an election during the pandemic. That is what the leader of the Bloc party said. The very same Bloc party today is saying that we should not have an election during the pandemic.

When he was asked about it last year, he responded by saying that allowing the government to remain in a position of power would do more damage to the country than forcing Canadians to head out to cast their ballots in the midst of a pandemic. He made it very clear that he would move a motion of non-confidence if the Prime Minister did not resign. In my books, that is pretty clear.

We have seen on numerous occasions all opposition parties, or at least the Conservatives and the Bloc, vote non-confidence. We have even seen some individuals from the New Democratic Party support non-confidence measures inside the House, from what I understand. Maybe not collectively as a party, but definitely as individuals.

● (1300)

Members should listen to what is being said in the speeches. The member for Kingston and the Islands and I spend a great deal of time in the chamber or in the virtual Parliament, and we listen to what members of the opposition are saying. Contrary to what some members of the Bloc are telling us today, it is completely irresponsible for us to believe that an election could not take place, when we have had threats coming from the leader of an official recognized party of the House, who is vowing to have an election. Am I to believe that the Bloc members, as a group, have had a road to Damascus experience and now do not want an election? Does that mean they fully endorse the Prime Minister and that what they said last year was wrong, that Canadians misunderstood and the Prime Minister is doing a good job, according to the Bloc now? Is that what we are to believe?

I will tell members what I believe. I believe in the reality of what I see in terms of votes on the floor of the House and some of the words we hear from members opposite, who talk consistently about elections and challenge the government on an election with the actual votes, not once, twice or three times. I loved the way the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, who is responsible for the Canada Elections Act, asked how many times opposition members voted no confidence in the government: (a), (b), (c) or (d). Those following the debate should keep in mind that any loss of a confidence vote precipitates an election. People may be surprised at the actual number. The President of the Queen's Privy Council asked whether it was (a) one to four times; (b) five to nine times; (c) 10 to 14 times; or (d) more than 15 times. I am virtually in the House of Commons, and I know it is well over 14 times.

It is not only votes of confidence. Let us look at the destructive force that the official opposition party has played on the floor of the House of Commons and some of the questions that were asked today. Members are talking about Bill C-19, which is a very important piece of legislation. We cannot continue to have confidence votes and not recognize the value of the legislation, but a couple of members said the government brought in time allocation and how mean that was because, after all, it is a minority government and it is forcing election legislation through. We cannot do that. We need the support of an opposition party to do it. Fortunately, the New Democrats stepped up to the plate so we could pass Bill C-19.

Then another Conservative member said the government brought in time allocation and there was very little time for members to debate it. On the very same day the time allocation was brought in, what did the Conservatives do? They brought forward a concurrence motion on a report, preventing hours of debate on Bill C-19. Did it prevent the bill from going to committee later that day? No, it did not. Did it prevent members from being able to speak to the legislation? Yes, it did.

Business of Supply

Then some opposition members said it was a bad bill and asked about consensus and even quoted me on it, in terms of how we should strive to get consensus. Need I remind members how they voted? Liberals know how they voted on it. Every political party voted in favour of Bill C-19 going to committee. What the opposition is attempting to do here just does not make sense. We can talk about the frustration of government in terms of legislation.

The Prime Minister says the pandemic is the government's number one concern. We will have the backs of Canadians and we will be there for them. That means we need to pass important legislation that matters to every Canadian. The best example I can come up with offhand is probably Bill C-14.

● (1305)

Last fall, Canada's very first female Minister of Finance presented a fall statement, brought in legislation in December, and brought it up on numerous occasions for debate. We had to force it to get through because the opposition was not co-operating. There was no sense of how long opposition members were prepared to keep it in the second reading stage of the process. That legislation provided support programs and many other things for real people and businesses being challenged by the pandemic.

The government has a very limited number of days and hours to actually conduct government business. The Conservatives, who are the official opposition, know that. They understand it. One might think, given the pandemic and their talk about the importance of being there for Canadians during the pandemic, that the Conservatives would come to that realization, as opposed to debating Bill C-19. One might think they would allow the debate on Bill C-14 to be conducted in a better, healthier way for all parliamentarians and, indeed, Canadians and that they would be willing to participate. One might think that, but that is not the reality.

I have been listening to a number of people speak to the motion we have before us today. I am still trying to learn some of the acronyms in texting, such as OMG, which I believe means "oh my God". I have probably had three or four of those OMG moments today when I wondered where this was coming from. How could members really say some of the things they are saying?

We had a member talking about how terrible the Liberals were. He said that we were an absolute and total failure and that we were so bad. Is the member scared we are going to call an election because we were so bad? Some members were saying how bad Canada was in acquiring vaccines. The last time I looked, we were the third best in the G20 countries. Canada is doing exceptionally well. We will actually have received somewhere between 45 million and 50 million doses of vaccine before the end of June. As of yesterday, in the province of Manitoba, anyone over 18 can book an appointment to get their first shot.

Conservatives then had to come up with something to be critical of the government on the vaccine front, so they hit on the double dose issue. Conservatives thought they could say that the government was not doing a good job on the double dose issue.

I ask members to remember, back in the December, some of the opposition's criticisms of the government. Criticism is fair game. The Conservatives are in opposition, and I wish them many years in

opposition. They are entitled to be critical of the government and the things we are doing. However, it is another one of those OMG moments. They need to get real. They need to understand what Canadians want us to be focused on.

To my friends in the Bloc, they should seriously think about what their leader has been saying and the posture the Bloc has taken for the last number of months. When I saw this particular motion appear on the Order Paper, I had to give my head shake and ask myself if it was really coming from the Bloc. The Bloc has been the clearest of all in terms of wanting an election now.

I do not believe this. It might be what the Bloc has been thinking in the last 72 hours, but who knows what their thoughts are going to be 24 hours from now. That is the reason we brought in Bill C-19.

● (1310)

If there are concerns for Canadians regarding a potential election, given the behaviour we have seen from the opposition, one responsible thing to do would be to actually pass Bill C-19. Let us get it through committee. I think about how much time have we allocated toward Bill C-19. I was prepared to speak to it on a couple of occasions. One day, maybe back in January or February, I was primed and ready to go. It was going to be called up and, lo and behold, the Conservative Party brought in a concurrence motion. That was not the first time.

Ironically, once time allocation was put on Bill C-19, Conservative members did it again. They brought in another concurrence motion that prevented people from being able to speak on the legislation, even though it was going to committee. It just does not make sense. We have the vote on it. Conservatives were trying to frustrate the government in terms of not allowing the bill to proceed, so one would think that they were going to oppose it, but that was not the case. Of the entire Conservative caucus, those who voted, voted in favour of it.

Now Bill C-19 sits in limbo, although the Liberals would like to see it actually being talked about. There are some good ideas there. The minister has been very clear that he is open to ideas. The member for Elmwood—Transcona has talked about a number of possible amendments.

I think that we have been fairly clear in terms of getting the legislation before the committee. It is there. The committee can deal with it at any time now. Is the opposition being sincere about being concerned with the pandemic and what takes place in an election? We know that, no matter what, Elections Canada, while being recognized around the world as a first-class independent agency with the ability to conduct an election, would benefit from this legislation if we can get it passed. I think it is the responsible thing to do. Just look at the number of non-confidence votes we have had: 14 or 15. This would be a responsible thing for us to do.

Why not allow that discussion at committee? If we take a look at the principles to be looked at, they are just temporary measures. We do not know how long the pandemic could potentially carry on with variants and so forth. We are very optimistic today, but there are long-term care considerations. Bill C-19 talks about extending the number of polling days and mail-in ballot enhancements.

We have seen other governments in three or four provinces that have actually conducted provincial elections. We saw a huge election just south of the border. We saw by-elections conducted by Elections Canada. I would like to see PROC deal with the bill, and the sooner the better.

I encourage members to recognize two facts. First and foremost, since day one this Prime Minister and this government have been focused on the pandemic and being there for Canadians in a very real and tangible way. Second, when it comes to talking about an election, it is the opposition that does a lot more talking about it than the Government of Canada or the Prime Minister.

• (1315)

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure whether the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons is announcing that the government will impose another gag order to pass Bill C-19, but his arrogance is truly disappointing and distressing.

In 2014, he said that it was unacceptable to suspend the rules of democracy in order to change them. Today, he is in power in a minority government, and now he thinks it is acceptable. Is he really open to amendments? Since he knows the bill so well, will he be able to give me an answer if I propose one?

Does he think it is okay that his minister told us this morning that there would be no delay in releasing the results, when, according to the bill, voting day ends on Monday but mail-in ballots can be submitted until 6 p.m. on Tuesday? Moreover, I could even deliver a mail-in ballot to the office of the returning officer on Tuesday morning.

Does the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons agree that the vote should end on Friday, to avoid confusion and to ensure health and safety on the ground?

• (1320)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the member raises concerns that would be best addressed and very easily addressed at the committee stage. That is the reason I think members of the House should encourage PROC members of all political stripes to put Bill C-19 first on their agenda, which would be my recommendation. For example, with regard to Monday versus Tuesday, there is a consideration for whether an election is taking place on a long weekend, which might have some consequences for a Tuesday.

The detailed answers my friend is looking for could probably be provided to him at the committee stage. As I indicated in my comments, the government is very much open to ideas that would improve the legislation.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague should make no mistake. The first thing we want to do, as quickly as possible, is to regain power. My colleague will then be able to stand on this side of the House again and ask questions of the new Conservative government that will be running Canada.

However, now is not the time for that, since there are just seven of us here in the House of Commons, which seats 338.

[English]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. This member is quite aware that he should not be referencing the members who are in the House and how many members are in the House. While we are sitting virtually, any member who is participating virtually is considered to be sitting in the House. To somehow summarize and quantify how many people are in this House is not only incorrect, but it is also unparliamentary.

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

Indeed, members are not allowed to allude to the presence or absence of members in the House, whether in person or online.

The hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Speaker, I was simply trying to point out that we very much understand how difficult this is, since we are working both in person and online.

The parliamentary secretary is participating virtually today. Can he explain how he will campaign virtually? How will he meet constituents and explain why the Liberals are better than us? How can we run an election campaign right now, when all members are not even able to be present in the House?

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, this is something I would like to emphasize. The Conservative Party will play games on the issue of an election. It has no problem at all moving motions of non-confidence and voting en masse for it. Every time it does that, it is rolling the dice. It cannot guarantee an election would not happen as a result of that.

In fact, I suspect that on maybe a dozen occasions we have seen the Conservative Party play that game. I do not know the actual numbers, but I suspect it would be double digits. I think the responsible thing to do is ensure we have some legislation in place that will enhance Elections Canada's abilities. We have already seen elections take place in Canada.

Business of Supply

● (1325)

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this member started his discussion today by talking about being crystal clear. He then went on and talked about how the committee can do this work, even though the Liberals are filibustering it. I have a very simple question for this member. Yes or no: Will he very clearly commit, 100%, that the Liberal Party will not trigger an election unless it loses a confidence vote? It is very simple.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I would commit, as much as possible, to ensuring that Bill C-19 ultimately gets through and passed because I believe it is in the best interests of all Canadians to see it passed. To that extent, I would encourage members of the PROC committee to deal with it as soon as possible.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, going back to the last question from the NDP, the member might want to talk to the member for Elmwood—Transcona, who specifically took a shot at me, saying—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I want to comment on the earlier point of order with respect to the comments from my colleague for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles. Although he referenced the number of people physically in the chamber, he did not refer to the presence or absence of members participating in the session in general, nor did he name the presence of specific members.

I would ask you, Mr. Speaker, to review the question. To me, it seems that the rules would prohibit somebody from saying a certain member was present, or perhaps from saying there was a certain number of members present in general in the deliberations. However, as the member for Kingston and the Islands pointed out, the number of members physically in the House is not constitutive of the total number of members participating in the session, so I do not know that his comments could be construed as actually referencing the presence or absence of a certain number of members in total.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. member for his further comments. I have declared my position on this particular point of order. I do not see anything there, in reviewing the comments of the hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles. I think my comments on the matter reflect the situation.

In fact, the Chair looks upon these kinds of references or allusions to the absence or presence of members, be they in the House or online in these times of virtual proceedings, as that either one would constitute a reflection in debate that is really not encouraged and, in fact, is not permitted. We will stand by that.

We will go back to questions and comments. I believe the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands was in the midst of posing his question. We will go back to him.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the parliamentary secretary. Time and again, when there are opportunities to bring forward opposition motions for the betterment of Canadians, to deliver better services to them, to improve government programs and to make policy in this place that will benefit the lives of Canadians, why do the opposition parties resort to motions like this instead of looking toward making the lives of Canadians better?

● (1330)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated yesterday, I was surprised by the manner in which this particular motion was decided, only because it seems to be completely at odds with, and 180° from, where the Bloc members were not that long ago. It concerns me in terms of where they might be tomorrow, which highlights the fact that at any given time there could be an election based on what we see taking place in the House of Commons. There have been 13, 14, or 15 motions of confidence. Any one of those, if we lose a vote, would precipitate an election, so I would encourage members, as I say, to pass—

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments, the hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is really mind-blowing to listen to these speeches describing some kind of parallel universe. There have been several questions about the Bloc Québécois, and I will try to answer them quickly.

The first question was what the Bloc Québécois is doing here. My answer is that we are standing up for Quebecers on issues like aluminum and language. Our party is making proposals. It proposed a wage subsidy, it proposed that the Canada emergency response benefit incentivize work, and it is asking that our seniors be treated fairly. I could go on.

The second question that the hon. parliamentary secretary asked was what the Bloc Québécois wants. I will say to him that we want the democratic rules to be changed by consensus, as parliamentary tradition requires and dictates. That is what we want. We also want a government that honours the mandate that the people gave it, which is a minority mandate that requires it to compromise. We would also like a government that cares about what the Ethics Commissioner says about its leader once in a while.

I have a lot to say. As for my colleague, is he not concerned about democracy? Is he not interested in the consensus being proposed?

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I am very interested in what takes place in all regions of our country, and I am very proud of the government's Quebec caucus and the advocacy that the members display for the Province of Quebec and all Canadians through the development of the very programs the member just cited. We understand. We are the government that put in place, after listening to and working with Canadians in all regions of our country, programs that were there to support them, and we will continue to be there for seniors, youth, small businesses and those individuals who need us to have their backs through this very difficult time.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the position of the parliamentary secretary seems to be that he says the Liberals are not focused on an election, but that we should also please quickly pass the bill that would allow us to have a pandemic election. He also says that the Liberals cannot predict when an election would occur, because the government could lose a confidence vote at any time, but then he simultaneously says that even if they do not lose a confidence motion, they are still retaining the option of calling an election.

How is it that the parliamentary secretary is so confused here, and will he acknowledge that the government has failed to answer the basic question about whether it would go to the governor general to call an election, even if it had not lost a confidence vote?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I will be very clear on at least one of the points the member raises.

If the opposition is going to continue to vote non-confidence in the government, it would be irresponsible for them not to have measures in place to protect Canadians. Bill C-19 is necessary, because of, in good part, the behaviour of opposition members and the potential real threat of an election. It is not this Prime Minister or this government that has been talking about an election. It has been opposition parties doing that. We continue, day in and day out, to ensure that Canadians' backs are being covered and taken care of during this pandemic.

[Translation]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to speak today to this proposal by the Bloc Québécois on this, our opposition day.

This is a proposal that goes to what may be the very heart of our political commitment, that is, the expression of democracy itself. There are several components and several things to say about this proposal. There would also be several things to say about Bill C-19.

Today, it has come down to us making a common sense proposal that no election be held while the pandemic is at its peak, which has yet to be confirmed. By definition, we never know what the future holds. The first wave was strong, the second was even stronger, and the third is bringing particularly harmful variants that are more dangerous and more contagious. With each wave, we told ourselves that it could not be worse than what we had just come through, but unfortunately we were wrong. Such are the vagaries of public health and the life we have been living for a year now.

I feel it is a shame to present a motion on something that is just plain common sense. This motion is not even binding. If the situation changes and the need for an election becomes palpable, it will still be legal to hold one. That is not the issue. This motion is really an affirmation of good old common sense: we all understand, collectively, as a political class, that the priority is not to hold elections. It seems to me that should be obvious.

However, evidence of the government's desire to trigger an election is piling up. Unfortunately for the Liberals, they are always forced to put it off. If it were not for this third wave today, which is especially bad in Ontario, a province we know will be hotly contested, we would not be here right now. We would all be in our ridings, campaigning. There is not a shadow of a doubt about that.

In January, when the House resumed after the holiday recess, several newspapers reported that the government had asked its party and its riding associations to be at the ready and to prepare for an imminent campaign. It was not the Bloc Québécois saying it, but some very serious newspapers.

I feel it is a shame that, because we are raising this issue, the government has nothing better to do than to pass the buck to us, saying that it is the Bloc Québécois that often votes against the gov-

ernment. I have news for the government: as my colleague from Berthier—Maskinongé said earlier, this is a minority government. It is the government that often decides that a given matter will be a confidence vote. That is called blackmail.

I will take the example of the Bloc Québécois's amendment to the amendment to the budget bill. As a reminder, we proposed an increase in the pension for seniors and an increase in health transfers, and the government told us that it would make it a confidence matter. Here is a minority government that says it does not want an election, that criticizes us for voting against it when there are confidence votes, but that itself turns important votes into confidence votes.

The government is telling us that, if a majority of the members of the House impose a policy that the Liberals do not want, it will not respect democracy or the constitution of this democratically elected Parliament that, in the current context of a minority government, gives the upper hand to the opposition, which has a majority. The government tells us that there will be an election, and then blames certain opposition parties for wanting to trigger the election. This is rather odd and ethically dubious.

There are more and more signs, and I think there is no doubt that the government wants to call an election. Let me give Bill C-216 as an example that is very important, particularly for my colleague from Berthier—Maskinongé. I raised a point of order on it a few days ago.

The government agreed to vote in favour of the bill to embarrass the official opposition. Since then, however, it has done everything it can to ensure that, contrary to custom, the bill does not receive priority consideration at the Standing Committee on International Trade, on which I sit.

The government expressed circumstantial, partisan and temporary support for this bill, figuring that if it delayed the study of the bill as much as possible, it would not make it back to the House before the next election. The government thinks that it will win a majority in the next election and that this will all be ancient history, but that it will not have come off looking all that bad in the meantime.

• (1335)

We have seen it before. We were not born yesterday. This shell game is quite elaborate, but we know exactly where the government is going with this.

I want to get back to the gag order that was imposed on a debate about an act that is fundamental to our democracy, the act that sets out the rules by which Quebecers and Canadians choose their elected officials.

Business of Supply

Questions about holding an election in this particular context will obviously come up, since the current Liberal government has a minority. If the government had a majority, we can assume that this pandemic would have ended before the next fixed election date. Since the government has a minority, however, an election could be called at any time. As I was saying, there would be an election right now. If not for the third wave, we would not be in the House because Parliament would have been dissolved.

We have no problem with an election being held before the health situation improves. We said as much last fall. We said that we needed to put rules in place and we invited the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada, or CEO, to come up with a formula. We were the first to say it. Elections must obviously be held as safely as possible. That is not the issue. Democracy should not be suspended because of the health crisis.

Nevertheless, I want to point out that Bill C-19, regarding potential elections during a pandemic, was introduced last December and completely ignored the study previously done on this issue by the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. It even ignored the CEO's recommendations from November 2020. The government only brought the bill back up for debate in the House on March 8. Five months have passed since the bill was introduced, and barely four hours have been allocated for debate in the House. I repeat, only four hours to review the Canada Elections Act.

Suddenly, last Friday, we got a surprise. The issue just so happened to become a national emergency, to the point where a gag order was imposed with support from the NDP to limit debate and speed up passage of the bill. In the end, we spent as much time debating time allocation as we did debating the bill. It is outrageous when I think about it.

This bill would make fundamental changes, including giving the Chief Electoral Officer additional powers and replacing election day with three polling days. That means voting day would stretch out to three days.

Notwithstanding the merits of the various measures in this bill, such changes to such a fundamental act must not be made under time allocation. We are talking about changing the rules governing the expression of democracy. This should not be done under time allocation, which is a procedure used exceptionally to limit democratic debate.

In any case, everyone is saying that they do not want an election, so there is no point. What is the rush? Where is the emergency? We would like to understand.

Considering the examples I gave earlier, no one believes that the Liberal Party does not want an election. I want to reiterate that we are calling for all the parties to meet up, to replace the gag order with an amicable agreement to reach a consensus on election laws. Let us not waste our time. Let us acknowledge today that we have more important things to do than to call a snap election.

● (1340)

[English]

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I read carefully the Bloc opposition day motion, and I do not find any

tricks in it. It seems to be pretty straightforward in suggesting that there not be an election during the pandemic.

Would the member agree that the Bloc is inviting the government to vote in support of the motion and that it in fact be a commitment not to call an election during the pandemic unless there is, of course, a loss of confidence in the House? Would he agree that would be the case and that the failure of the Liberals to support the motion would indicate otherwise?

● (1345)

[Translation]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question.

There are no tricks here. Everything is written in black and white. There is no ambiguity. There is nothing wrong with the motion. It is simply a statement of good faith, and I think it would reassure Quebecers and Canadians. It just makes sense.

Of course we encourage the government to support this statement. If the Liberals vote against it, that would mean they do not agree with it and an election could very well happen in the midst of a pandemic.

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, not only do none of the parties want an election during the pandemic, but just last month, an Ipsos poll for Global News indicated that 57% of voters felt an election during a pandemic would not be fair.

A Leger poll showed that 14% of Canadians want an election this spring, 29% want one this fall, and 43% want one later. Liberal voters are even more hesitant. Only 6% of them want a spring election, 26% want a fall election, and 60% want the election to happen later. This bill shows that the government is not only out of touch with reality, but also out of touch with its members.

The government wants to rush this bill through as quickly as possible, and we can expect it to be passed on closure. Is this bill just a tool the government will use to leverage the pandemic and continue acting like a majority government as it disrespects the 67% of people who did not vote Liberal and fails to conduct affairs of state as a minority government?

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, who also made a powerful speech a little earlier.

I could not agree more. That is exactly what we are seeing. I gave the example of proposing an amendment to the amendment. That is part of the workings of democracy, especially in a minority government context. Then the government says that if the amendment to the amendment is adopted, then it will trigger an election. The government is blackmailing all the parties to make sure that a majority of members vote no. Then, it will say that we are the ones trying to trigger an election. It is absolutely ludicrous.

What my colleague said is quite accurate. We are reading the situation the same way.

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak today on the Bloc Québécois's opposition day.

Opposition days are few and far between, and therefore it is important to choose a very specific topic to debate. Most of the time, we ask ourselves the following questions. What do electors want? What subjects do the people we represent want to see their representatives debate? What is important to them? What is important to them in these difficult times?

On a few occasions, we have used opposition days to call for an increase in health transfers for Quebec and the provinces because the needs of our health care systems are acute. In a health crisis, everyone, except perhaps the Liberals, seems to agree that health is the logical priority.

We used one opposition day to demand that EI benefits for people with serious illnesses to be extended from 15 to 50 weeks. Many Quebecers are experiencing this type of discrimination, and they want their elected officials to fight for that.

We also took advantage of an opposition day to demand that the government increase old age security by \$110 per month for all seniors 65 and over. That is what seniors across Quebec are asking for. They are also telling us that people aged 65 to 74 need it just as much as those 75 and over.

On an opposition day, we usually ask ourselves the following question: What do our constituents want? This time, the question is more like, what do they not want? They do not want a federal election called in the middle of a global pandemic. It is as simple as that.

By introducing Bill C-19 and imposing a gag order, the government is pushing us to debate, in a very limited amount of time, an issue that the majority of the people who elected us do not want to hear about. The Liberals know as well as we do that the opinion of voters is fundamental. However, they are turning a deaf ear.

An Ipsos poll conducted on April 18 for Global News found that 57% of electors believe that an election during a pandemic would be unfair. As my colleagues have said over and over again, people are already overwhelmed with the day-to-day management of the pandemic. An election is most likely the last thing on their list of priorities.

Voter turnout is low enough as it is, so calling an election now is extremely risky for several reasons. It is not just us or our constituents saying this. Everyone is saying it. The leaders of the three opposition parties are saying it, and even the Prime Minister has said it. He has repeatedly stated that he is not interested in holding an election and that nobody wants an election during a pandemic.

The problem is that, unfortunately, no one believes him, considering that the government introduced Bill C-19 and imposed closure. No one in Quebec believes him. No political analyst is buying it, and no one thinks it would be a good idea to call an election until the situation is stable. People like Mario Dumont, Paul Arcand, Bernard Drainville, Emmanuelle Latraverse, Pierre Nantel and Mathieu Bock-Côté come to mind. None of them think that triggering an election is a good idea.

Business of Supply

If everyone agrees on that right from the outset, including all the opposition parties, the Prime Minister himself and most of his Quebec ministers, who said publicly that no one wanted an election, then no one should have a problem voting in favour of our motion. It is so simple. It reminds us that a general election was held in October 2019. Some might say that feels like yesterday, but it may seem longer to the government because it is a minority.

We are quick to forget one thing, which is the current environment. The country is going through one of the worst health crises in its history. Since March 2020, more than 1.3 million Canadians have been infected with COVID-19 and nearly 25,000 people have died as a result. It is for this simple and very important reason that holding an election during a pandemic would be downright irresponsible. We believe it is the responsibility of the federal government to do everything it can to avoid sending voters to the polls for as long as we are in a pandemic. So long as the crisis has not subsided and the situation has not stabilized, that would be not only irresponsible, but also dangerous to the health of our fellow Canadians.

I can already hear Liberals telling us that it is also the responsibility of the opposition to make every effort to ensure that voters are not called to the polls. Who gets to decide which votes are confidence votes? Is it the government or the opposition parties? Who can go to the Chief Justice of Canada or the governor general to call an election? Is it the government or the opposition parties? Who can dissolve Parliament? Is it the government or the opposition parties? The answer is obvious. It looks like the government is confusing the executive with the legislative.

I do not know about my Liberal colleagues, but it would make me feel very uncomfortable to go knocking on people's doors to talk about an election at a time when they cannot even have their own family members over, at least in Quebec. Many of them have children who have to do their schooling at home. Some of them still cannot reopen their businesses. Others have lost their jobs, because the company they worked for closed down. Some are health care professionals who are at the end of their rope or family caregivers who have been unable to see their parents for weeks.

● (1350)

Worse still, perhaps they themselves were infected with COVID-19 and will suffer the effects for the rest of their lives, or they have lost a loved one to the virus. That is what they are concerned about right now. They need a government that cares more about them and their needs than about its own re-election.

As my colleagues have said before me, the Bloc Québécois agrees with the government on one thing. If an election were to be held during a pandemic, adjustments would have to be made to ensure that polling takes place in accordance with the health rules set out by Quebec and the provinces.

Business of Supply

However, from a public health and even an ethical perspective, calling an election in the current environment is not a responsible decision. From a technical perspective, Bill C-19 contains major flaws and inaccuracies that must be discussed and debated. From a democratic standpoint, it is completely inconceivable that a minority government would impose time allocation on Parliament regarding a bill intended to provide a framework for the democratic rights of citizens.

I am sure you will have guessed where we stand on this, Mr. Speaker. That does not mean we are acting in bad faith. The Bloc Québécois did propose a compromise to address this issue. The Bloc Québécois leader invited the Prime Minister to set up a private meeting with the leaders of all the parties at which they could reach a consensus and then honour that consensus instead of invoking closure. What was the Prime Minister's response? He says he does not want an election, but he keeps trying to shove a bill that would enable a pandemic election down our throats. Is that not ironic?

I think this shows a blatant lack of judgment and a failure to grasp the situation. I would even go so far as to say that taking steps to trigger an election in the short term shows a lack of empathy for voters. That is why the Bloc Québécois moved this motion today.

I could spend hours talking about why, from a public health and safety perspective, it would be a bad idea to trigger an election. However, I also want to talk about what is in Bill C-19, such as provisions for polling in seniors' residences. The bill provides for 16 polling days, 16 days during which election workers would be on site in every long-term care home and residence. We think that is unrealistic.

Another thing that bothers us is the deadline for receiving mail-in ballots. For instance, Bill C-19 would allow Elections Canada to receive mail-in ballots until the day after polling day. We think that is unjustified and would only delay the release of the election results.

That is not to mention the issue of voter turnout. A Leger poll conducted in early March found that less than a quarter of Quebecers and Canadians would want to vote by mail if a federal election were to be held soon. According to the poll, it would take a good awareness campaign to get people to accept that this way of voting is secure. The majority of voters prefer to vote in person. It would be unfortunate if the pandemic led to a drop in voter turnout, which is already low, I might add.

Under Bill C-19, voting would be held over three days, with eight hours of voting on Saturday, eight hours on Sunday and 12 hours on Monday. However, if the vote is held on a Monday, a change of venue might be required for that day, making it very difficult to organize the whole thing.

Confidentiality is another one of the Bloc Québécois's concerns. Mail-in voting is generally safe, but the voter can be identified if the ballot is viewed or handled. That is why it is always better to exercise the right to vote in person. In addition to preserving the integrity and secrecy of the vote, it also promotes the symbolism behind the socially committed act of voting.

All these concerns have to do with the technical considerations of holding an election during a pandemic, but let us get back to ba-

sics, to the reason behind today's motion. From a public health perspective, holding an election during a health crisis is, and I cannot say this enough, an irresponsible choice. In fact, if there is one thing that all parties and every leader in the House can agree on, it is that it is inappropriate to hold an election during a pandemic.

What is even more important, however, is that the Quebecers and Canadians we represent do not want an election. They have made this very clear. We must listen to them, respect them and ensure that they will not be forced to the polls while we are combating COVID-19.

• (1355)

[English]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with respect to the discussion around Bill C-19, I cannot understand why the Conservatives and the Bloc continue to harp on this point of receiving mail-in ballots until the day after an election. That is not true. The only situation where the act suggests it would be appropriate to receive mail-in ballots the day after is if the Monday is a holiday. Every time the Conservatives or the Bloc bring it up, they make it seem as though it can be done no matter what. Does the member agree that it perhaps contributes to the lack of trust in the mail-in ballot system?

[Translation]

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

If we had had more than four hours over five months to debate and discuss this bill, maybe we would have been able to delve into the finer points. We could have made changes to what the government initially put forward, and that would have already been a good start. However, by limiting debate, the government is cutting us off and preventing us from amending and improving the bill.

I want to get back to the real issue. It would be completely irresponsible to have an election right now, and it is completely irresponsible to be debating a bill that would make it easier to hold an election during a global pandemic. As we have said many times, our constituents expect more from us and have other concerns right now.

The Deputy Speaker: There will be three and a half minutes remaining for questions and comments for the hon. member for Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia when the House resumes debate on this motion.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

FALUN Dafa DAY

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the co-chair of the Parliamentary Friends of Falun Gong, also called Falun Dafa, it is my great pleasure to join the millions of people around the world in over 100 countries who are celebrating Falun Dafa Day. I extend my warmest greetings to the Falun Gong community and all of their supporters on the 29th anniversary of Falun Dafa's introduction to the rest of the world.

The universal values that we all share of truthfulness, compassion and tolerance, which are at the heart of Falun Dafa, are also wonderful ideals for building an outstanding country like Canada. I appreciate Falun Dafa for continuing to bring these values to life in Canada and for joining all of us in creating a better world and a better country.

This celebration is an opportunity to recognize the benefits of this moral teaching that has made excellent contributions toward a more healthy, peaceful, tolerant and compassionate society. I commend members of Falun Dafa for their courage, perseverance and peaceful resolve in upholding faith, freedom and justice. It is a true reflection of the principles of Falun Dafa, which are admirable. It speaks loudly to the merits of its teachings.

* * *

● (1400)

INDIA

Mr. Bob Saroya (Markham—Unionville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in India the second wave of COVID-19 has spread like wildfire, overwhelming the health care system and exhausting key medical supplies. The Indian government has sent over 60 million vaccines to over 75 different countries. When Canada needed vaccines and pharmaceuticals, India answered the call. Now that India faces shortages of life-saving supplies, we need to answer its call.

There is a deadly vaccine shortage in India. Canadian companies like ON2 Solutions are producing world-class oxygen plants. We need to get more oxygen plants to India as quickly as possible. For the people who want to help, I urge them to donate directly to the Canadian Red Cross. I also urge the government to match these funds dollar for dollar and show our solidarity with India.

Last, extraordinary times call for extraordinary measures. I call on the government to join the push to drop patent protections for the life-saving COVID-19 vaccines to increase production. Lack of action will cost lives.

* * *

MI'KMAQ KINA'MATNEWEY

Mr. Jaime Battiste (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Mi'kmaq Kina'matnewey, MK, a leader and a trailblazer for indigenous-led education initiatives across the country. MK oversee the education of young Mi'kmaq in 12 of the 13 first nations communities across Nova Scotia. Bringing together chiefs, parents, educators and an amazing staff, this Mi'kmaq-led

Statements by Members

education system is a model for institutions created by and for indigenous people, rooted in community, language and culture.

In 2020, the high school graduation rate for Mi'kmaq in Nova Scotia was an impressive 94% and more than 600 students were enrolled in post-secondary education. This year, I am proud to share that they are one of six recipients of the Governor General's Innovation Awards. It is a profound success story and they should be very proud. To all the educators and staff who worked at MK over the years, I say a heartfelt congratulations and "job well done".

The Speaker: Before proceeding, I want to remind all the members that to speak in the House whether it is virtually or in person, men require a tie and jacket. I wanted to put that out there to remind everyone that there is a certain protocol.

The hon. member for Salaberry—Suroît.

* * *

[Translation]

PAUL VIAU

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Salaberry—Suroît, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it was with great sadness that I learned of the passing of Paul Viau, the mayor of the Township of Hemmingford, on May 11.

I always had a great deal of respect and affection for Paul. He was a dedicated mayor and a committed prefect, particularly when it came to social development.

Paul was a visionary, a frank, colourful man who was easy to work with. I was saddened to learn of his sudden passing. I will always remember his sense of commitment and his sincere passion for his people. He was a man of purpose and action.

To his family and friends, I want to say that kindness and affection bring comfort when navigating the devastating loss of a loved one. I hope that these words will bring them some peace. On behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I extend my deepest condolences to them.

Rest in peace, dear Paul.

* * *

EID AL-FITR

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Outremont, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today, Muslims in my community and across Canada are celebrating Eid al-Fitr.

This celebration marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan, the end of a month of fasting and spirituality, reflection, gratitude, forgiveness and compassion.

For the second year in a row, Eid al-Fitr is being celebrated in a very different way. I want the Maghrebien community to know how much I miss them and our gatherings.

*Statements by Members**[English]*

● (1405)

I know that this Ramadan has been difficult, and I would have loved nothing more than to gather around again and break bread with my Muslim brothers and sisters in celebration of Eid, and in commitment to peace and harmony between communities. In these turbulent times, it is more important than ever. Know that we are together; we are together in spirit.

Eid Mubarak Said.

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CITADEL MEWS WEST FIRE

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last Thursday, a massive fire swept through the Citadel Mews West continuing care facility in St. Albert, displacing more than 100 seniors.

Despite the massive scale of the fire, there was no loss of life. That is as a result of dedicated caregivers, firefighters and other first responders as well as several good Samaritans who acted quickly and fearlessly to evacuate residents. More than 100 firefighters throughout the region battled the fire, stopping it from spreading and saving part of the facility.

In the wake of the fire, there has been an outpouring of generosity and support from our community to the residents. While the loss to the residents cannot be understated, they can at least take some comfort in knowing that they live in a community that truly does care, and will do everything to help them get through this trying time.

* * *

*[Translation]***JUSTICE**

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the last Parliament, the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights tabled a report on improving support for jurors in Canada. Across party lines, we came together to recognize that there was much work to be done to improve the experience of jurors.

[English]

We found that jurors lacked information on their role and responsibilities, often were paid amounts that had not been adjusted since the 1970s and were not compensated for their costs. Most important, we recognized jurors were often not provided with appropriate mental health services they desperately needed.

We made important recommendations, which included increasing awareness of the role of jurors. Since then, individuals like Mark Farrant, Patrick Baillie and Tina Daenzer have stepped up to create the Canadian Juries Commission to advocate for jurors.

Today, I call upon Parliament to recognize the second week in May as jury appreciation week in Canada. This week is recognized in many U.S. states and is a great way to recognize the important role that jurors have to ensure the effective administration of justice in Canada.

INTERNATIONAL NURSES DAY

Mr. Marcus Powlowski (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday was International Nurses Day.

As a doctor who has worked 35 years in a lot of hospitals, in a lot of different countries, I have worked with thousands of nurses over the year. I, like every doctor, and I hope this is acceptable to say in Parliament, have had my butt saved on many occasions by nurses who have been far smarter than I. Any doctor who denies something similar happening to them is either a much better doctor than I or is someone who is hopelessly arrogant.

Certainly, the pandemic has taken its toll on nurses. It is estimated that over 17,000 health care workers globally have died as a result of COVID, many of them nurses. In addition, many nurses have not only had to work harder, they have done so in fear, fear for their own lives or fear that they might get sick and transmit the disease to their own families.

I hope all other doctors and MPs will join me in thanking our nurses.

* * *

VYSHYVANKA DAY

Mr. Dan Mazier (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on May 20, Ukrainian Canadians across our nation will celebrate Vyshyvanka day. It is with great honour that I congratulate all Ukrainian Canadians on this special occasion.

In this chamber, we truly understand the importance of Ukrainian embroidery as a symbol of heritage, dignity and unity. This is why we will be celebrating this day virtually with thousands of Ukrainian Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

Vyshyvanka day is also a reminder of the challenges that Ukraine faced in the past and continues to overcome as an independent state. This holiday is another chance for us to declare our support for the people of Ukraine in their fight for sovereignty. We will never recognize the illegal annexation of Crimea and the occupation of Donbas.

On behalf of Canada's Conservatives, happy Vyshyvanka day.

• (1410)

[Translation]

GRADUATIONS

Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I would like to recognize all the academic achievements of all high school, college and university graduates for the year 2021, and congratulate them. They should be very proud of their accomplishments and their journey.

[English]

Despite this global pandemic, they have overcome the challenges and obstacles of life. With their determination, their dedication and their resilience, they still managed to finish this chapter of their lives. It is now the time to honour their success with their family and friends.

[Translation]

They have worked so hard to get here. This diploma is just the beginning of their own journey. The next page in their big book will be about their passion, imagination and creativity.

[English]

They must dare to believe in themselves, in their dreams and in their future. For those who continue their studies, we wish them a beautiful continuity. For the ones starting their career, we wish them great success.

Once again, I congratulate them on their graduations.

* * *

SOURIS—MOOSE MOUNTAIN

Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this past year has been extremely challenging, and I would like to highlight the incredible efforts made in my riding of Souris—Moose Mountain to keep our local industries afloat.

As I have said before, agriculture is the backbone of our economy, and we owe a lot to our farmers for the work they do to feed Canada and the world. As they are in the midst of seeding and hoping for rain, I would like to thank and recognize them for their tireless efforts year in and year out.

I must also mention the hard workers in the oil and gas industry, many of whom have been struggling due to the government's utter lack of support. They want a hand up, not a handout. With issues like the cancellation of Line 5, they deserve a Conservative government that would secure their future.

This is also the case for small businesses that are so essential in my riding, especially in smaller communities. The pandemic has been particularly hard on them, and I recognize the efforts of all my constituents to shop at home and spend money locally.

I thank them all for their perseverance, hard work and incredible spirit throughout these unprecedented challenges. I could not be prouder to represent them.

The Speaker: We had some interference with the hon. member for Souris—Moose Mountain.

Statements by Members

I want to remind all the members, if they are not on, to please check to see that their mikes are muted. I know inadvertently they may ruin somebody else's speech, and we do not want to do that in the chamber.

That being said, I will let the hon. member for Souris—Moose Mountain do his over again, if he would like.

Mr. Robert Kitchen: Mr. Speaker, this past year has been extremely challenging, and I would like to highlight the incredible efforts made in my riding of Souris—Moose Mountain to keep our local industries afloat.

As I have said before, agriculture is the backbone of our economy, and we owe a lot to our farmers for the work they do to feed Canada and the world. As they are in the midst of seeding and hoping for rain, I would like to thank and recognize them for their tireless efforts year in and year out.

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SPORTS BETTING

Mr. Chris Lewis (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as members know, the single-event sports betting bill, Bill C-218, is currently before the Senate. I value the vital role our senators play in reviewing bills passed by the House and rise today on behalf of the tourism sector and its workers to appeal to senators to pass this legislation quickly. This bill received all-party support in the House, which is quite an achievement.

Statements by Members

The tourism industry has been hit hard by the COVID pandemic. To recover, it will need Parliament's full support. Bill C-218 would secure well-paying jobs and give the tourism industry a much needed boost. I look forward to its swift passage in the Senate. I would also like to thank my Conservative colleague, the MP for Saskatoon—Grasswood, for introducing the legislation.

Tourism is a significant driver in my riding's local economy. Passage of this bill would be welcome news back home.

Finally, what an honour it is to stand in the House on behalf of the people of Essex.

* * *

● (1415)

NORTHERN HOUSING

Ms. Mumilaq Qaqqaq (Nunavut, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the fight against COVID-19 must include real investments in northern housing.

In Nunavut, we have had COVID cases in three isolated communities, Iqaluit, Rankin Inlet and Kinngait, in just the past month. While families in Ottawa and Toronto are told to stay home, wash their hands and stay physically distanced, Nunavummiut are packed inside overcrowded and mouldy homes that are falling apart.

Nunavut has the highest rate of overcrowded housing in Canada, and we have six times the national average of housing in need of major repairs. Twenty-five million dollars in the budget is laughable, to say the least. How can they stay in their homes, when their houses are full of mould, they live with 14 other people in a four-bedroom and their house is full of broken pipes?

Addressing the chronic housing crisis in Nunavut is a matter of public health, indigenous rights and basic human dignity. We live in one of the richest countries in the world. We can do better; we must do better.

* * *

[Translation]

QUEBEC FAMILY WEEK

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as the Bloc Québécois critic for families, children and social development, today, I am pleased to wish all Quebecers a happy Quebec Family Week.

Family is the first home we know. Family is where we are loved, where we learn our mother tongue and where we absorb our culture. Family teaches us the values we need to develop bonds of goodwill and community with other people and other families outside our own family unit. These bonds help us take on the challenges that life brings and participate in a society that holds promise for all.

I want to take this opportunity to congratulate two members of my team, Jessie and Antoni, as well as their respective partners, Frédéric and Dinorah. Both of their families have grown in size and in love, as Jessie welcomed baby Ethan last month and Antoni welcomed baby Louis just yesterday.

I want these families to know that, as a member of Parliament, I am there for them, much like the Bloc Québécois will always be there to listen to and support Quebec families.

* * *

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for over a year, Canadians have done their best to comply with Public Health measures to contain the spread of COVID, but the pandemic has left millions of Canadians worried about their economic security. Canadians need a government that is not ashamed of primary industries, like energy, fishing, forestry and farming. They need a government committed to manufacturing, tourism and the innovations of our high-tech entrepreneurs.

Canada's Conservatives believe in securing the future for Canadians by ensuring none are left behind by COVID. We believe in revitalizing main street with incentives to small business investment, not by handing out cash to connected insiders. Canadians need a government that will allow them to find the dignity and security of stable, well-paying jobs with rising wages. Canadians need a government committed to all regions and every sector of the Canadian economy. Canadians need a Conservative government, one that will secure the future for Canadian workers.

* * *

[Translation]

RAMADAN

Mr. Sameer Zuberi (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to wish *Eid Mubarak* to everyone celebrating Eid al-Fitr in Pierrefonds—Dollard and elsewhere.

[English]

Eid al-Fitr is a day of celebration after Ramadan, a month of fasting, patience and self-reflection. Normally, Eid is festive, filled with family visits, friends and food. For a second year, this Eid is unique. While many are taking the day off, socializing will have to keep Public Health guidelines in mind.

I know that this Eid many have a heavy heart. The strife in Jerusalem at Al-Aqsa Mosque and in other parts of the world is heartbreaking. Durable and dignified peace is possible, but the path to it is never easy. It requires continuous and ongoing work.

As we pass through these challenging times, let us pray that the next Eid is filled with family, friends and loved ones.

Eid Mubarak.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

HEALTH

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, right now, on this spring day in May, Canadians are still locked up, watching our American neighbours sit on patios with friends, play in parks with their kids and cheer on sports teams in packed stadiums. Here in Canada, basketball hoops and swings are covered in plastic to keep the kids away, restaurants and patios are still closed and families cannot see each other. Why? It is because the government has failed to get vaccines.

Is it not true that we are far behind most other countries and Canadians are paying a heavy price for Liberal failures?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is working closely with provinces and territories to get Canada vaccinated as quickly as possible. To date, we have sent over 20.2 million vaccines to provinces and territories with millions more arriving in the weeks to come. Let me remind the member opposite that the budget bill includes \$1 billion to support provinces and territories in their vaccination efforts.

* * *

● (1420)

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are suffering while the rest of the world moves ahead and it is because of the Liberals' third wave.

We all know the Liberal thought police are alive and well, and through Bill C-10, the Prime Minister is expanding his attempt at controlling Canadians by controlling what they can or cannot see online. If we question Bill C-10, Liberals will call us conspiracy theorists, all while the heritage minister has incoherent and inconsistent answers on how the Liberals' own bill will apply.

Do these Liberals have such a low opinion of Canadians that they think they must control their online activities?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government has the highest opinion of Canadians and I believe every single member of the House does, too. All of us are privileged to serve our Canadian constituents.

As a former journalist and editor, let me assure Canadians that our government understands how essential freedom of expression is to democracy. We will never limit freedom of expression. This bill does not do that.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Canadian Heritage admitted the goal of Bill C-10 is to end net neutrality, thereby controlling online freedoms. This is not about web giants or artists. It is about what Canadians can and cannot post, and can and cannot see online.

Oral Questions

Can the heritage minister just admit that what the Liberals are trying to do actually has nothing to do with promoting Canadian content, and everything to do with stifling free speech and expression?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, speaking very personally as a former journalist and editor, I absolutely understand how important freedom of expression is. It is a foundation and pillar of our democracy, and I want to assure all members of the House and all Canadians that our government will never limit freedom of expression. That is not what this bill does.

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we, the Conservatives are for culture and against censorship. The problem with Bill C-10 is that it was literally thrown together by the Minister of Canadian Heritage after he withdrew the much-talked-about clause 4.1 resulting in Canadians' freedom of expression no longer being protected and even threatened.

We are not the only ones saying this. Academics, observers, former members of the CRTC are sounding the alarm. This bill goes too far. The minister himself said that those with a very popular YouTube account will now be under the yoke of the federal government.

Who is going to draw the line between what is good and what is not good in that government?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is absolutely against censorship, and I believe that every member of this House is too.

Canadians expect us to be there to support our artists and our creators. That is why our government was very pleased to see a unanimous resolution at the National Assembly of Quebec to support Bill C-10.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to see that it is the Deputy Prime Minister answering the question. I can also understand why because every time the Minister of Canadian Heritage speaks, he gets tangled in his own web.

On the weekend, it was something else. In the span of 24 hours, he had to clarify his position twice and apologize. As a result, the parliamentary secretary is taking the scrums now. The Minister of Canadian Heritage is the architect of the problem with Bill C-10.

I have a simple question. Why did the government withdraw clause 4.1 that protected freedom of expression?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a former journalist and writer, I can assure you that I am acutely aware that Canadians have the right to freedom of expression. Our government would never limit freedom of expression. That is not what Bill C-10 does.

*Oral Questions***OFFICIAL LANGUAGES**

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today is an important day for Quebec. It is an important day for the French language.

The Government of Quebec has introduced Bill 96, an act respecting French, the official and common language of Québec. This is certainly the most ambitious bill on the French language since Bill 101. The Bloc Québécois applauds this effort to halt the decline of our common language and to contribute to its development.

Will the Prime Minister join us in applauding this effort by the Quebec government to defend and promote our only official and common national language?

• (1425)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we have always said, protecting and promoting French is a priority for our government.

The federal government has recognized for the first time that the situation of French in this country is unique and that the government has a responsibility to protect and promote French. We acknowledge the bill introduced by the Government of Quebec and we will study its content carefully.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I was expecting more enthusiasm.

The Quebec government is addressing many issues that Ottawa was unwilling or unable to address. Quebec is doing what all federal governments have refused to do since the Meech Lake accord failed, and that is to enshrine in the Constitution that Quebecers form a nation, and a French-speaking nation at that. That is a strong affirmation of our national will.

I urge the Prime Minister to make a solemn, unqualified and categorical commitment.

Will he commit today not to challenge Bill 96, an act respecting French, the official and common language of Québec, either directly or indirectly, in the courts or in the House? Will he even commit to supporting the bill?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, protecting and promoting French is a priority for our government.

In fact, our government has recognized for the first time that the situation of French in this country is unique and that the federal government has a responsibility to protect and promote French. It is a responsibility that we take very seriously, and it will be a pleasure for us to work with all members in doing so.

* * *

[English]

HEALTH

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is currently a ban on the donation of blood by gay men. It is a blood ban that makes absolutely no sense and has no basis in science. The Liberals know this. They campaigned to remove the blood ban in 2015 and 2019, yet continue to break that promise.

I have a question directly for the Prime Minister. Why did the Prime Minister continue to campaign to remove the blood ban, yet right now is defending the blood ban in court?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is a very important question. Speaking as a member of Parliament, that is something that I have spoken to many, many of my constituents about. I know it gravely concerns many Canadians. Our government absolutely shares those concerns. At the same time, we respect the independence of Canadian institutions, especially when it comes to medical and scientific issues.

[Translation]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): That makes no sense, Mr. Speaker.

We know there is a ban on gay men donating blood and we know that it is not based on any scientific evidence. This is harmful and upsetting to the gay community. That is clear and the Liberals know it. They campaigned against this ban.

Why did the Prime Minister campaign on withdrawing this ban when he is now defending it in court?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out that our government agrees that this is a discriminatory practice that is hurting a lot of Canadians. Our government is working very hard right now to eliminate it, but we must work in collaboration with medical and scientific experts.

* * *

• (1430)

[English]

THE BUDGET

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister promised a growth budget. Instead, all he gave us was bigger government, bigger debt and bigger deficits. More and more experts are piling on. Kevin Lynch, the former deputy finance minister, said that the budget missed “an urgent opportunity to rebuild our longer-term growth post-pandemic”. He said that this intergenerational transfer of debt and risk was unprecedented. By any measure, the biggest spending budget in our history was a bust.

Why did the Prime Minister miss this opportunity to secure our economic future?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am so glad to get this question because it gives me an opportunity to talk about how well the Canadian economy is doing. Let me talk about some verdicts that really matter. Standard & Poor's, the international ratings agency, reaffirmed our AAA rating one week after the budget and said the outlook for Canada is stable. It does not get better than that and that should assure all Canadians.

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last month, Canada lost 200,000 jobs. The recent budget was not about economic growth. It was about an avalanche of spending to re-elect the Prime Minister. Now we read troubling reports about officials who were asked to come up with excuses for millions of dollars of spending after that spending had already been announced. It turns out this budget was not about growth. It was about a “ready, fire, aim” approach to policy-making that is not about serving Canadians. It is about serving the Prime Minister.

Who is left holding the bag? Canadians are, of course. The Prime Minister has failed us. Why?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives may have their own partisan reasons for talking down the Canadian economy, but I am so proud of how resilient and innovative Canadians are. That resilience is showing in the numbers. In the fourth quarter, our economy grew by 10%. In the first quarter of this year, it grew by 6.5%. In the first quarter, the U.S. grew by only 6.3%. The Bank of Canada has upgraded its forecast for this year to 6.5% growth.

* * *

[Translation]

COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, thousands of small businesses have had to close their doors because they could not get help during the pandemic, yet the Prime Minister gave \$1 billion in wage subsidies to big corporations that were not in need and paid millions in dividends to their executives.

Extendicare, Canada's largest operator of private seniors' residences, applied for and received \$21 million in wage subsidies on the grounds that demand for care dropped during the pandemic.

Why did the Prime Minister favour the Liberal elite over Canadian workers?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government always chooses to support Canadians and Quebecers. That is exactly what we did.

The Canada emergency wage subsidy supported 5.3 million workers in Canada, 1.29 million of them in Quebec alone.

It is very important to support Canadians now, and that is exactly what our government will do.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance should know that the reality is that the wealthiest got richer during the pandemic at the expense of struggling Canadians.

Oral Questions

Marcel Bourassa, president and CEO of Savaria, received \$3.4 million in dividends, and his company received \$4.5 million in wage subsidies.

Alain Bédard, CEO of TFI International, paid \$2.3 million in dividends to his executives, and his company received \$25 million in public funds.

Why did the President of the Treasury Board authorize these payments to wealthy friends of the Liberal Party?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the reality is that our government has been there for Canadians since the pandemic began, and we will continue to be there.

All told, 873,000 small businesses received assistance from our government through the Canada emergency business account, or CEBA. Our government has supported over 10 million working Canadians. We know that we must support Canadians, and that is exactly what we are doing.

• (1435)

[English]

Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are now learning that at least 32 companies that filed for bankruptcy before the pandemic was declared took millions from the wage subsidy, but no jobs were protected despite the taxpayer investment. It is becoming more and more clear that the Liberal government failed to provide the necessary oversight on this program worth over \$100 billion.

Meanwhile, a woman entrepreneur in my riding opened a gym in early 2020 and does not qualify for any federal program as a result. I wrote to the government two months ago about this, and I have yet to receive a response.

Why is the Liberal government prioritizing bankrupt companies over new small business owners, who have received nothing?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that question I am afraid betrays a fundamental misunderstanding of how bankruptcy protection works in Canada and what it is intended to do. Bankruptcy protection is intended to enable companies to restructure and to emerge as viable businesses. It is entirely appropriate for companies during that process to be encouraged to maintain employment.

That is exactly what the wage subsidy does and continues to do. It has supported the jobs of 5.3 million Canadians. We are proud of that.

Oral Questions

Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am wondering if the Deputy Prime Minister is proud that her government-funded PenderFund Capital Management, which has \$1.5 billion in assets, and one of its most prominent funds ever recorded was 40% of returns last year, or JM Fund Management, which had a pretty good return in 2020, not yet seen since 2016, and ranked one of the third-best performing hedge funds in 2020.

I am just wondering if she finds it ethical. Personally, I find her response a bit disrespectful, particularly in light of all the small businesses that opened up right before the pandemic and received not a penny from the Liberal government.

Again, I am just wondering if the minister believes, like her predecessor, that it is ethical to give billions to wealthy hedge funds and bankrupt companies and nothing to newly opened small businesses.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what I think is ethical is doing whatever it takes to support Canadians and Canadian businesses get through this once-in-a-generation pandemic, and that is why I am so pleased that 873,000 small businesses across the country have been able to receive the CEBA loan. In the member's own province of Manitoba, 22,603 small businesses have received the CEBA loan. The wage subsidy in Manitoba alone has supported 175,000 jobs.

* * *

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Montarville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today, Quebec reaffirms its intention make federally regulated businesses subject to Bill 101, responding to the unanimous will of the Quebec National Assembly and to a request from all living premiers.

Ottawa always objected. However, last fall, this government finally recognized that it needed to “protect and promote French in Quebec”. It also acknowledged the “particular situation” of French in the North American anglophone ocean.

Will the government co-operate with Quebec to apply Bill 101 to federally regulated businesses?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for Montarville for his excellent question.

Indeed, our government has taken a historic step in recognizing the need to protect and promote French. We also want to enshrine the right of francophones to work in French, to be served in French and, of course, not to be discriminated against because of their language in federally regulated businesses in Quebec and in other regions with a strong francophone presence.

I had the opportunity to talk with my Quebec counterpart, Simon Jolin-Barrette. We acknowledge the tabling of today's bill by the Government of Quebec. I will take a close look at the bill and keep on protecting the inherent linguistic rights of Quebecers and francophones across the country while protecting linguistic minorities.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Montarville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, precisely because it acknowledges the decline of French in Quebec and the need for action to promote and protect our language, the federal government should welcome Quebec's introduction of one of the most ambitious language reform documents of the past four decades.

The government must therefore commit to working with Quebec in implementing its Bill 96. Clearly, the first way to help is to do no harm. Will the government promise today that it will not take part in any challenges to Quebec's Bill 96, either directly or financially?

• (1440)

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government recognizes that Quebecers form a nation within Canada and that the official language of Quebec is French. We also recognized it in the reform document that I had the opportunity to table in the House earlier this winter.

Now, it goes without saying that we as a government must play our role to protect French in Quebec and across the country, because, as my colleague mentioned, French is certainly in decline in this country. We therefore must act and we will act.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebec is appointing a French language commissioner, not an official languages commissioner, because French must be the common language in Quebec. At last, Quebec will be applying Bill 101 to federally regulated businesses. Quebec is once again asserting its place as a French-speaking nation before Canada.

Will the Liberal government recognize that Quebec must have sole authority over its language policy, and will it behave like an ally, not an adversary?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would remind my colleague that we have recognized the special status of French since the reform document was tabled and even before that, in the Speech from the Throne, because French is indeed declining in Quebec and in Canada, and we must do more.

For the first time, the federal government believes that substantive equality between our two official languages is necessary and that more must therefore be done to support the language rights of francophones across the country and in Quebec. We will do so, of course, by protecting the rights of all linguistic minorities. I will have the opportunity to work with my Quebec counterparts on this issue.

[English]

HEALTH

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is becoming clear that scientists at the government's virus lab in Winnipeg worked closely with China. One of these scientists, Dr. Qiu, not only visited China five times in two years for this work, but also collaborated with scientists at China's military institute and trained scientists at the Wuhan Institute of Virology to a level 4 standard, enabling them to handle the world's most deadly viruses.

With all the known concerns about China's communist leadership, why was the current government helping China build capacity to handle the world's most deadly viruses?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think the member opposite knows, first of all, that these particular researchers are no longer with the Public Health Agency of Canada and that I cannot comment due to privacy obligations.

The National Microbiology Laboratory plays a critical role in research around the world and here in Canada.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in a democracy, citizens deserve answers. To work at the government's level four lab in Winnipeg requires a secret clearance, a clearance normally only given to Canadian citizens. The CBC has reported that on July 5, 2019, Dr. Qiu and Dr. Cheng, along with Chinese students, were escorted from the lab by the RCMP. How on earth did Chinese nationals get secret clearance to work at the government's level 4 lab in Winnipeg, Manitoba?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first let me talk about the important role the National Microbiology Laboratory plays and continues to play, especially in the context of a global pandemic. I thank the professionals there who are working day and night to help Canadians with the laboratory and research needs we have.

I cannot comment on this matter due to privacy obligations. These people are no longer with the Public Health Agency of Canada.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we live in a democracy, where transparent and open government is incredibly important, something the current government is not upholding. We know that secret clearance requires senior-level approval. We know that CSIS raised national security concerns about Dr. Qiu, Dr. Cheng and the Chinese students at the government's lab in Winnipeg, as *The Globe and Mail* has reported. With all that we know about China's communist leadership, how were these individuals given secret clearance at the government's level 4 lab, where the world's most dangerous viruses are handled?

• (1445)

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will repeat that the National Microbiology Laboratory is a Canadian treasure and has been providing incredible research and laboratory support to Canadians and Canadian organizations around the country during the pandemic.

Oral Questions

I will also remind the member opposite that these individuals are no longer with the Public Health Agency of Canada, and that I cannot comment due to privacy obligations.

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ETHICS

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, well, the Ethics Commissioner's report on the WE scandal is a doozy. This is way beyond whether or not Bill Morneau should have recused himself. What we have learned is that the office of the finance minister of a G7 country used its enormous influence to open doors to further the private interests of the Kielburgers. Liberals were intervening right down to the municipal level to help their friend Craig, and then the Liberals put the WE brothers in the driver's seat of a \$900-million deal with no competition. That is what got them into trouble.

When will the government end this blatant insider access for their cronies and their pals?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the commissioner has investigated the matter, and the report released today cleared the Prime Minister of all allegations.

I will quote directly from the report. On page 3, it says that the Prime Minister “did not contravene subsection 6(1), section 7 or section 21 of the Act”. The commissioner is conclusive on page 40, where he says, “I cannot conclude that a contravention has occurred.”

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what we have seen repeatedly from the Liberal troops today is that they have a real conflict of interest culture. This is the fifth time that the commissioner has found that the Liberals had a conflict of interest. It is not the first, second, or third time, but the fifth time.

Even though the Prime Minister was not personally found to be in the wrong, the entire Liberal government is tainted because this decision was made by cabinet.

Will the Prime Minister pledge today to put an end to this culture of cronyism and finally meet the needs of Canadians and not those of his friends on Bay Street?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the commissioner investigated this matter, and the report released today clears the Prime Minister of all allegations.

I will quote directly from the report released today. On page 3, we read that the Prime Minister “did not contravene subsection 6(1), section 7 or section 21 of the Act”.

Oral Questions

Also on page 3, the commissioner states that, “there is no evidence of impropriety in relation to [the Prime Minister]’s decision making in relation to” this matter.

On page 40, the commissioner states, “I cannot conclude that a contravention has occurred”.

* * *

[English]

JUSTICE

Mr. James Maloney (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, many Canadians, including me, were pleased to see investments made through budget 2021 to restore the Law Reform Commission of Canada. In a world that has changed so much since 2006, when the commission saw a cut in funding by the previous Conservative government, our justice system has faced new and more complex challenges. Now, more than ever, we must ensure that Canadians have access to a justice system that is fair, relevant and accessible.

Can the minister tell us more about this very important investment?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, through budget 2021, we will invest \$18 million over five years and \$4 million ongoing to revive the Law Commission so that it is able to continue its important work guiding the federal government on the legal challenges of today and tomorrow with evidence-based ideas and research. The commission will also ensure that our justice system is responsive to challenges, such as systemic racism in the justice system, and will also help in establishing a new relationship with indigenous peoples.

Today, I am paying homage to one of my mentors, the late Law Commission president Rod Macdonald, both in answering this question and in wearing this bow tie.

* * *

HEALTH

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the federal government approved an unprecedented four-month delay between doses of vaccine due to supply, meaning that few Canadians are fully vaccinated against COVID. The federal government has not issued any clear advice for half-vaccinated Canadians about their level of protection, their risk of transmitting COVID and what restrictions do or do not apply to them.

Given the Prime Minister’s announcement of a half-vaccinated summer, what official public health advice does the federal government have for half-vaccinated Canadians regarding what they can or cannot do?

● (1450)

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am not really sure where to start with that mixed bag of half-truths and falsehoods, but I will start with this.

Here is what we do know: Vaccines save lives and they stop the spread of COVID. They are a critical tool in getting our lives back to normal.

I want to thank all of the immunizers across the country who are working so hard to get vaccines into Canadians’ arms. In fact, we are doing a phenomenal job. We see that we are one of the fastest immunizers in the G7. We see Canadians stepping up in unprecedented ways to take a vaccination when it is offered to them.

I would encourage Canadians to continue to get vaccinated. It will save their own lives, it will help stop the spread in their community, and we will have a much better summer and fall.

The Speaker: Before continuing, I would like to remind all members in the chamber and joining us virtually to be judicious with the language they use. Sometimes some language may be inflammatory and cause problems. While the words used are not necessarily bold, sometimes the intentions behind them are.

I know this is week five of a long stretch, but I ask all members to be mindful of our fellow members in the chamber.

The hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, thank you for that advice to the health minister.

Even though only 3% of Canadians are fully vaccinated, by now Canadians should have advice from the federal government on what they can look forward to once fully vaccinated. This also applies to half-vaccinated Canadians, given the proclamation of a half-vaccinated summer. Countries around the world are doing this. This type of hope will incent people to get the vaccines.

What advice does the federal government have for half-vaccinated Canadians, or fully vaccinated Canadians, regarding what they can or cannot do?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will repeat that vaccines save lives and they stop the spread of disease. I think Canadians know that we need to get to the finish line together. Canadians have made extraordinary sacrifices for each other. Now they are stepping up to the plate and getting vaccinated when it is their turn. That is how we will see a light at the end of this tunnel.

I am so proud of all the immunizers around the country who are working so hard to get immunization to Canadians, no matter where they live. We are going to reach that finish line, and we will get there together.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Quebec and Ontario have suspended the first dose of AstraZeneca, and four other provinces are preparing to follow suit. Canadians who got the first dose are worried. They want to know if they will have to get a second AstraZeneca shot, if they can get Pfizer or Moderna for their second shot, or if they have to start all over and get two doses of another vaccine.

Can the government give us a clear and simple answer?

[English]

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every step of the way, the Canadian response has been guided by health, evidence and science. This is no different. We know that many provinces are pausing the delivery of AstraZeneca.

I will say this. It is important for Canadians to get vaccinated as soon as they are offered a vaccine. This is how we will save lives, stop the spread and get our lives back. I am certain that provinces will do their absolute best to make sure that no doses go unused.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, is it normal for me to have to ask the Minister of Health how it works? From the beginning, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Health have often contradicted the National Advisory Committee on Immunization and Theresa Tam.

I will ask my question again. What should people who got the first dose of AstraZeneca do? Will they have to take a second dose of AstraZeneca? Can they get Pfizer or Moderna for their second dose? Do they have to start over and get two doses of another vaccine? Can the minister answer me? Does she know, yes or no?

[English]

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we see a pattern from the Conservative Party of politicians wanting to interfere with the work of scientists, regulators and researchers.

I will tell my colleagues that every vaccine that is authorized for use in Canada is safe. Canadians are stepping up in unprecedented ways. I myself have been immunized with AstraZeneca. I look forward to getting a second dose as soon as I am eligible. That is what Canadians are doing. They are stepping up to help each other, help themselves and stop the spread of COVID-19.

* * *

● (1455)

[Translation]

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on Tuesday, the National Assembly of Quebec unanimously adopted a motion on Quebec culture in the digital age. The motion states that Bill C-10 does not go far enough against the web giants to protect Quebec culture.

That is true, and that is why the Bloc Québécois made sure to introduce amendments to meet the expectations of Quebec's cultural community.

Oral Questions

On Tuesday, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage warmly supported the motion. Are we to understand that the minister will ensure that Bill C-10 will be prioritized as soon as it leaves the committee in accordance with the unanimous request of the National Assembly and Quebec's cultural community?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question, as well as the National Assembly, which unanimously supports the speedy passage of Bill C-10. This bill is very important to us, but it is much more important to the cultural and artistic community in Quebec and across the country. We will do everything we can to get it through as quickly as possible. It would be very helpful if the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage were to resume its work.

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the motion passed by the Quebec National Assembly regarding Bill C-10 also demands the repatriation to Quebec of all powers in the area of culture and communications.

That is nothing new coming from Quebec, or even from provincial Liberals. In 1973, Robert Bourassa was already calling for this. He called it "cultural sovereignty". Jean Charest did the same in 2008, but the federal Liberals were not quite there yet. There is some good news, however. We learned on Twitter this week that the Liberal Party's Quebec lieutenant supports that motion. He is in favour of repatriating the powers regarding culture to Quebec.

Is there any chance we can see that happening before the end of this session?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question.

Our main focus is to do everything in our power to help the cultural sector across the country, including in Quebec. This sector was hit particularly hard by the pandemic.

Bill C-10 will invest hundreds of millions of dollars more in our cultural ecosystem, including hundreds of millions of dollars in Quebec, to support francophone artists and musicians in Quebec and across Canada.

*Oral Questions**[English]***PRIVACY**

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on March 8, I asked the immigration minister if there had been any privacy breaches at IRCC or CBSA. He claimed there had not been any. In fact, there were 1,793 privacy breaches from 2020 until now. One of those breaches led to more than 30,000 individuals' information being improperly disclosed.

The facts do not line up with the claim. Why should Canadians trust the government with their data when it will not take cybersecurity seriously?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I said then, and I will say again now, that we take privacy very seriously in this government.

We have put in place the laws and policies that are necessary to protect Canadians' privacy, as well as that of our clients who use the immigration system. We also have in place protocols to ensure that we are being transparent with Canadians when there are breaches.

We work closely with all of the authorities to ensure that there is accountability, so we can continue to have an immigration system that delivers the economy and prosperity we need in the long run for Canadians.

* * *

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is the most anti-small business government in Canadian history. Who could forget the draconian 2017 tax changes and the Prime Minister's claim that small businesses are just a tax dodge for the wealthy.

Small businesses are drowning in debt and facing uncertain futures while the government dithers its way through the pandemic with slow vaccine deliveries and failure to make use of other important tools. Where is the plan for a safe, permanent reopening?

Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our priority, from the very beginning, has been to support Canadian businesses and support Canadian workers.

Budget 2021 is the most small business friendly budget in Canadian history. From decisive action in lowering credit card fees to historic support for digital and technological adoption, we are making ambitious and targeted investments to help get our businesses back on that road to recovery to create jobs and ensure inclusive growth.

I agree that small businesses are the backbone of our Canadian economy. We have been there for our small businesses, and we will be there for them now and into the future.

*[Translation]***HEALTH**

Mr. Richard Lehoux (Beauce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after the sole-source contract debacle, the blunders keep on coming with the Liberal plan for processing foreign workers' tests. Many tests that were entrusted to Switch Health are still incomplete or have been lost, and nobody seems to have any answers.

Now Dynacare, the new supplier in Quebec, is asking businesses to bring quarantining workers to Montreal for in-person tests.

Has the government come up with a new mobile quarantine I am not aware of, or is this some kind of joke? When will the government clean up this mess?

• (1500)

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we worked with the other federal departments to expedite the process and make the arrival of foreign workers as simple as possible. The Public Health Agency of Canada and Service Canada were in regular contact with Switch Health, employers and industry associations to solve these problems.

We take these issues very seriously, and we will continue to work with Switch Health.

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AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Yves Robillard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is estimated that more than half of Canada's food supply is wasted annually and that more than \$50 billion of that wasted food is avoidable. Reducing waste not only increases food availability, it also saves consumers and businesses money. It strengthens our food systems while reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Could the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food tell us how our government is empowering businesses to develop innovative solutions to this problem?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a few days ago, I had the pleasure of announcing the 24 semi-finalists in the food waste reduction challenge.

Each organization will receive \$100,000 to advance to round two, which is the market demonstration stage. These projects are very diverse and innovative. They aim to prevent waste by processing imperfect fruits and vegetables, for example, or to divert waste from landfill with new approaches to composting.

[English]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Greg McLean (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Enbridge's Line 5 has been consistently sanctioned as safe by the U.S. regulator. Now the governor of Michigan is trying to overrule that federal oversight authority. Enbridge is being pushed into a U.S. court to defend the energy needs of Canadians and the 30,000 jobs in Ontario that depend on Line 5. This pipeline operates under an international agreement signed by our two nations.

For the sake of Canada's energy security, will the Prime Minister step up and engage with the U.S. president on the enforcement of our treaty?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Line 5 is a critical energy and economic link between Canada and the U.S. Because of our efforts, it continues to operate today. On Tuesday, the Government of Canada filed an amicus brief in the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Michigan, sending a clear signal as to where Canada stands on this issue.

I want to thank my counterparts, Minister Savage in Alberta, Minister Eyre in Saskatchewan, Minister Rickford in Ontario and Minister Julien in Quebec, for their collaboration and their unity on this issue. This is a full-court press by team Canada, with the support of industry and labour.

Mr. Warren Steinley (Regina—Lewvan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have seen nothing but incompetence from the natural resources minister. Why do we have to wait for a U.S. mediator to tell us if and how long we can continue to use Line 5. On this file, the minister has done the very least he could and all at the very last moment. Line 5 is a critical piece of energy infrastructure in Canada. It supplies western Canadian oil to eastern refineries and creates good-paying jobs along the way.

If the relationship has never been better between the U.S. and Canada, why does the Prime Minister not pick up the phone, call President Biden and get the Line 5 issue resolved today?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I take exception to the hon. member's comments. First of all, we are taking the exact approach that the Canada-U.S. special committee asked us to, the same approach that the provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan, Quebec and Ontario urged us to take.

Canada has filed an amicus brief in the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Michigan. It sends a clear signal as to where Canada stands on this issue. We are encouraged that Enbridge and the State of Michigan continue to participate in the court-ordered mediation process. We are confident it will yield a local solution.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Chris Lewis (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government's failure to secure our borders has yet another casualty. Fourteen months ago, the Canada-U.S. border was closed on land, sea and air. While Canadian charter boats are moored at dock, American charter boats are being issued work permits by the government. There was a recent sting by the RCMP, but generally, enforcement of our sea border has been lax.

Oral Questions

When will the Minister of Public Safety pull these work permits permanently and start enforcing our sea borders?

● (1505)

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's acknowledgement that we did close our border with the United States 14 months ago. We have imposed unprecedented restrictions on the movements of people and goods across that border, while at the same time maintaining essential supply lines.

As the member acknowledged, there has been enforcement by the RCMP on the issue that he raises, and we will continue to do our job working very collaboratively and reciprocally with our U.S. counterparts. Those measures are working to help keep Canadians safe while we work toward the successful vaccination of our population. We will continue to maintain those restrictions as long as they are necessary.

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Ms. Ya'ara Saks (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have been discouraged by Conservative politicians with no medical training or background at all promoting what can only be described as vaccine hesitancy. This is not how we will overcome the challenges of COVID-19. Canadians have been clear. Each of us, along with family, loved ones and neighbours, should ensure we get vaccinated when our times comes. If we have any questions, we should raise them with medical professionals. Vaccines protect us, those close to us and our communities. We have seen the progress. We have seen the action plan, and the action plan is working.

Can the minister provide an update on vaccine doses delivered to Canada and vaccinations?

Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for York Centre for her hard work.

Here are the facts: Over 50% of adult Canadians have received at least one dose of vaccine. We have delivered 21.5 million doses to provinces and territories. Canada stands among the top three countries in the G20 for daily vaccination rates. We will receive 48 million to 50 million doses prior to the end of June, and up to 100 million doses prior to the end of September. We are working together to get Canadians vaccinated.

*Points of Order***GENDER EQUITY**

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, pay equity legislation passed in 2018, but the final regulations of this act have yet to be implemented. Some women will have to wait more than a decade after this legislation passed to see pay equity. The Minister of Labour stripped workers of their rights with back-to-work legislation in a day, but is missing in action when it comes to defending women's rights to equal pay for equal value. Why is it that, when it comes to attacking workers' rights, they can do it in a day; but, when it comes to defining women's rights, they ask for a decade?

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Rural Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are the first government to anchor our economic growth in women's health, women's safety and women's labour force participation. We moved forward with pay equity legislation despite the protests from the Conservative Party of Canada. We will continue to work to ensure that women have equal pay for work of equal value, and are safe everywhere.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the increasing crisis in the Middle East is a danger to the region and beyond. We are hobbled when we limit our response to “both sides must de-escalate”. Yes, they must, but true peace will never be achieved if we keep ignoring that one side is the occupier, the other is occupied.

This current crisis was provoked by actions of the Netanyahu government and other extreme elements within settler groups. Can Canada speak out clearly to defend the Palestinian people against illegal annexation, illegal settlements and illegal forced evictions?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada remains gravely concerned by the continued expansion of settlements and by the demolitions and evictions, including the ongoing cases of Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan. These actions impact families and livelihoods, and do not serve peace or international law. Unilateral actions that prejudice the outcome of direct negotiations and further jeopardize the prospects for a two-state solution must be avoided. We will always stand ready to support efforts for a two-state solution.

• (1510)

The Speaker: That is all the time we have for questions today. I believe we have a couple of points of order.

The hon. member for Sydney—Victoria has a point of order.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

Mr. Jaime Battiste (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during the statements, you had indicated that one should be wearing their jacket and a tie. It must have been my posture or camera angle; I was wearing a beaded medallion, which was gifted to me by the Office of the Treaty Commissioner in Saskatchewan. I believe on previous occasions you have ruled that this was appropriate and allowed in the House. I think it is especially important, considering

Macleans magazine praised your previous ruling in this month's article in the fashion section, where you were able to say, indeed, this respects the growing diversity of this House.

The Speaker: I want to thank the hon. member, and yes, it was his posture, because I looked and I could not see it, but I see it now.

I thank the hon. member for Sydney—Victoria for raising the point of order. As he pointed out, I made a short, informal statement about the need for members to be appropriately attired, including a jacket and tie for men, when intervening in the proceedings. As members know, this remains an important element in upholding the standard of decorum in the House. I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate that the long-standing practice of members wearing indigenous attire is also appropriate during their participation in the proceedings. In these circumstances, due to the virtual participation of members, it was difficult to tell if the member was, in fact, appropriately attired, which he was. I thank the House for its attention to this matter.

I would rather remind all members, rather than interrupt the member in the middle of his statement, which he did an excellent job with.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties, and if you seek it, I hope you will find unanimous consent for the following motion: that the House recognize that each year thousands of Canadians are asked to serve on juries and contribute to the Canadian justice system, and designate the second week of May in each year as jury appreciation week in Canada, to encourage those Canadians who provide this public service and to recognize their civic duty.

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

An hon. member: Nay.

The Speaker: I am afraid we do not have unanimous consent in the chamber.

The hon. member for Montarville is rising on a point of order.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations among the parties and I think you will find unanimous consent for the following motion: That the House (a) condemn the resurgence of violence between Palestine and Israel that led to the death of at least seven Israelis and more than 83 Palestinians; (b) call upon the parties to implement an immediate ceasefire; (c) reaffirm its support for finding a two-state solution; (d) call upon Israel to stop colonizing and annexing Palestinian territories; (e) ask the Palestinian Authority to denounce Hamas's rocket fire on Israel's civilian population; and (f) urge both Palestinian and Israeli leaders to quickly return to the negotiating table to achieve a lasting peace between the two peoples.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: There is not unanimous consent.

The hon. member for Saint-Laurent on a point of order.

* * *

KINDNESS WEEK ACT

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties and if you seek it, I think you will find unanimous consent to for the following motion:

That, notwithstanding any standing order, special order or usual practices of the House, on Friday, May 14, 2021, at the ordinary hour of daily adjournment, the House shall consider and dispose of Bill S-223, An Act respecting Kindness Week, as follows: a member from each recognized party and a member from the Green Party may speak for not more than 10 minutes on the motion for second reading and, at the conclusion of the time provided for the debate, or when no member rises to speak, whichever is earlier, the bill shall be deemed to have been read a second time and referred to a committee of the whole, deemed considered in committee of the whole, deemed reported without amendment, deemed concurred in at report stage and deemed read a third time and passed, and the House shall adjourn until the next sitting day.

• (1515)

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

I hear none. The House has heard the terms of the motion. All those opposed to the motion will please say nay.

Hearing no dissenting voice, I declare the motion carried.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

[English]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, I quoted someone else, but today I will quote you. During question period you said that we are on “week five of a long stretch”.

[Translation]

We are coming to the end of a fifth consecutive week where we all worked in the House of Commons. Next week, we will all be in our ridings to continue working for our constituents.

Now I would like to ask my government counterpart, the minister and member for Honoré-Mercier, to tell Canadians what is on the legislative agenda for the next few days.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague and friend for his good question, which gives me the opportunity to inform members of the House about what to expect over the next few days.

This afternoon, we will continue debate on the Bloc Québécois opposition motion.

Business of Supply

Tomorrow, we will resume debate at third reading stage of Bill C-15 on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), I would like to designate Wednesday, May 26 for consideration in a committee of the whole of the main estimates for the Department of Finance.

Monday, May 31 will be for the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development.

As my dear colleague mentioned, next week we will be in our constituencies so I wish everyone an excellent week. I look forward to seeing everyone for the last period of five consecutive weeks.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—ELECTIONS DURING A PANDEMIC

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to have the opportunity today to discuss this opposition motion that was introduced by the member for La Prairie. It is a very important discussion to be having, and I have been listening closely to what members from all sides of the House have had to say about this.

I will admit I am perplexed, as I mentioned in a few different interventions today. Despite the fact that I am squarely in the camp of those who do not want to have an election during a pandemic, I am concerned about the manner in which this motion is being brought forward by the Bloc Québécois. Namely, only two days ago during question period, the member for Beloeil—Chambly, the leader of the Bloc Québécois, said in response to a question from the Prime Minister that he was not afraid of an election and to bring it on.

The Conservatives and the Bloc seem to be startled by the concept that we would like to be prepared in the event of an election, one that could easily be triggered by the opposition. They seem to be confused by that, yet we have the leader of the Bloc Québécois saying to bring it on. This is what he actually said during question period. When the leader of the Bloc Québécois, a party that quite often is put in the position of being the party that decides between going to an election and not, makes comments like that it gives a great need to be properly prepared and bring forward legislation as is being brought forward in Bill C-19.

I also find it very interesting that the Bloc Québécois has talked about consensus when talking about Bill C-19. There is a need to ensure we have consensus when changing our election laws in this country. Bloc members have mentioned it many times today, but this is extremely hypocritical.

Business of Supply

Something else that relies tremendously on consensus in the House is changing our Standing Orders. For those who do not know, when we change the Standing Orders, the rules that govern how we debate in the House, how we conduct ourselves and how we follow procedures, they are usually changed with consensus. Only a year ago, the Bloc Québécois teamed up with the Conservatives, the NDP, the Green members and probably the independents at the time to change the Standing Orders and change the number of opposition days given.

Bloc members come in here and say that we need consensus for Bill C-19 and that there absolutely must be consensus among all parties. However, their actions a year ago when it came to changing the Standing Orders indicated that consensus was not needed because they had a majority. The rules could just be changed with their majority. I find it extremely hypocritical when the Bloc comes in here and starts preaching about consensus.

Of course the response to that suggestion, as I heard before, is that the rules were only being changed temporarily to add those three days. They were not being changed indefinitely. Guess what? Bill C-19 is just a temporary bill. It would temporarily be putting some temporary rules in place in the event that an election happens to get called.

The Bloc really needs to stand up. Somebody needs to stand up and explain to me what the difference is between consensus on Bill C-19 and consensus on Standing Orders. From my position, the only difference is the Bloc's opinion on the matter and its desire on the outcome. We need very important measures in place during a minority Parliament in the event that an election happens to be called, and people change their minds all the time.

• (1520)

The Conservatives right now are saying that they do not want an election, but I sat in the House for five years when the Conservatives said that they did not want carbon pricing. Guess what? They changed their minds on that. Who is to say that they will not change their minds on an election? Maybe, in the event that the Conservatives suddenly say they have changed their minds, as they did on carbon pricing, and that they want an election now, we should have some measures in place on how our Chief Electoral Officer should run an election. That is all that Bill C-19 would do.

Members have been saying it is a permanent change to our election process. I have heard Conservative after Conservative say that we are changing the way that Canadians vote and other misleading information, such as that we could count the ballots until the day after the election, which is totally false. One small exception built into the legislation talks about if an election happens on a holiday Monday when mail is not delivered, then there should be a consideration to count those ballots on the Tuesday morning because they would not have been delivered on the Monday. However, the Conservatives talk about a massive shift in the way that we run elections and count ballots, and about counting ballots after election day.

Think of the possibilities of that happening. There are only so many holiday Mondays during the year, and if it happened it would only be because the mail was not delivered. However, there is a deeper problem to this. When people start making comments like

that, when they start talking about counting ballots afterwards, it starts to sow the seeds of doubt in the minds of Canadians as it relates to the integrity of their elections. Did we see that anywhere else recently? I think we did. Not that long ago, our neighbours to the south had a leader who sowed the seeds of doubt for months. I think all members of the House would do very well to be very careful when it comes to sowing the seeds of doubt about our electoral process.

Members need to be up front. If they have a problem with the fact that under certain circumstances ballots might have to be counted on a Tuesday, if the Monday was a holiday, they should at least identify that is the case. They should not outright say that all ballots will be counted after. They could then take it to committee and see if the committee could look at how to fine-tune that, but they should not intentionally sow the seeds of doubt in Canadians. I will say I am skeptical on this, because when PROC was studying this in the spring I was on the committee and indeed, Conservative members at the time were sowing the seeds of doubt. I would refer members to David Akin's reporting from back at that time, where he specifically said as he was watching the committee meeting that Conservatives were sowing seeds of doubt about the validity of mail-in ballots.

Bill C-19 is really about temporary measures. It is about putting measures in place just in case. I have also heard numerous members in the House talk about the Liberals being the only ones talking about an election. The member for Calgary Nose Hill said that. I encourage anyone to go on to the Twitter and Facebook feeds of the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party, and tell me who keeps talking about an election. The Conservatives shared a tweet yesterday. As if there was nothing else to get political gain from, they shared a tweet of a meme that had two pictures in it. The top picture was a bunch of people having fun and dancing in the sun. Above it, it said a one-dose summer.

• (1525)

The picture below that was of a middle-aged man with an oxygen mask on his face, lying in a hospital bed. The caption above that said "Trudeau's summer". I am referencing it. I am quoting it. I maybe should not have said that. I am happy to be corrected.

However, that is what it said. My point is, who is looking for an election right now? Who is trying to gain political points right now? Go no further than the social media feeds of the two political parties, and we will see who is talking about an election.

We have the Conservative Party blasting out these tweets that are politically motivated. We have the Bloc Québécois whose leader said in the House, two days ago during question period, "bring it on," in reference to an election, and then opposition members are standing here trying to wrap their heads around why it is we want to be prepared with Bill C-19. It really should not be a mystery to anybody.

If that does not convince Canadians, how about the fact that on 14 occasions, Conservatives and Bloc members have voted non-confidence in the government? It happened on March 8, with Bill C-14; on March 25, with a concurrence motion to pass supplementary estimates; on March 25, with Bill C-26 at second reading, report stage and third reading; on March 25, with concurrence on the interim supply; on March 25, with Bill C-27, which was more interim supply. All of these were confidence votes. On April 15, there was the fall economic statement, Bill C-14; on April 21, there was the budget motion; on April 22, the budget motion amendment; on April 26, another budget motion; on April 30, there was the motion to introduce the budget implementation act. Time after time, opposition members are voting against the government and showing they do not have confidence.

I will hand it to the member for Elmwood—Transcona, who said earlier in his intervention that it was necessary for somebody to work with the government. I will hand it to the NDP: It works with the government from time to time. We used to see that in the beginning, a little, from the Bloc as well. We totally do not see that anymore. The NDP still does, to a certain degree.

I know I am getting towards the end of my time. I want to highlight one more thing with respect to the motion. If we look at the “second resolved clause” in this, it says:

In the opinion of the House, holding an election during a pandemic would be irresponsible, and that it is the responsibility of the government to make every effort to ensure that voters are not called to the polls as long as this pandemic continues.

I agree with this. Actually, I agree with the motion by and large. What I disagree with is that it is only the responsibility of the government. I believe that this is the responsibility of all of Parliament. The government certainly has its job to do in making sure that we can avoid an election to the best that we are humanly possible, but the opposition has a responsibility to do that as well. The opposition plays a key role here in a minority Parliament. It could very easily take down the government, as I have indicated numerous times throughout my speech. I think it is important that what is reflected in this motion is the fact that the opposition has to play a role in that too.

With that, I would like to move an amendment to this opposition motion presented by the member for La Prairie, and I hope it will garner the support of this House. It is seconded by the member for Kanata—Carleton.

I move that the motion be amended by adding, after the words “responsibility of the government”, the words “and opposition parties.”

• (1530)

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): It is my duty to inform hon. members that an amendment to an opposition motion may be moved only with the consent of the sponsor of the motion.

Therefore, I ask the hon. member for La Prairie if he consents to this amendment being moved.

Mr. Alain Therrien: No, I do not.

Business of Supply

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): There is no consent. Therefore, pursuant to Standing Order 85, the amendment cannot be moved at this time.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Saint-Jean.

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

I have great respect for the member for Kingston and the Islands. I would like to believe that he does not take intellectual shortcuts so easily, but I hear him say that the Bloc wants an election, the evidence being that the Bloc Québécois members have voted non-confidence 14 times.

Perhaps I should give him a chance to reconsider. Does the member think there is a difference between wanting an election and voting against confidence motions?

Is it possible for us to vote non-confidence simply because we are not satisfied with the government's legislative offer and we are doing our job as an opposition party?

• (1535)

[English]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, absolutely, but that misses my point. My point is that it is possible that we still go into an election as a result of all these confidences votes we have had and the way the opposition has been voting on them. Her comment does not change the fact that we still need to be prepared. It might change the motive, which quite frankly is irrelevant to the election process. We need to be ready. Whether the Bloc wants an election or not, it is certainly playing its hand in a way that would suggest we could have one.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC): Madam Speaker, earlier in his speech, the hon. member talked the changing of Standing Orders. I want to remind him of the last Parliament when there was changing of Standing Orders from the government and it just about lost a vote. That is when it had a majority. There were three days of questions of privilege to prevent the government from continuing as it went after the Prime Minister for his actions.

Could the member confirm to his backbench and everybody here that they would probably want to wait until after the full six years from the 2015 election so their pensions could come into play?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, we know what is on the mind of Conservatives. I cannot believe I was just asked that question in the middle of a pandemic when we have been focusing on taking care of Canadians throughout the last 15 months. That has been the focus of this government. We clearly know where the Conservatives' heads have been. That question was an absolute joke.

What is important is that I do not want to go into an election. I want to avoid an election, and it certainly is not for the purpose that the member indicated. It is because during a pandemic, we do not need that. However, the reality of the situation is that it is very possible that it happens, in particular, when we reflect on the way the opposition parties have been voting.

Business of Supply

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Madam Speaker, the member referenced the study that the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs did on holding a pandemic election. One of the main recommendations in the report from that study was that the Prime Minister not call an election during a pandemic unless the government lost a confidence vote.

Does he agree with that recommendation that the Prime Minister should not call an election unless it is the result of a confidence vote?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, we see that it was a unanimous report, as the member indicated, so the Liberal members on that committee felt that this was what they wanted to support. As our representatives on that committee, I stand by their recommendations, having had the opportunity to study it. Unfortunately, I was not on the committee when the report was done.

At the end of the day, what is important is to recognize that we have an opportunity to work together to get through this for the betterment of all Canadians. We need to strive to do that. I know the NDP has been trying. It has been supporting various processes along the way in the budget. I hope that relationship can continue, not for the House but for the betterment of Canadians.

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Kingston and the Islands for his speech, which he delivered with his customary eloquence.

I am very perplexed that the Bloc Québécois is unable to support such a simple and clear amendment that certainly calls for responsibility on the part of the government, but also for responsibility on the part of the opposition parties.

In the context of a minority government, each parliamentarian must demonstrate the highest level of responsibility. We know that a minority government faces confidence votes that it can lose, and Bill C-19 prepares us for a potential election, which is responsible.

The government must face confidence votes. It is all right for opposition parties to vote against the government in some of those votes, but it is therefore equally right to prepare for a potential election during a pandemic.

I would also remind my colleague and the House that, just last summer, the leader of the Bloc Québécois said he was willing to trigger an election. For him, the pandemic was not a very important issue. He was promoting a potential election every chance he got last summer.

I believe that supporting Bill C-19 would be a responsible decision.

I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on this inconsistency in the Bloc Québécois's discourse regarding Bill C-19 and the responsibility that we all have as parliamentarians to be well prepared in the event of an election.

• (1540)

[English]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, I am shocked that the Bloc Québécois did not accept my amendment. All it would do is add three simple words, which support everything the Bloc members have been claiming today despite the fact they have not been supported by their actions in the House. All I asked was that, in addition to it being the government's responsibility to ensure that the election would not happen, to add in that the opposition would not do it. What Bloc members have basically signalled by not supporting the amendment is that they do not want the Prime Minister to call an election, but they are getting ready to do it themselves.

How could I not conclude that when we look at the actions of their votes and when we look at the words that have come out of the Bloc Québécois leader's mouth? "Bring it on" is what he said in response to the Prime Minister. He wants an election and through not supporting this amendment, he is signalling that exactly.

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Madam Speaker, the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands noted that he supported changes to the Elections Act in case we had to have an election during a pandemic. I do not want an election during a pandemic, and I do not think Canadians want one. He said that some opposition members were saying that these would be permanent changes, and we know they would not be.

However, I would like to see some permanent changes to the Elections Act, and I wonder if the hon. member would agree with me. I hear from a lot of young people who would like to see the voting age changed to 16. I hear from a lot of people who would like to see a proportional representation system so that every vote counts.

I wonder whether the hon. member would agree with those two changes permanently to the Elections Act.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, I hope there will always be time for us to reflect back on our electoral system and to make recommendations and changes for better participation of all electors in the country.

Can I comment specifically about some of the suggestion the member has? They are great suggestions and we need to talk about them more.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to explain why the Bloc Québécois does not support the amendment and why it is the responsibility of the federal government to ensure that an election is not called.

Who has the power to decide to dissolve Parliament? Is it the government or the opposition? Who can go to the Governor General and ask that an election be called? Is it the opposition or the government? Who decides to make any vote a confidence vote? It is the government.

I will make a comment to my hon. colleague, rather than ask him a question. He accuses all the other opposition parties of wanting to trigger an election. However, I think that, by introducing Bill C-19 and imposing a gag order, it is the government that wants to trigger an election.

[English]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, that is not the way our parliamentary system works. What the member is suggesting is that it is possible to pass a non-confidence motion in the House but then still not go to an election, because it is technically and ceremoniously the responsibility of the Prime Minister to go to the Governor General. That is not the way it works. It has not worked like for 175 years. To make that suggestion only underscores the false narrative that has been put forward by the Bloc Québécois today.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, I rise today on this Bloc Québécois opposition day to speak to the important issue of elections during a pandemic.

The motion reads as follows:

That:

(a) the House remind the government that a general election was held in October 2019 and sadly note that more than 1.3 million Canadians...have been infected with COVID-19 and that nearly 25,000 people have died as a result;

The critic for seniors adds here that seniors were the first victims of this pandemic, and that the government should not try to use them in a cheap election ploy by promising them a one-time cheque for \$500 in August, just before its target period for launching the election during the pandemic. I will continue reading:

(b) in the opinion of the House, holding an election during a pandemic would be irresponsible, and that it is the responsibility of the government to make every effort to ensure that voters are not called to the polls as long as this pandemic continues.

This afternoon, I will address this issue from three perspectives. First, I will explain the theme we chose for our opposition day, then I will put on my former journalism student's hat, and finally, I will put on my former political science student and confirmed social democrat's hat.

To begin with, I would like to remind the House that the Bloc Québécois does agree with one thing. If there is an election during the pandemic, adjustments will have to be made to ensure that polling takes place in compliance with the public health rules issued by Quebec and the provinces. That is the question though: Should there be an election?

We moved this motion today for several reasons. From a technical perspective, the bill is flawed and contains significant grey areas we have to discuss and debate. From a public health and ethics point of view, holding an election under the current circumstances is not responsible. Here is a specific example.

As the Bloc Québécois's critic for seniors, I am concerned. The bill provides for polling stations in residences for 16 days before voting day. Somehow or other, election workers would have to be there for 19 days. That is not necessary, and we would have liked to change that. Voters have a number of different ways to cast their

ballot. If they cannot go to a polling station, they can always vote by mail, as usual.

In addition to the logistical issue, there is also the psychological issue around strangers being in these homes and constantly asking people to vote. We do not yet know exactly how it will unfold, but it is not hard to imagine.

Furthermore, as a former journalism student, I always pay attention to what commentators have to say. I will quote a few of them to show that this is not just a whim of the Bloc, as the other parties would have people believe with their rhetoric. Rather, our motion today is based on the concerns of the people of Shefford who wrote to me, as well as those of other Quebeckers and Canadians.

First, there was Mario Dumont on QUB radio. This is what he said on his show on May 10:

I remember that, at the National Assembly, the advisory committee of the chief electoral officer was meeting in camera because they did not want to have public grandstanding and bickering over the Quebec Election Act. They said that the parties had to agree first...

Invoking closure to pass new election rules for an election that is only a few weeks away is not a good thing...

This may be difficult to understand for the Liberals, who have a tendency to ignore the specifics relating to Quebec and its National Assembly.

Furthermore, on the May 10 episode of *La route*, Emmanuelle Latraverse said that wanting to amend a law without going through Parliament was against the rules of our electoral system, which encourages seeking consensus.

The irony is that the Liberal Party has put a gag order on a bill to amend the elections legislation, but the Liberals made a big fuss when the Harper government tried to pull the same stunt. The more things change, the more they stay the same. The Liberals have only themselves to blame for the timing of this legislation. I could name several others who have spoken out in response to what they have heard on the ground.

Still in the media world, in order to gauge public opinion, Ipsos conducted a poll for Global News on April 18, 2021, so relatively recently, and found that 57% of voters believed that an election during a pandemic would not be fair. A Leger poll on April 16, 2021, found that only 14% of Canadians wanted an election this spring, 29% this fall and 43% later. Liberal voters are even more hesitant. Only 6% want a spring election and 26% want a fall election. Sixty percent want it to be later. That is a huge number.

Finally, as a former student of politics, I am very worried. It is well known that every crisis carries two main risks. One is the federal government interfering in the jurisdictions of Quebec and the provinces, and the second is austerity for the recovery. This could be disastrous, especially for our health care system.

● (1545)

I would add to that the serious risk of eroding our democratic systems. That is why it is inconceivable that a government is imposing time allocation in Parliament on a bill meant to frame the democratic rights of the people.

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Let us not forget the context for introducing Bill C-19. Since the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020, there have been questions about holding an election in this particular context given the minority status of the current government. Using the current provisions of the legislation, general elections were held in New Brunswick, British Columbia and Saskatchewan and two federal by-elections were held in Ontario.

Then there is the example of the provincial election in Newfoundland and Labrador. We all know what happened there. That election illustrated the risks of holding an election during a pandemic. The rise in the number of COVID-19 cases forced the cancellation of a polling day and the shift to mail-in voting.

In 2019, 61% of Newfoundlanders voted and that rate fell to not quite 51% in the last election, which tarnishes the legitimacy of a government. We need to do what we can to have the highest voter turnout possible. That is what should happen. In a federal election this type of scenario could have a considerable impact on voter turnout.

Let us now continue with our timeline. On October 5, the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada tabled a special report with his recommendations for holding an election during a pandemic. On December 8, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs released a report entitled “Interim Report: Protecting Public Health and Democracy During a Possible Pandemic Election”. The Bloc Québécois issued a supplementary opinion, proof of its usual willingness to collaborate.

The government ignored the work of the committee and introduced its bill to amend the Canada Elections Act in response to COVID-19 on December 10, 2020. For his part, the Chief Electoral Officer considered a range of administrative measures to adapt to operations during a pandemic.

I am going to discuss the impact of COVID-19. Since Bill C-19 was introduced five months ago, we have had only four hours to debate it. Finally, last Friday, the Leader of the Government in the house of Commons indicated that he intended to move a time allocation motion, or closure, with respect to Bill C-19 on the following Monday, May 10, 2021.

After a 45-minute debate on the gag order, there was a vote. The Bloc Québécois and the Conservative Party voted against the gag order but in favour of sending the bill to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. This was followed by three hours and 15 minutes of debate, primarily on the gag order. The Liberals let this bill languish and now they are rushing it through at the end of the session, as we approach the summer break and a drop in their polling numbers.

Furthermore, running a Canada-wide mail-in vote presents some significant logistical challenges and could prevent some people from exercising their right to vote.

In conclusion, the Liberals' gag order on C-19 shows that they plan to call an election during the pandemic. That is how pundits are interpreting this unnecessary legislative manoeuvre. The Liberals are telling us that their political agenda comes before getting everyone vaccinated, helping our economy recover and lifting the

health measures and stay-at-home orders. This will not all be wrapped up with a wave of a magic wand at the end of the summer.

I repeat, nobody wants an election. The Bloc Québécois wants all the party leaders to meet, reach a consensus and find common ground. Yes, the Bloc Québécois is a party of ideas.

In our democratic system, we are well within our rights to make demands of the government. The government's job is to listen to opposition proposals to make Parliament work.

We wanted health transfers to go up to 35% of total health spending. That is what Quebec and the provinces called for during the health crisis. We wanted an extra \$100 per month for seniors 65 and up. Our asks are perfectly legitimate and absolutely essential. The government chose not to take them into account in its budget, so it is responsible for the fact that we voted against that budget.

We have always said that if it is good for Quebec, we will vote for it, but if it is not good for Quebec or if it is against our interests, we will vote against it. We made our intentions clear well in advance.

If the government had been sincere, it would not have hidden everything or tried any excuse to trigger elections to gain a majority. It would have listened to us and would not have settled for a budget that announced a host of electoral promises. In fact, many of the measures it announced will not be rolled out until 2022, after the next election. Is that a coincidence?

● (1550)

My leader, the member for Beloeil—Chambly, reached out to the government and suggested organizing a private meeting, inviting anyone the government chose. They could have met in an office and tried to reach a consensus, without resorting to closure—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I am sorry, but the member's time has expired. The member will have an opportunity to add some remarks during the question and comment period.

[English]

Questions and comments, the hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, there are many aspects of the member's speech that I would take to task, the primary one being this. The member gives the impression on behalf of the Bloc that it would be irresponsible to have an election during a pandemic. I wonder if she would apply that very same principle to her leader, who last year said that if the Prime Minister did not resign he vowed to call an election, that he would bring a non-confidence motion. He believed it was absolutely essential that Canada have an election.

What has changed? Does the Bloc now fully endorse the Prime Minister? What has changed between now and then?

• (1555)

[Translation]

Ms. Andr  anne Larouche: Madam Speaker, I talked a lot about the importance of democracy. The fact that the Bloc Qu  b  cois wanted to ask the Prime Minister to step down at one point, because we had good reason to do so, does not mean that we wanted an election just for the sake of it. This is just the way it has to be. We did not hand the government a blank cheque. This is a minority government. The voters gave it a mandate to listen to the opposition parties. They did not give it a majority of votes to behave in a way that ignores the viewpoints of the opposition parties.

The Bloc Qu  b  cois votes to support good bills. When they are not good, the Bloc votes against them. That is the role of the opposition parties. That is how a Parliament with a minority government should work.

[English]

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Madam Speaker, I really appreciate the comments by the member for Shefford, because I think one of the most important things is this. As opposition members, we are supposed to be holding the government to account. We are asking for good legislation so that when things are coming out there will not be any poison pills like we sometimes find in certain legislation that may just turn us off and cause people to wonder why they would vote for something that is a very political thing.

We also know that, following the throne speech, the government made opposition day motions non-confidence. It did it with the Conservative Party, as well as with the NDP, until it received a lot of pressure. What are the member's thoughts on that, when the government puts confidence votes on opposition day motions and not on government legislation?

[Translation]

Ms. Andr  anne Larouche: Madam Speaker, it is another indication that the government is trying to do whatever it can to trigger an election, with no regard for voters and no regard for democracy and the pandemic. All it wants is to form a majority government, and I can only deplore that.

Once again, the government itself is responsible for what is happening to it right now. We can only deplore the fact that it is trying to trigger an election any way it can.

[English]

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Madam Speaker, one of the things I cannot help but come back to is the fact there was an all-party recommendation at the procedure and House affairs committee that there not be an election called unless there was a confidence vote. I appreciate that the Liberals at that committee agreed to that, but does the member not think the Prime Minister should back up his MPs and support that as well?

[Translation]

Ms. Andr  anne Larouche: Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague from La Prairie, who is on the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, did a great job of explaining this morning that there was a minor disagreement within the Liberal Party. The committee members all supported the idea that there should not be an

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election during the pandemic, but the Liberals ended up introducing Bill C-19 with a gag order. It is an affront to democracy, and proposing an election bill with a gag order is contradictory. Even members of the Liberal Party recognize that.

Again, there was a simple solution. We could have reached a consensus. Why was this not done? Why is the way things are done in Quebec being ignored?

That is how we do things in Quebec. We reach a consensus.

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Madam Speaker, I have big shoes to fill in following my colleague from Shefford, who is always eloquent and on point. It is my turn to congratulate her on her speech.

It is unbelievable. I am somewhat appalled to see our Liberal colleagues speak so passionately in this debate on Bill C-19. I think that, had he known they were so passionate about the subject, the Prime Minister might have thought twice before forcing closure on it. It seems to me they really need to talk about it.

I believe we are all of one mind in saying that a pandemic is not the time to hold an election. The motion put forward by the Bloc Qu  b  cois today is plain common sense. It simply reminds us that an election was held in October 2019, that 1.3 million Canadians, including almost 360,000 Quebecers, have been infected by COVID-19, that nearly 25,000 people have died as a result and that, in the opinion of the House, holding an election during a pandemic would be irresponsible, and the government must make every effort to ensure that it does not happen. It is a common sense motion.

I get that the government wants to be ready in case the opposition parties decide to bring it down. That is the cheap excuse the government is using, but we are not naive, and neither are Quebecers. The only reason the Liberals want to pass Bill C-19 is that they expect an election in the coming months. I think it is as simple as that.

I think it is irresponsible of the government to even be thinking about an election, never mind doing everything it can to blame it on the opposition parties. I think that is the height of cowardice. Under normal circumstances, yes, there would probably have been an election this year, or maybe even before now because the Liberals, quite frankly, are just not rising to the occasion. They do not seem worthy of the trust that voters placed in them.

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There are some fairly recent examples, like that of the Minister of National Defence, who took no action on allegations of sexual misconduct against the former chief of the defence staff, and the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages, who did nothing to save French-language programs at Laurentian University. She even said that her government would take action to reverse the current anglicization of Quebec. We are still waiting. In the meantime, Quebec had the time to come up with its reform of Bill 101, which was introduced today.

Another example that is very important to me is that of the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, who has difficulty putting his money where his mouth is when it comes to greenhouse gas reductions. In fact, his actions encourage businesses to increase their emissions. For example, he granted exemptions to DuPont and Owens Corning, which are manufacturing giants. These exemptions let them ignore the new standards established by his own department for the manufacture of XPS insulation board. I mention this because it was done to the detriment of companies such as Soprema, which is a well-established company in my riding of Drummond that has suffered huge financial losses just because it agreed to comply with these new standards.

There is also the Minister of Canadian Heritage, who has been in the hot seat a lot recently. He still has not come up with a solution to the urgent problem facing our print media, which have been suffering for years because of GAFAM, which is taking advertising revenues on the backs of our journalism content creators. This is to say nothing of the current impasse on Bill C-10 and how the government is managing that file.

In fact, the only minister who did something and took full responsibility was the former minister of finance. I am talking about when he resigned, of course.

If this government knew how to collaborate, listen and govern in a minority context, it would not have such a hard time convincing us of its good faith. Instead, rather than listening to the criticisms and comments of the opposition parties, it prefers to act like a two-year-old child.

When kids are two or three, they go through a phase of saying no. The Liberals are going through that phase right now. They say no to health transfers. They say no to increasing the old age pension starting at age 65. They say no to a single tax return for Quebec. They say no to applying the digital services tax to Netflix, Amazon Prime and other subscription-based content streaming companies. They say no to print media, as I just mentioned.

In fact, they say no to good suggestions from the Bloc Québécois, but those good suggestions will likely become more appealing at election time because we know that the Bloc Québécois proposes things that reflect the interests and demands of Quebec.

I experienced this “no” phase with my own children. They went through it. It is so annoying. It is tiresome and counterproductive. They are so stubborn that there is no way to make them listen to reason. That was at age two. Now we are stuck with a government that is in its “no” phase.

If there is an election during this pandemic, we can conclude that all of the measures announced in the budget were probably meant

to become election promises. There is nothing concrete. The government simply made announcements without any follow-up. The Liberals have been doing this since well before the 2019 election.

• (1600)

One example is that the government is promising an inadequate increase to old age security in 2022. Their motto seems to be “why do today what you can put off until tomorrow?”

The government announced \$1.3 billion to support the cultural and tourism sectors. The government had the opportunity with its budget implementation bill to include a number of proposed measures to support the cultural and tourism sectors. These sectors would finally have gotten the money they so urgently need. However, the government did not do this.

Two years ago, the Prime Minister promised that his government was going to plant two billion trees by 2030. That comes out to 200 million trees a year. That announcement sounds great, but I do not think that many trees have been planted so far. In fact, I am not even sure there have been many shovels in the ground since 2019.

Since we cannot count on the Liberals for that, I thought maybe the 184 opposition members could give them a hand. According to my calculations, if we decide to do the work for them, every MP will have to plant 10,869,565.2 trees. I do not want to brag, but I have already planted two trees in my yard, and I believe my colleague from Longueuil—Saint-Hubert has planted one or two as well. We are ahead of the game. Other MPs will have to catch up with us because there is a long way to go.

As Niccolò Machiavelli wrote in his book, *The Prince*, to govern, one must make others believe. The Liberals have read the book, and they are putting that theory into practice.

According to a Global News study published on April 18, 57% of voters feel that an election during the pandemic would be unfair. Another survey, this one by Leger, shows that 60% of Canadians do want an election, but they want it to happen later, at least after the fall.

The opposition parties are not the only ones against holding an election in a pandemic. Over 22 million Canadians feel the same way. The Liberals have been getting ready to trigger an election for a while now. In an article published in *Le Devoir*, journalist Boris Proulx wrote that, in the fall of 2020, candidates under consideration received invitations, in the form of letters addressed to them, to run under the Liberal banner. In the same article, he wrote that, in a year-end interview with CBC, the Prime Minister let slip the words “next year’s election”, referring to this year. Either his subconscious is playing tricks on him or plans have been laid.

Why is the government in such a hurry to call an election? I use the word “hurry” because Bill C-19 has been languishing on someone's desk for four months now, and suddenly, the government leader put it on the agenda, with only four hours of debate and time allocation. We are not the only ones wondering about this. The media has often talked about the Liberals' intentions, wisdom or opportunism in trying to trigger an election.

In January 2021, Louis Lacroix, a Cogeco Media host, said that, if he were prime minister, he would want to hold elections as quickly as possible, because once the vaccine begins to have an impact a few months from now and the pandemic starts to recede, we will have time to analyze all these programs and spot the mistakes that were made, which will come back to bite the Prime Minister.

The government would like to have an election because things are getting better and better. The vaccine rollout is generally going well, and we are beginning to see the light at the end of the tunnel.

In closing, I will repeat what Bernard Drainville, a radio host on 98.5, had to say. On Monday morning, he said that if the government wants to change the election act, it must seek as broad a consensus as possible. He also mentioned that changes were made unanimously in Quebec.

What the the Bloc Québécois is proposing is to have the leaders of the four parties meet to discuss the proper way to do things and reach a consensus, as befits a subject that is so important to the people we represent. It is just common sense.

The Bloc Québécois has always been clear about what it expects for Quebecers. When the government criticizes us for voting against the budget, that makes me feel quite cynical because we have always made it very clear that we would support the budget if it included an OAS increase for seniors 65 and up and higher health transfers, which Quebec and the provinces were unanimous in calling for. The government knew that it would not get the Bloc Québécois's support without those things.

The Bloc said in advance what it wanted. Its demands were transparent. When it votes against a budget that does not contain those things, whose fault is that? Is it the Bloc Québécois's fault? I think not.

• (1605)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, Bloc members, themselves, have introduced motions of non-confidence. If any of those motions had passed, that would have precipitated an election. Just last year, the Bloc leader vowed that if the Prime Minister did not resign, he would precipitate and call for a non-confidence vote and cause an election. Today, Bloc members are of a different opinion. Why should the people of Quebec, or Canadians in general, trust what the Bloc is saying?

The Government of Canada will continue, as it has done from day one, to focus its attention on the pandemic and being there for

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Canadians in a very real way. Why the inconsistency on the issue, with the Bloc?

• (1610)

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Madam Speaker, first of all, I would like to tell the parliamentary secretary that if the government really wants to continue to govern responsibly, rigorously and with common sense, as it says, it will have no difficulty at all in adopting our motion, since it goes in precisely that direction.

As for whether the Bloc Québécois demanded the Prime Minister's resignation or said that it would vote against him, it is important to put that into context. The context last summer was not the same as it is now.

The Bloc Québécois will not forsake its values, however. We will always be very transparent in this regard. We will represent the interests of Quebec, and if that means that we have to vote against a government motion or bill, we will not renege on our promise to Quebecers to represent them with dignity to the end. It is also up to the government to do the right thing and act as it should, which it does not always do.

[English]

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would ask my colleague from the Bloc to comment on the absurd inconsistencies that the government is highlighting today. First, the government seemed to want to litigate Bill C-19 when it brought in closure, and now it claims not to want an election but refuses to work with opposition parties to find consensus in what is a minority Parliament.

I am curious if the member would agree with what I am increasingly hearing from pundits and many political observers, that the Liberals are refusing to accept that Canadians only gave them a mandate for a minority government, but they continue to drive down the path thinking they have a majority and trying to utilize a national, global crisis like a pandemic to further their political agenda.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his excellent question.

This government has been given a minority mandate. Rather than taking responsibility for its decisions, some of which are better than others, it tries to blame its poor decision-making on the so-called obstruction of the opposition parties.

However, the mandate of a minority government is precisely to seek collaboration and consensus and to work to advance issues that might not be readily accepted. A minority government therefore needs to humbly accept criticism and make changes so that the population that gave it a minority mandate can see that it is working in that direction.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague whether he thinks that adapting the election rules to the pandemic should be an urgent priority and whether he trusts the Prime Minister to put the public good ahead of his own partisan interests.

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Mr. Martin Champoux: Madam Speaker, I think that, in a way, the government's gag order answers that question.

The Bloc Québécois is proposing that the leaders of the four main parties represented in the House get together to discuss and negotiate so that they can come to a consensus. We think that this would show some respect for the process and that it is just common sense.

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Outremont.

Today is May 13, and it my father's first birthday since his death. My father is among those people who died during the pandemic. The first part of the Bloc Québécois motion refers to all of the Quebecers and Canadians who died during the pandemic. I want to express my condolences to all of the families in Quebec, in my riding and across Canada who have lost loved ones.

My father had been in a long-term care unit. Our country has some significant problems when it comes to long-term care. I truly hope that we will take everything that we have learned to ensure that people like my father will be better served in the future.

I fully support the idea of national standards, and I hope that all Canadians will respect not only provincial jurisdictions but also national standards to guarantee that our seniors can enjoy their right to be safe in long-term care homes.

• (1615)

[English]

The motion also talks about an election, and I can assure the Bloc Québécois and all the hon. members of the House that I do not have any interest in an election, nor do any of the other people I know on our side of the House. It is one of those things where we can keep repeating it and people may or may not believe us, but in the end result, that is the case.

We also, of course, understand that we are in a minority Parliament. The government does not get to control when the next election happens. All of the opposition parties could force an election, and I am not saying that it is necessarily in bad faith that people may vote non-confidence in the government. It could happen for a variety of reasons.

If non-confidence in the government is voted, then we need to have a safe election. There is no doubt about it, with the entire idea of potentially having an election. I am not blaming opposition parties for voting non-confidence. They have a right to do so, but there have been 14 times in recent weeks when opposition parties have voted non-confidence in one way or another, and as a result we could have an election, so it is really important that we appreciate that we need to find a way to bring Bill C-19 through the House in order to have a fair and safe election.

We have talked a lot about it, and I am very proud of our government having taken many measures to ensure safety in the workplace. Elections Canada needs to ensure safety for its poll workers and for all Canadians who wish to express their right to vote in our society. I am also very pleased that we are in a country where we have national rules on national elections. We see what has hap-

pened with our neighbours to the south, where there are different rules in every state and different rules, sometimes, in every county in a state. Different types of election machines in different counties led to a 2000 election where Palm Beach County in Florida managed, by itself, to reverse the results of an election.

In the most recent election in the United States, there was a candidate who refused to accept the results of the election. He launched many lawsuits, which were all unsuccessful, and now he continues to maintain that the election was unfair and is trying to get states to create legislation that makes it more difficult for people to vote.

I am pleased that we would be making it safer and better to vote with Bill C-19. We know that the Chief Electoral Officer and the procedure and House affairs committee are really cognizant of the importance of this issue, as evidenced by their significant work and associated recommendations. In addition to supporting the committee's recommendation with respect to long-term care voting and extending the voting period, Bill C-19 proposes a number of other measures to ensure that our electoral process remains resilient, taking into account the current public health context. Both the committee and Bill C-19 propose increased adaptation powers for the Chief Electoral Officer for the purposes of ensuring the health and safety of electors and election workers, should an election occur during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In its final report, the committee acknowledged that it has the utmost confidence in Elections Canada in undertaking the diligent planning and preparedness necessary to deliver a successful and accessible election during the pandemic.

This is reflected in Bill C-19's temporary amendment to extend the Chief Electoral Officer's power to adapt the provisions of the act to ensure the health and safety of electors or election officers. It seeks to offer greater flexibility, given the rapidly changing nature of the pandemic and the diverse logistics of conducting 338 elections, and each riding having different challenges. On the committee's recommendation that rapid tests be provided, the government is committed to supporting Elections Canada's preparedness, all while respecting its independence.

An election during the pandemic also means that more electors will vote by mail, as we have seen in various Canadian and international jurisdictions. Indeed, the chief electoral officers of British Columbia, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island all told the committee that there were significant increases in demand to vote by mail during their respective provincial elections held during the pandemic. We certainly saw the same thing with our neighbours to the south.

In British Columbia, there was a 100-fold increase of mail-in ballots between the 2017 and 2020 provincial general elections. At the federal level, the Chief Electoral Officer testified that surveys had indicated that 4 million to 5 million electors intend to vote by mail if a federal general election is held during the pandemic. The Chief Electoral Officer noted that steps had been taken to ensure that Elections Canada would be prepared for such an increase.

Although the committee's recommendations on mail-in voting were primarily directed to Elections Canada, it is evident through the report and witness statements that access to mail-in ballots would support electors that may face barriers. As such, measures to shore up the mail-in ballot system are important. That is why Bill C-19 seeks to implement measures to improve access to mail-in voting for all Canadians in numerous ways, including the installation of mail reception boxes at all polling stations and allowing for the receipt of online applications for mail-in ballots.

The committee's final report highlights that mail-in voting was identified by several witnesses as a means of increasing accessibility for electors who face barriers to voting, including persons with disabilities, indigenous voters, persons living in poverty and students. Augmenting mail-in voting procedures will ensure the system is easy to use, accessible and responsive to voter's needs. It will also provide additional alternatives for those who are most vulnerable during the pandemic.

Ensuring that our electoral system is easy to use, accessible and responsive to voter's needs is also very much the advice we heard from international partners and experts from government, industry and civil society. We want good practice. We want a solution tailored to communities. We do not need a one-size-fits-all approach, but we need to ensure that the same access to voting exists across the country.

Multiple witnesses, including Canada's Chief Electoral Officer, told the committee that holding a federal general election during the pandemic would pose significant challenges and difficulties for Elections Canada. Elections Canada has exchanged information on our best practices and contingency planning and commissioned research.

Bill C-19 will reaffirm to Elections Canada, political entities and Canadian electors that the government remains committed to ensuring that a general election during a pandemic, should one be required, which all of us say we do not want, would be delivered in a manner that is safe for electors and election workers, and ensures the overall integrity of the electoral process.

In conclusion, I do believe it is important to pass Bill C-19, whether or not there is an election on the horizon.

• (1620)

[Translation]

Ms. Andr  anne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his intervention, and I offer him my deepest condolences on the loss of his father during the pandemic.

This clearly shows the importance of reinvesting in our health care system to take care of people. I would like to hear his thoughts on that. Unfortunately people have died because of the crisis, and it

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has highlighted the need to make health care a priority and the importance of making new, massive investments in taking care of people and preventing death.

I would therefore like to hear his thoughts on the importance of increasing health transfers to 35%.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for whom I have a lot of respect.

During the pandemic, the federal government made a lot of investments to help the provinces manage the crisis. When the crisis is over, there will certainly need to be a discussion between the provinces and the federal government on the issue of health in order to determine how we can work together to ensure that the federal and provincial governments are able to make the best investments in health.

Mr. G  rard Deltell (House Leader of the Official Opposition, CPC): Madam Speaker, I first want to thank the hon. member and parliamentary secretary. I, too, extend my most sincere condolences to him. I know he is an honourable man and that he learned a great deal from his father, as all of us should.

My question for the parliamentary secretary is actually quite simple. When there is a minority government, an election can be triggered in two ways. First, the government could lose a vote in the House on a government or even an opposition motion, for example, with the opposition parties ensuring that the government loses the vote. In such a case, the Prime Minister must call an election. Second, the Prime Minister himself could call an election.

Today, we are hearing that the Prime Minister has no intention of calling an election. He says that the opposition parties might trigger one.

Can the parliamentary secretary reassure Canadians that the Prime Minister will not go to Rideau Hall in July, August or early September, before the House resumes, to call an election, yes or no?

• (1625)

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague, who is a man of great intellect.

Because he is a man of great intellect, he certainly knows that only the Prime Minister will be able to answer that question, as to what he can or cannot do.

All I can say is that no one in the Liberal caucus feels like there should be an election, just like no one in the opposition caucuses feels that way. Nevertheless, we know that an election can be triggered against our will for a number of reasons.

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I gave an example. If opposition members find it impossible to vote in good conscience on a bill that is a matter of confidence, it might mean that they will trigger an election, even if they do not want to. I suppose that is always a possibility on both sides.

[English]

Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am going to make this a very easy question for my colleague and good friend because he is a very good guy.

The all-party recommendation of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs agreed not to call an election during the pandemic. This advice was given to the Prime Minister.

Does my good friend believe it would be wrong for the Prime Minister to call an election during a pandemic, unless it was because of a confidence vote?

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Madam Speaker, I have huge respect for my hon. friend. I shared the view at committee that there should not be an election during the pandemic, on either side.

[Translation]

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as we all know, our society and our government are still facing unprecedented challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

For the time being, the pandemic has forced us to change how we live our lives to keep our fellow citizens safe. To be honest, I would have loved to debate this motion and many others with my colleagues in person in the House, but here we are on Zoom in our living rooms back home in our ridings. We now vote remotely using an app.

The pandemic has forced us to change the voting procedure in the House of Commons, a first in 200 years. It has forced us to adapt, and we have had to adapt the electoral process as well. Since the pandemic hit, there have been two federal by-elections and a number of provincial, territorial and local elections. These elections have given voters a broad range of options to exercise their right to vote safely.

Holding an election during a pandemic is, of course, a major challenge. The government has drawn on the experience of elections held in Canada and other jurisdictions, as well as on the analyses of Elections Canada and the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

To ensure both the safety of voters and their ability to exercise their right to vote in as large numbers as possible, the government introduced Bill C-19 on December 10 of last year.

Before getting into the details of this bill, I would like to say very clearly that I absolutely do not want an election. Throughout this pandemic, we have worked together to govern the country responsibly and in collaboration with the other parties. We did this to help Canadians and we will continue to do so.

I want to be very clear on another thing: I have nothing against this motion, but I have a real problem with the way this debate has been filled with small partisan attacks implying that the govern-

ment wants an election during a pandemic. That is totally false, as the facts show.

Getting back to Bill C-19, it makes provisional changes to the Canada Elections Act to support a safe and accessible vote in the event of a general election during the pandemic. This bill is based on recommendations made by the Chief Electoral Officer in October 2020 regarding voting in the context of a pandemic, as well as the critical work of our colleagues on the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, whom I thank.

Bill C-19 is structured around four main points. First, in order to facilitate physical distancing at the polls, the bill proposes to add two additional voting days, on the Saturday and Sunday before the traditional Monday voting day. This would reduce the number of people at the polls at any given time, which is very important. It would be especially useful in ridings where public health authorities have set strict limits on the number of people allowed in public places. This measure will also provide additional flexibility to those for whom voting on election day would be a problem.

Second, the bill would strengthen the powers of the Chief Electoral Officer to adapt the provisions of the Canada Elections Act to ensure the health and safety of voters and election staff. In its current form, the Canada Elections Act grants these powers only to enable electors to vote or to enable the counting of votes.

Third, the bill would make it easier to exercise the right to vote in a safe manner for one of the most vulnerable groups that has been hit the hardest by the pandemic, those residing in long-term care institutions. The bill would establish a period beginning 13 days before election day to facilitate the administration of voting in these institutions. This period would allow Elections Canada staff to coordinate with the staff of these long-term care institutions and ensure that residents can vote safely.

● (1630)

The bill proposes four measures to enhance access to mail-in voting for all Canadians. This measure makes sense when we know that mail-in voting was the preferred tool used in many countries such as the United States, where nearly two-thirds of voters voted by mail during the presidential election. According to Elections Canada, up to five million voters would choose mail-in voting if there is an election during the pandemic.

First, the bill would allow voters to register online to be able to vote by mail. Then, it would allow voters to use an identification number, for example, like the one on a driver's licence, to confirm their identity and their place of residence in the context of mail-in voting.

It would install secure reception boxes at every polling station and at the offices of the returning officers. This would allow those who cannot send their ballot by mail to deposit it securely.

The bill would allow people who initially chose to vote by mail to change their mind and vote in person, while protecting the integrity of the electoral process.

Together, these measures seek to ensure the security of an election that might be held during a pandemic by providing as many ways possible for voters to exercise their democratic rights.

It is important to note that these measures would be temporary. They would only apply to an election that is called 90 days after this legislation receives royal assent, or earlier if the Chief Electoral Officer has indicated that all the necessary preparations have been completed. These measures would cease to be in effect six months after a general election was administered during the pandemic or earlier, as determined by the Chief Electoral Officer after consultation with Canada's chief public health officer.

We must take steps now to ensure that the next election be held safely and that it be accessible to all voters.

I want to commend Elections Canada for its exceptional work and thank all those who are involved and who will be involved in administering a safe election in unprecedented circumstances.

I am pleased to take questions from and debate with my colleagues.

• (1635)

[English]

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member said that she absolutely did not want an election, and that is very similar wording to what we hear from her Liberal colleagues. However, the member is part of the government that created confidence votes that were not part of the regular business of government. Of course, the government is the only one that can create confidence votes.

Specifically, in the fall there was the prorogation of Parliament that led to the creation of confidence votes, following the throne speech. Then, for the first time ever in 150 years in Parliament, the government created a confidence vote for creating a committee.

How can members of the government say that they do not want an election if they create confidence votes that are not part of the normal process of government?

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Madam Speaker, first, the House sat during the summer. We actually responded to more questions over this pandemic year than we would have under normal circumstances. I certainly take issue with one of her comments with respect to the work of the House, which has not stopped. I would also mention that the Conservative Party delayed for weeks and weeks the passage of Bill C-14, which had critical supports for Canadians.

Business of Supply

If the member opposite is so interested in seeing the House move forward with important legislation, with votes and with programs, then I wonder why the Conservative Party delayed Bill C-14 for such a long period of time. Although I have no more time left, I certainly have a lot more to say on this issue.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to say a few words. Turning votes into confidence votes strongly suggests that the Liberals want to call an election.

I would also like to talk more about how the Liberals' actions since taking office are an insult to democracy. The member mentioned that the Liberals added sittings last summer, but she left out the fact that they prorogued Parliament. Prorogation is a serious affront to democracy. It curtailed numerous bills and committee undertakings.

We know the government has once again insulted democracy with its closure motion as it looks for a way to trigger an election. The Liberals are also busy engaging in systematic obstruction in committee, and there are other sensitive issues in play as well.

I would like my colleague to comment on just how important democracy is, because what has been happening since last summer is pretty bad.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Madam Speaker, no one was expecting a pandemic last year, so it was very important for us to reset with a new throne speech.

I remind my hon. colleague that Parliament was prorogued in the summer and that we do not normally sit in the summer. I find her comments about confidence votes quite surprising. If the Bloc Québécois does not want an election, why are Bloc members trying to make the government fall by voting non-confidence?

This is rather strange. The Bloc Québécois seems to be the one that wants an election.

• (1640)

[English]

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, the NDP has been clear and consistent that we do not want to have an election during a pandemic and we do not intend on triggering one. We would have liked to see the Prime Minister take some responsibility and commit to the same.

The hon. member talked about Bill C-19, but it only passed second reading on time allocation earlier this week. It has not gone through committee or the Senate. If an election were called, we would be in pretty big trouble.

Business of Supply

It is the Liberals who are filibustering the procedure and House affairs committee, which risks delaying Bill C-19. Will the Liberals allow for the vote at committee so we can get on with studying the bill?

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Madam Speaker, I wish I could delve further into that question. With the short time I have, I do appreciate the support of that NDP member and other NDP members for our budget. The budget implementation act will deliver for Canadians. Having at least one opposition party supporting work and programs that will help Canadians is certainly very refreshing.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Langley—Aldergrove, Public Safety; the hon. member for Cloverdale—Langley City, Housing; the hon. member for Bow River, Public Services and Procurement.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today on this opposition day, especially since we have heard a lot of hasty conclusions during this debate.

The most recent example was from the member for Outremont. She just said that the Liberals do not want an election and that it is clearly the Bloc Québécois that wants one, since it votes non-confidence in the government and is trying to make the government fall. She said that it is the Bloc that wants an election.

I think it is important to remember that there is no connection between voting non-confidence in the government and wanting an election. Some journalists may even need that reminder as well. Yesterday I saw a headline that said, “BQ calls on Liberals to avoid pandemic election, despite voting non-confidence”. This is yet another example of what I feel is an incorrect assessment.

I would like to remind the House of the role of opposition members. It is precisely to scrutinize the government, not to give it a blank check, especially in a minority Parliament. It is also to make sure it adopts good policies and that these are reached through a certain consensus, or at least that a certain majority is favourable to these policies in the context of a minority Parliament. That is the role of opposition members. We cannot systematically tie our own hands just because someone accuses us of wanting to trigger an election. We have an obligation to do our job.

I am going to share a little story about the role of opposition members. Often, during election campaigns, people say to parties like the Bloc Québécois that opposition members serve no purpose, because they are not part of the government and are not important. When that happens, I am happy to ask people what they think of the idea of giving all the seats in the House to the members of the party with the most votes. They always answer that someone has to keep an eye on the government. Precisely. The role of opposition members is to keep an eye on the government.

That being said, the motion put forward today by the Bloc Québécois provides the government with a fine opportunity to clarify its own position on holding an election during a pandemic. We all know the saying “to walk the talk”. In this case, the walk and the talk are not even close. I would suggest to members that today we

are handing the government, on a silver platter, the opportunity to be constructive and to really confirm that it does not want an election during a pandemic.

All day long, the Liberals seem to have been trying to argue that they do not want an election. They are saying that they did not introduce Bill C-19 to call an election during a pandemic, but rather because it was necessary and because they had to plan ahead and determine how an election would be managed during a pandemic.

Yes, it is important to pass Bill C-19. That is why the Bloc Québécois contributed to a study on holding elections during a pandemic at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. It was necessary and appropriate to do so.

The Bloc Québécois voted in favour of the final report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs on holding an election during a pandemic. We voted in favour of the principle of Bill C-19 at second reading. We support having a bill that would dictate the rules of the game in the context of a pandemic election.

The problem we have is that the government is not walking the talk with regard to Bill C-19. It is important to remember that the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, which examined the election issue, prepared its report after hearing from a number of very interesting witnesses, including chief electoral officers who had actually conducted elections during a pandemic. I had the pleasure of attending a few of those committee meetings.

The report was tabled on October 8. Two days later, before the ink was even dry, the government completely ignored the recommendations and introduced its own bill.

Things were off to a bad start. Then a little later, closure was imposed. At that point, things deteriorated even more because closure is anything but consensus building. I will repeat once more some of the remarks quoted by my colleagues.

Emmanuelle Latraverse said that wanting to modify a law without going through government was against the rules of our electoral system, which encourages seeking consensus. According to Ms. Latraverse, the irony is that the Liberals put a gag order on a bill to amend the Canada Elections Act, but made a big fuss when the same thing happened under the Harper government. She stated that the more things change, the more they stay the same, and that the Liberals have only themselves to blame for the timing of this legislation.

● (1645)

The Liberals are sidestepping the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, which had reached consensus, and they are invoking closure, which is anything but consensus-building. They say they do not want people to be cynical, but their actions foster cynicism.

All day, the Liberals have been saying that we should not undermine the electoral process or do anything that would cause people to lose faith in it, which is what happened in the United States. If closure does not cause a loss of faith in the legislative and democratic process, I have to wonder what it does.

There is another point to make here. Generally speaking, closure is hard to justify. That is very true in this context because closure was invoked after four hours of debate over a five-month period. The government has done a poor job of managing its legislative agenda. There was no reason to invoke closure.

Since we did not have time to discuss the bill because of the time allocation motion, I will do so now. I would like to remind members of what could have been discussed if we had had the opportunity to do so. Let us not forget that the Bloc Québécois is always ready to co-operate. In fact, my colleagues heard the leader of the Bloc Québécois offer the Prime Minister the opportunity to discuss the content of the bill. We are still prepared to help. For example, we could discuss the deadline for receiving ballots by mail. Currently, the deadline is set for the day after the last polling day, which means that people can continue to vote after the preliminary results.

The procedure and House affairs committee made recommendations to avoid having election day on a Monday. This would make it easier to have more election workers, especially young people, since they work mostly on the weekend, and to have access to more local workers during an election. We will also need extra workers if we want to maintain social distancing.

The issue of advertising and polls could have been addressed. Right now, the bill seems unclear on that issue. Usually, on election day, advertising and the publication of polls are prohibited. Since the voting period will take place over three days, will this guideline be applied to all three polling days? It would be interesting to discuss this. We would have liked more time to do so.

The way the bill was brought before the House suggests that there may be some desire on the part of the government to call an election. Today, we are suggesting that the government clarify matters. We are giving the government the opportunity to confirm that there will not be an election during the pandemic.

In politics, we say that the rule is to hope for the best but prepare for the worst. Today's debate is not entirely about the merits of Bill C-19. Bill C-19 is about preparing for the worst, because we do not know how long the pandemic will last. Should the pandemic last longer than the government's four-year term, which I hope will not be the case, then it is a good idea to have a bill that provides an election framework.

In fact, today's motion does not aim to prevent us from having a bill on preparing for elections. It asks us to draft the best bill we can, to hope for the best, but not to set ourselves up for the worst, which would be to hold an election during a pandemic. It is the responsibility of the government to do everything it can to avoid having an election, so that people will not be called to vote so long as there is a pandemic.

This can be achieved very easily by doing three things. First, we are asking the government to ensure that votes that are confidence

Business of Supply

votes by default are well structured and to do its best to reach a consensus on the measures it proposes, or at least obtain the agreement of the majority of the House.

Second, we are asking the government not to make confidence votes out of votes that do not necessarily need to be, as we have seen it do on multiple occasions during the current Parliament.

Third, we are simply asking the government not to unilaterally decide to dissolve the House, even if the polls are in its favour.

That basically sums up our motion. It is just plain common sense. That is all we are asking of the government.

• (1650)

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my esteemed colleague for her speech.

I hold my colleague in high regard, and I am grateful for her work. I have a little less respect for her party.

I would like to quote from an article published in the *Journal de Québec* on July 24, 2020, that refers to a Bloc Québécois press release. The article states:

...the Bloc Québécois calls on the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada to consider social distancing measures for a general election that could be called before a medical solution to the illness is available, and calls on the Speaker of the House of Commons to arrange for a vote of all 338 elected members of the federal Parliament as soon as Parliament resumes on September 21, or sooner.

Last August, the Bloc Québécois was dangling a non-confidence motion over Parliament's head. The Bloc was calling for preparations to be made for an election. Yes, the responsible thing to do is to be prepared for a possible election, especially in the context of a minority government, since this also affects the opposition members.

What is the responsibility of the opposition members? Why did they vote against a simple amendment that added the role of the opposition parties?

Ms. Christine Normandin: Madam Speaker, this question has many elements.

I will nevertheless take the time to acknowledge my colleague from Louis-Hébert, whom I met in another life. I share his sentiments. I appreciate him very much as well. I look forward to seeing him in person in the House and discussing our previous lives and even politics.

I would like to provide another Bloc Québécois quote from the same article. It quotes the leader of the Bloc Québécois as saying, "Quebeckers may not want an election in the short term, but we understand that they certainly do not want another partisan Liberal scandal that seriously undermines the fight against COVID-19".

Business of Supply

This was our position in the context of the disastrous management of the crisis, amid an accumulation of Liberal Party scandals. Sometimes we must make an impossible choice. At some point, we might have had to topple the government because the other option, keeping it in place, would have been even worse in the context of the crisis.

[English]

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member from the Bloc touched on a lot of very important things, including the fact that the Liberals seem to be quick to debate the elections bill they brought closure on earlier this week. Although they brought closure on the bill, it seems like today has been an extension of that, which the member talked about.

I would ask the member to comment on the incredible hypocrisy we have seen from the current government with its claim that opposition parties are somehow bent on trying to bring it down, when it has refused to be collaborative and work with them to bring forward a plan and a framework that could be supported by all parties in the House. Instead, the government plays politics time and again. Would the member comment on that?

• (1655)

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Madam Speaker, we are offering to help the government to work on a compromise and a consensus. Again, however, the door is closed even though what we are asking for makes sense.

My colleague asked a good question. It is true that in a minority context, and especially during a crisis, we have to try to reach a consensus and a compromise. The government is behaving like a majority government. That is a problem, and it is hypocritical.

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Madam Speaker, the Bloc Québécois made it clear that it did not want to have an election during the pandemic, but we know that the Prime Minister refuses to commit to not holding an election.

Does the member believe that adjusting the election rules for the pandemic should be an urgent priority, or does she trust the Prime Minister to put the public good ahead of his own partisan interests?

Ms. Christine Normandin: Madam Speaker, as I said in my speech, the problem is not Bill C-19, but the way it was handled. It could have been dealt with much sooner, seeing as the pandemic had been going on for several months when we talked about it for the first time. We could have debated it in the House for five months and gotten the work done without the need for the government to use time allocation. We need to make a distinction between the content of Bill C-19 and the way it was handled.

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Madam Speaker, I have listened carefully to most of the speeches today, and it occurs to me that I should make a point that I feel it important but that has not been properly emphasized: the purpose of the motion, or my party leader's purpose in moving it.

I would like to focus everyone's attention on what was said yesterday during question period. My colleague from Saint-Jean mentioned it, and I think she put it better than I can.

Yesterday, during question period, the member for Beloeil—Chambly said he was reaching out to the opposition parties to avoid a pandemic election. We got an unmistakable answer today, and I think I would like explain by picking up on what my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie said in his speech. He said the Bloc Québécois had, on several occasions, floated the possibility of an election. Making such a claim suggests that he does not understand the opposition parties' role, so I would like to review that role.

We often assign motives to other members in the House. I assign motives to my Conservative, Liberal and NDP colleagues. That is the ideological part of politics, but beyond that ideology, we sometimes have the opportunity to collaborate and work together to advance a file. For example, I will point to our work on CUSMA.

If we all recall, under CUSMA, aluminum did not have the same protections as steel. We worked with the Deputy Prime Minister. I congratulate her on that. What an inspiration she is. I have a feeling that the Liberal Party would benefit from drawing inspiration from what the Deputy Prime Minister is doing. We collaborated with her. At first, she was not of the same view as us, and she misjudged our intentions. We discussed things openly and worked in collaboration with her. It resulted in something fortunate. Ultimately, aluminum got the same protections as steel.

By moving today's motion, the leader of my political party wanted to do the same thing and repeat the same *modus operandi*. In other words, why not sit down with all the party leaders, whips and others and come up with a solution that everyone agrees on, one that means we can avoid having an election during the pandemic, because that is what the public wants? The Liberal government rejected this overture, and it will have to answer for that.

On the one hand, there was a call to work collaboratively. This reminds me that I have often heard my Liberal colleagues say that we should take a “team Canada” approach. Regarding vaccines, they have told us that we were not working like team Canada. Oddly enough, their “team Canada” operates on a sliding scale. When it suits them, the Liberals talk about consensus and working together, but when it does not suit them, they toss that notion aside.

I thought it was pretty unfortunate today that the House could not get past partisan interests and agree that what we needed to do was have a dialogue in order to potentially find a way out that would allow us to avoid a pandemic election, or at least agree on the rules that would apply.

This brings me back to what I was saying earlier.

It is true that we sometimes assign motives to one another. That may be the somewhat more negative role of the opposition, but there is also a positive role. I was thinking about that just now. What is the role of the opposition? I was thinking of my colleague, the member for Lac-Saint-Jean, who often annoys me when he asks who I work for.

It is true that the role of the opposition and of all members is to present what their constituents want. At present, they are telling us that they do not want an election during a pandemic. Therefore, it is our duty to deliver that message. However, there is another role that we talk about often.

My colleague from Lac-Saint-Jean often asks the question, “Who do we work for?” However, there is another question: what do we work for? That is the role of opposition parties. If I ask a member of the Bloc Québécois what they work for, sovereignty is definitely one answer, but there are also other matters that we have addressed, such as the fight against greenhouse gas emissions, cutting oil subsidies, and vital support for seniors, an issue that brought about collaboration the likes of which we had never seen before and will never see again, unfortunately, as well as health transfers.

The role of the opposition, and therefore of the Bloc Québécois, is to push the government in a particular direction or advocate for things that bring the organization of society more in line with our values.

● (1700)

That is the opposition's role, and we can only fulfill that role through a balance of power. This is politics 101. It is what I would explain to first-year political science students. Politics is rooted in conflict. Sometimes we settle that conflict through compromise, but politics is ultimately rooted in a balance of power.

That is why I was surprised to hear our NDP colleague saying today that the Bloc Québécois members were finally seeing the light and joining the NDP in saying that there should not be an election during a pandemic. I found that shocking, since the NDP has completely destroyed the balance of power between it and the government by constantly voting with the government. The NDP will no longer be able to advocate for its own proposals, since the current government knows that the NDP will ultimately vote with it. That is diminishing the role of the opposition. I think that is the worst thing that can happen, especially in the context of a minority government.

Today, we are looking for some form of co-operation with the Liberal government, but they are dismissing our offer out of hand. In addition, to add insult to injury, when we make political decisions and try to advance our interests, such as seniors and health transfers, the Liberals say that we are putting their government at risk because we are not voting with them.

When we voted against the budget because it did not include the things we thought were essential, they said we wanted to trigger an election. It is no longer possible to criticize the Liberal government, because they will accuse us of wanting to trigger an election. That is the worst thing anyone can do in politics. It is called a circular argument.

Government Orders

In other words, if we vote against the Liberal government, that means that we basically want an election. We do not have the option of saying what we want. At the same time, we cannot say anything about how we should not hold an election during a pandemic or about how Bill C-19 is a disaster, because the government will tell us that we are being partisan and that we voted against its budget. It is the perfect way to paralyze the opposition and ensure that there is no political debate. To me, a party that does not want political debate is a party that is in decline, or at least a party that has very little respect for democracy.

I think that we witnessed this today. Some people seem to operate on a sliding scale when it comes to respecting democracy. However, democracy works through negotiation, and we have seen these negotiations many times in the House. Earlier I shared the example of what we did with CUSMA. Another example would be from early on in the pandemic, when we were able to have rational debates with the government about how to manage the pandemic. Through these debates, we were able to come to a consensus in the House to improve the wage subsidy. This negotiation process is essential to how Parliament works, and this is especially true with a minority government.

How did the government put an end to these negotiations? It imposed a gag order, or time allocation, on Bill C-19. That is the worst thing it could do. It is completely unacceptable for a government to use time allocation on a bill that directly affects our democratic processes and principles. I have not seen a single political pundit agree with this move. Worse yet, the NDP supported the government's time allocation motion on Bill C-19, which is completely unacceptable.

Several people who are close to me often ask me if there will be an election. The reason I keep getting asked that question in my riding is that people are worried. Today, I do not have much reassurance to offer them, because when I see what the Liberal government is doing, I am convinced it is waiting for the right time to trigger an election, pandemic notwithstanding.

● (1705)

[English]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade.

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UNITED NATIONS DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES ACT

BILL C-15—NOTICE OF TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.): Madam Speaker, an agreement could not be reached under the provisions of Standing Orders 78(1) or 78(2) with respect to the third reading stage of Bill C-15, an act respecting the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Business of Supply

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

* * *

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—ELECTIONS DURING A PANDEMIC

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member talked about running in circles, yet he did the exact same thing in his speech. He went on and on about this government not wanting to work to build consensus, but then two sentences later he talked about how the government worked with the Bloc Québécois when it came to CUSMA and the COVID relief efforts. He is being hypocritical in his own statement.

More important, this government has not shown that it has an interest in going to an election. The only thing this government has done is introduce a piece of legislation based on the request of the Chief Electoral Officer to put together a bill in the event that an election does happen, unlike opposition members, who have been doing nothing but support non-confidence in this government.

Can the member explain why he is so obsessed with thinking we want an election, when we have not said anything to suggest that we do?

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Simard: Madam Speaker, I am happy to hear you say that.

Your government was ready to work collaboratively, so long as there was no electoral window suitable for triggering an election. Perhaps unfortunately, you saw my Conservative colleagues drop a little in the polls.

You see this window opening, and your first reflex is to bring back Bill C-19. You bring it back to us under time allocation—

[English]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: On a point of order, Madam Speaker, at least according to the translation, the member said “you” or “your” a number of times, and I do not think he is talking about you specifically, Madam Speaker.

• (1710)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I appreciate the hon. member's point of order on that. I was going to correct the member after he finished his 22 seconds that he has left to respond before I go to the next question and comment.

[Translation]

The hon. member for Jonquière knows he must address the Chair.

Mr. Mario Simard: Madam Speaker, I am finished.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

It is pretty clear that the government is in a hurry to call an election in the middle of a pandemic. It introduced the bill in December, it has cut off the debate and now it wants to get the bill to committee. However, the Liberals are filibustering in committee.

Does the member think the Liberals are in a hurry to call an election?

[English]

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Madam Speaker, on a point of order, I just wanted to alert everyone to the fact that the interpretation and the member's voice were at the same level of sound, so it was very hard to hear the interpretation.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): We are going to add some time to the clock so that the question can be re-asked.

[Translation]

The interpretation seems to be working now.

[English]

The hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton will re-ask her question, and then we will restart the time once we get to the answer.

[Translation]

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Madam Speaker, it is clear to me that the Liberals are in a hurry to call an election while we are in a pandemic. The government introduced the bill in December, before the committee had completed its report. Now the government wants to send the bill to committee. However, the Liberals are filibustering in committee.

Would the member agree that the Liberals are in a hurry to call an election?

Mr. Mario Simard: Madam Speaker, I completely agree with my colleague.

The Liberals realized that the NDP was going to vote with them come hell or high water. Their only objective and the only option for triggering an election now is to quickly pass Bill C-19.

If they do not want an election during the pandemic, then Bill C-19 is no longer of any use. I completely agree with my colleague.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Madam Speaker, the Bloc Québécois keeps repeating that voting against a non-confidence motion does not equate to wanting an election.

Could my colleague tell us what he thinks would happen if all the opposition parties had voted like the Bloc Québécois, that is in favour of a non-confidence motion?

Does he believe that that would not trigger an election?

Mr. Mario Simard: Madam Speaker, as I was explaining, the balance of power that opposition parties have means that sometimes they have to vote against the government. If opposition parties are prevented from using their vote to support the balance of power, then democracy is no more. That is what I said.

We cannot accuse a party of wanting to have an election every time it votes against the government. That is oversimplifying things, in my opinion.

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Madam Speaker, in a minority government, both the government and the opposition parties have a responsibility to ensure that an election is not triggered.

As the NDP member just said in her question, if we lose a confidence vote, then we automatically have an election.

Why is the Bloc Québécois refusing the proposed amendment to add the responsibility of the opposition parties?

Mr. Mario Simard: Madam Speaker, if the government does not want to trigger an election and if it is genuine in saying it does not want an election, all it has to do is accept the offer made by the leader of the Bloc Québécois and the proposal he made yesterday.

I will ask him a question of my own: Why did the government not take the offer?

• (1715)

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Madam Speaker, I cannot wait to start campaigning and present the Conservatives' plan for forming government once again to Canadians.

There is one big caveat, however, and that is the pandemic. This is why we agree with our colleagues in the Bloc Québécois that a pandemic is not the time for an election campaign.

How is any party supposed to go meet Canadians and present their plans? The only thing Canadians will see is the party leaders on TV. That is not how a campaign works.

We need to be able to get out there and meet people like in normal times, and the only way to do that is to wait until after the pandemic.

At that point, the Conservatives will be able to defeat the Liberals and form government.

[English]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): It being 5:15 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forth with every question necessary to dispose of the business of supply.

The question is on the motion.

If a member of a recognized party present in the House wishes to request a recorded division or that the motion be adopted on division, I would invite them to rise and indicate it to the Chair.

[Translation]

Ms. Andr  anne Larouche: Madam Speaker, I would ask for a recorded division on the motion.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Pursuant to an order made on Monday, January 25, the division stands deferred until Tuesday, May 25, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

Private Members' Business

[English]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, I believe if you seek it you will find unanimous consent to see the clock as 5:30, so we can move on to Private Members' Business.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Does the hon. member have unanimous consent to see the clock at 5:30?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): It being 5:30, the House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

SUPPORT OF OIL AND GAS SECTOR

The House resumed from April 20 consideration of the motion.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): As we resume debate, I will remind the hon. member for Calgary Centre that he had four minutes left for his debate.

The hon. member for Calgary Centre.

Mr. Greg McLean (Calgary Centre, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank all my colleagues for showing up for the second half of my speech, which exalts the benefits of the oil and gas industry to Canada as a whole. I will be less animated this time because I have heard so many negative reports from my colleagues on the other side of the House about the oil and gas industry, which has been the lifeblood of this country for decades.

It has contributed so much toward our lifestyle and toward our support for social programs. It has been an industrial driver. It has led to many industries in Canada. That is really clear today when we look at what we are dealing with with Line 5, which I will remind members of the House originates in western Canada.

Its source is in western Canada. It then traverses down through the United States to Superior, Wisconsin. Line 5 then continues from there to go through the United States, through both parts of Michigan and back into Canada at Sarnia, where it delivers 540,000 barrels a day of oil and other petroleum products for the benefit of Canada. Ontario uses a lot of that, and some of it goes to the refineries in Quebec as well.

A number of secondary industries use the oil as well for manufacturing, so there are plastics that are manufactured and there are petrochemicals. The backbone, the industrial part of our country, depends on that supply line. The logistics are there, and we have built a whole national manufacturing industry around this Canadian resource. It has benefited the whole of the country to such a great degree, not just counting our social programs, which I spoke about last time.

Private Members' Business

I will say one thing that I have heard again this week, this time from the Minister of Infrastructure, was that this is a subsidized industry. I will inform all of my parliamentary colleagues here that is complete balderdash. The minister is famous for saying that, if you repeat a falsehood many times, people will eventually begin to believe it.

That was a falsehood as this is an industry that contributes approximately \$24 billion of economic rent to this country on average. It does receive tax credits, just like every other industry with the same types of technological advancement that benefit Canada, and this applies to every other industry as well.

Let us talk about clean technology. Of the \$2 billion in clean tech investments, \$1.5 billion occurs in the oil and gas sector. It is very forward looking. Think about the solutions to greenhouse gas emissions that are dependent upon reducing our CO₂ emissions. That happens in this industry. This is an industry that is responsibly spending money and finding new technologies that will benefit the environment and this country.

We are working against misinformation here, but I will stand with pride on an industry that has benefited this country for decades and should continue to do so. We will continue to monitor it and make sure that we are adding value throughout the piece. I am very proud of my colleague from Edmonton Manning for bringing this piece forward.

• (1720)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I probably could have come up with a few questions for the member, all related to some of the comments Conservatives have raised, time and again, to try to portray the federal government as not responding to the needs of the Prairies, or to a certain degree Atlantic Canada, with respect to this particular industry. This is obviously not the case.

The motion before us seeks, in essence, to recognize the importance of Canada's oil and gas sector, while at the same time disputing the feasibility of more sustainable options and ultimately removing tax and regulatory barriers to the sectors that are responsible for expansion.

I think what needs to be done, right at the beginning, is to recognize the important role energy workers have played in Canada, both historically and today. The member is right when he says that, from a historic perspective, it is an industry that has contributed immensely to where we are as a nation today. One of the reasons Alberta was able to contribute so much over the years to equalization was its oil and gas revenues. The revenues that provinces like Manitoba received through equalization payments ultimately provided us with opportunities to pave roads or provide health care to our citizens. I recognize the many contributions from past generations of revenue to the central coffers that was redistributed to different provinces so that we were able to provide that type of social programming.

Where I really give the credit is to those energy workers. They helped to build this country, and they will be the same people who will help to lower emissions, build additional renewable energy capacity and meet our climate goals. I really do believe that. Canada's energy workers understand the reality of climate change.

I find it interesting nowadays, when we talk about the economy and the environment, to try to figure out where the Conservatives fall, particularly on the issue of the environment. It was not that long ago that the Conservative party had its annual general meeting where they, in essence, denied climate change as a reality. Members can imagine Conservatives from across the country coming together and denying it, and saying it is not a reality. A couple of weeks later, after a few somersaults and backflips, the Conservative party now supports a price on pollution. I have found it very interesting to watch, based on many of the comments from Conservatives in the past.

I suspect that even with this particular resolution, the motion that we are talking about today, had it not been for the leader of the Conservative party reversing his position on the price on pollution, I am sure we would have heard more Conservatives, as they have in the past, criticize us as a government for the price on pollution. I can appreciate that the Conservative way of thinking seems to be about four or five years behind on certain issues, and I would suggest to members that this is one of those issues.

When I think of the oil and gas industry, there is a huge difference between the government of the day, the Liberal party, and the Conservatives, the Bloc, the NDP and, to a certain extent, the Green Party.

• (1725)

We have always argued that we need to take into consideration the environment, indigenous issues, consultations and working with other stakeholders to make things work, so we can in fact deal with both the industry and the environment. We saw some fairly encouraging signs of that when we got the Trans Mountain project, which shows that governments can make a difference, just like the B.C. NDP government did on the LNG project.

It is the only the NDP in opposition in Ottawa that tends to say no to natural resource development. While in government, both the NDP in Alberta and in B.C. recognized what we did, which is that there is value there. We need to work with industry, stakeholders and indigenous leaders to have that balance. The national government has been very successful.

At the same time, it is really important that we understand the issue of climate change and the environment. Canadians are very concerned about it. At the end of the day, we cannot have one without the other. If we compared Canada's energy sector to energy sectors in other countries, we would find that Canada, through technology, development and so forth, is doing exceptionally well.

We are very fortunate to have all kinds of options. In my home province of Manitoba, for example, we have Manitoba Hydro, which is renewable, clean energy. There were some negatives we had to get over, such as the flooding that was caused as a direct result of some of the dams that were created, but it is renewable energy. The potential that has for Manitoba is quite significant.

Working with provincial jurisdictions and others on how we can continue to build on renewable energy is really important. I think Canadians want us to focus some attention on that, but it does not mean we have to neglect other areas.

I always find it interesting when the Conservatives, particularly from Alberta, say that they are the only ones who can truly represent energy workers when, in fact, they did not build or see any pipelines go to tidewaters. There was nothing in the 10 years of Stephen Harper. All they continued to see was the market go south, 99%-plus from when Stephen Harper became prime minister to when he left office.

Under the Liberal administration, we are saying that we need to diversify. Not only do we need to diversify, but we also need to have a process in place to protect the environment and ensure proper consultation is done on all projects. If that does not happen, then chances are it will not fly anyway.

At the end of the day, we need to continue to work with energy workers. They are part of the solution. The energy sectors in the Prairies and Atlantic Canada have a very important role to play, not only from a national perspective but from an international perspective as well.

• (1730)

We could potentially share some of the technologies and the methodology that we use with other jurisdictions, which would make the world—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We have to resume debate.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Repentigny.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Madam Speaker, first off, is this 2021? I only ask because, after reading Motion No. 61 moved by my colleague from Edmonton Manning, I wonder if I travelled back in time.

This motion echos the language of another century. It illustrates the deep divide between a green, progressive Quebec that is ready to deal with climate change and an official opposition that, unsurprisingly, is digging in deeper and deeper in oil.

What part of “climate emergency” does the Conservative Party not understand? The Bloc Québécois is firmly against this motion, but I do not have enough time to raise every argument I have against this motion from top to bottom, so I will limit myself to paragraphs (i) and (iii) of the motion.

Paragraph (i) calls on the House to recognize that:

(i) replacing oil and gas with more environmentally sustainable options is not technologically or economically feasible;

Private Members' Business

I would like to come back to what a former Saudi oil minister said in 2000, “The Stone Age did not end for lack of stone, and the Oil Age will end long before the world runs out of oil.” That is where we are right now.

By saying the transition is not feasible, the motion flatly denies the growth potential of renewable energy in Canada. It is just not true for Quebec, for Canada or for the rest of the world. It is so off the mark that I want to point out that the renewable energy sector has grown at an unprecedented rate, according to the International Energy Agency's 2020 report. According to the IEA, “Last year, the increase in renewable capacity accounted for 90% of the entire global power sector's expansion”.

Earlier this week, *Le Devoir* reported on massive wind farms under construction in China. We may have legitimate complaints about China, but it has made huge strides in beginning its transition while maintaining its economic growth.

In the United States, the Biden administration has given the green light to the Vineyard Wind project, which will include 84 turbines producing 800 megawatts and supplying power to 400,000 households. By 2030, wind power projects that are currently under way could supply enough energy for 10 million households.

This transition is not only technologically feasible, it is already under way and is economically necessary. I do not want to dwell on that, so I will simply say that countless investment funds understand this already.

If the Conservative Party is determined to remain in the last century with this unfortunate and backward point of view that will deprive future generations of access to economic progress and prosperity, that is their choice. Just because the Conservatives refuse to consider the immense progress of renewable energy technologies and to recognize their potential does not mean that they do not exist. Willful blindness does have its limits.

Quebec's innovative and creative society, rich in clean energy and renewable resources, is eager to contribute to the post-pandemic world. Where do the Conservative members from Quebec stand on this issue? Do they not have a responsibility to promote the regions they represent? Repeating the same message over and over again, just with different wording, does not make it any more true.

Paragraph (iii) of the motion calls on the House to recognize that:

(iii) Canadian oil and natural gas are produced with the highest environmental standards in the world, and domestic producers are global environmental leaders and responsible corporate citizens;

Here is the truth. Even if Canadian producers complied with the highest environmental standards, we are talking about the standards set for their industry, which is an undeniably polluting industry. Complying with environmental regulations is not a moral accomplishment, nor is it an act of good corporate citizenship; it is a requirement.

Private Members' Business

Sure, producers make an effort to mitigate some environmental impacts by using technology that improves efficiency. However, the problem remains that greenhouse gas emissions associated with these industries are the primary source of emissions in Canada. These industries, from production all the way to the end use of this resource, account for 81% of our total emissions.

Even more worrisome, the technologies to make operations more efficient simply allow for increased production. There is not a single technology that is capable of reversing the very nature of this industry, which will forever be incompatible with the Paris targets. I remind members that the signatory states to this agreement committed to preventing the climate catastrophes that are threatening life as we know it now, not just for polar bears or belugas, but for humans as well.

• (1735)

Greenhouse gas emissions have reached troubling levels. Greenhouse gas emissions directly produced by energy industries have increased by 38.5% since 1990. In 1990, oil and gas emitted 106 megatonnes of CO₂ compared to 195 megatonnes in 2017. In 1990, oil sands operations emitted 15 megatonnes of CO₂, while in 2017 they emitted 81 megatonnes.

I remind members that Canada has 0.5% of the world's population and is responsible for 16% of all carbon emissions. I think that the worst phrase I have ever heard is "green oil". I even am disgusted putting those two words together. The Canadian industry began using another phrase because "green oil" drew outrage. Now we hear "the greenest oil in the world". No. The oil sands are an environmental disaster that has resulted in clear-cut forests, destroyed landscapes, air pollution and the contamination of water tables. All these sad realities and many others have been well documented.

You cannot develop the third-largest oil field in the world and think you are doing the planet a favour when it comes to climate change. That is not how it works. The Bloc Québécois will repeat this as long as it takes: The government must stop subsidizing fossil fuels. Our position reflects what Quebeckers want. We are proposing that we create wealth and avoid generating even more greenhouse gases.

The Bloc Québécois believes in the principle of a just transition. This involves recognizing that it would be unjust to expect workers and their families to make this transition happen overnight, especially since they are the primary victims of the crisis in the energy sector and of the challenges associated with climate change.

Our leader, the member for Beloeil—Chambly, has said more than once that the obscene amounts of public money, billions of dollars, invested in Trans Mountain should be put towards helping the workers out west through the transition and establishing geothermal, wind and clean energy sources in these areas. The parliamentary secretary was just saying that Trans Mountain shows that government can make a difference. That is true, but only if it acknowledges its mistake.

In a study published in March, Simon Fraser University confirmed that the pipeline will put taxpayers close to \$12 billion in the hole. The facts are clear. The government must abandon the pipeline and invest in renewable energy. Even BP, Total and Shell

are more lucid than the government. Believe it or not, given shrinking demand for oil, these industries and companies are moving their investments over to green energy.

As the saying goes, a fault confessed is half redressed. Is there any hope that the government will admit it made a mistake and start walking its constant talk about fighting climate change for real? The government loves to use the word "leadership", it really does, but true leadership shows in actions, policies and responsible legislation. A government embodies leadership when it has the courage to make tough decisions and stick by them.

I still believe that the Conservative Party is not some monolithic organization. Conservative MPs are ready to consider that climate change is the challenge of the century. However I will tread with caution in these considerations because, apart from withdrawing from the Kyoto protocol, the 10-year reign of a Conservative government resulted in the review of the environmental assessment process for the sole purpose of reducing barriers for oil projects, major cuts to climate research, the muzzling of government experts preventing them from speaking publicly on topics related to their expertise, and, now, this motion asking members of the House to celebrate the existence of the fossil fuel industry. Members will forgive the play on words, but it is high time Conservative members pulled their heads out of the tar sands.

I will close with the following words, which are just as important. The current government should stop saying one thing and then its opposite. It should seize, immediately and firmly, the opportunity presented to it, namely to be responsible, diligent and consistent regarding its commitment to put climate action at the centre of all its governmental and environmental decisions.

Other countries have done it. What is the Canadian government waiting for?

• (1740)

[English]

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am virtually here in the House today to speak to Motion No. 61, which was put forward by the member for Edmonton Manning. It is entitled "Support of oil and gas sector". There is no doubt that fossil fuels have brought wealth to our country. I believe that this motion is based in concern, a very real one, about the workers in this sector. It is a concern that I share.

With respect to the great benefits we have received because of this sector, I hope that all members of the House are ready to recognize and accept that it is time to find a new path forward. The reality of climate change is that it is happening across the planet. It is changing our world in a way that scientists are telling us about again and again. There is no time to wait. It is time to move forward and be progressive.

I hear all too often from the Conservatives in this place that Canada has just a tiny portion of emissions compared with those of other countries. That is simply not the case, and I am working for a country that I want to see as a leader and an innovator in facing the worldwide climate crisis.

Recently we conducted a study at the committee of indigenous and northern affairs on food security in the most northern communities of this country. Again and again, we heard testimony from those communities that the impacts of climate change are at the top of the list. The environment in their communities is changing so quickly that there is absolutely no time for them to adapt, and with the high cost of food, this reality is leaving people behind and hungry.

This motion has eight substantive parts. Today I will address several of them.

First, the motion states:

- (i) replacing oil and gas with more environmentally sustainable options is not technologically or economically feasible

That is simply not true. These statements are frustrating to me. There was a time when the technologies of today did not exist. They exist now because of the significant investment of visionaries who saw the world in a new way. The reality is those people are here now, and technologies that are more sustainable are developing quickly. Investments are happening, and it is high time the Government of Canada increased its support to innovation.

• (1745)

I am also frustrated by this comment because of the simple reality that we are talking about a non-renewable resource. That means it will end. The Conservative vision seems to believe that we will still be here, on this planet, if we keep using this resource in the way we are today. I do not agree with this idea and I say this confidently, knowing that most scientists in the relevant fields keep saying repeatedly, in so many different ways, that this is happening, that the climate crisis is here and we fundamentally have to change. The fact that Canada, the government, is not listening is terrifying to me. It is time for bold solutions and investing in a future that leaves our children with a planet that is livable.

All too often when we discuss the shift to a low-carbon reality, Conservatives repeat that it cannot be done, that it is too expensive or that people in Canada do not believe in or stand to support it. Whenever I hear this, it makes me think of a leader I greatly admire, who once told all Canadians “Do not let them tell you that it cannot be done.” What I hear is that the people of Canada expect us to do this. They are becoming more and more disappointed and cynical about feeble government responses to climate change.

Options that are more environmentally sustainable are technologically feasible. The electrification of Canada's vehicles is happening. It is happening faster than was expected. Even the most optimistic experts could not have imagined the progress we are seeing. The results are in: A KPMG survey found that 70% of Canadians want their next car to be electric.

Conservatives admitted this in their late and somewhat confusing plan to fight climate change. I am still a little concerned about their membership voting on whether or not climate change is real, when

scientists have been very clear, repeatedly. I am also concerned about the other reality, that Conservatives are unclear on their position regarding climate change and what is happening in our environment. Hopefully, we will see some clarity soon.

Private Members' Business

Canada knows that to fuel electric vehicles we need non-emitting, clean electrical sources. Already, 80% of Canada's electricity is non-emitting. Renewable solutions like wind and solar projects, combined with utility-grade storage and strategic renewal of our electrical grid, can be built to fill in the difference. These solutions are economically feasible. Wind and solar are the cheapest energy sources on the planet.

Even with this knowledge, Canadians watch as both Conservatives and Liberals throw billions of dollars at the fossil fuel industry, building more and more, larger and larger pipelines in a desperate attempt to pump oil out of the ground faster, right at a time when the oil demand is predicted to decline. The demand must decline, and decline rapidly. As countries look to live up to the Paris targets, it must decline if we are to halt the horrific impacts of climate change. The cost of this inaction is in the trillions of dollars.

Second, the motion says, “Canada's energy needs require the use of oil and gas to heat Canadian homes”. Energy efficiency in our homes and buildings in Canada is one of the lowest-hanging fruits in the fight against climate change. If Canada invested in a serious program to retrofit buildings, reduce energy consumption and change building codes to ensure that new buildings use little to no energy, we can easily get rid of a quarter of our carbon dioxide emissions. The technology is there. Again, Canada needs to ensure that the investment is supported.

The motion also states, “Canadian oil and natural gas are produced with the highest environmental standards in the world”. There is no doubt that most domestic oil and gas producers are doing their very best to reduce their industrial emissions. Yes, we have some of the highest environmental standards in the world, which Canadians expect. This does not change the fact that the oil sands will require an investment of over \$200 billion to rehabilitate. This is very concerning, as no company has put that sort of money aside to do this work. In Canada, we see companies abandoning idle wells, and billions of taxpayer dollars will be spent to clean them up.

Private Members' Business

• (1750)

This motion also states that Canadian resources create Canadian jobs. Our country was built on natural resources. That is why I brought forward Motion No. 53, “Principles for a sustainable and equitable future”. The history of Canada is one rich in resources and the extraction of resources. The reality is that things are changing, and as they change, workers need to be at the core of the solutions. My motion addresses this by asking for workers to be supported during the change and that resources flow from the federal government to all ridings in this country.

Most high-resource industry areas are in rural and remote areas in Canada. Significant wealth has come out of those regions, and when resources change or are limited, they are often left behind. My motion addresses these concerns. While we recognize that addressing the climate emergency is a priority, we also have to make sure that solutions are local and that the potential jobs that are there are invested in to support our workers.

This motion also speaks to the fact that first nations communities receive some income from these projects. This cannot be taken lightly, especially as we must all recognize in this place that where we sit has created legislation for well over 100 years to assure that economic marginalization continues in first nations communities.

As we face the climate crisis, the energy transition is key, and working with innovation and first nations communities must be at the very core of every decision made. We need measures in this country that look at sustainability and support everyday workers, and measures that address fairness and not giving so much power to big corporations that take money and leave Canadians holding the costs of fixing things and workers without a job. The motion does not address this; therefore, I cannot support it.

Mr. Chris Lewis (Essex, CPC): Madam Speaker, today I rise in the House to speak to this important motion introduced by my colleague and friend, the MP for Edmonton Manning.

I stand in support of Canada's oil and gas sector. I stand on behalf of families in my riding of Essex and the many workers in the energy sector across Windsor and Essex, whose jobs are in jeopardy because of Governor Whitmer's intended closure of the Line 5 pipeline.

Before I get into the issue of Line 5, which is important to my riding, my region, my province and Canadians in Quebec and the east, as well as to the border issue, and the significant contributions of Canada's oil and gas sector as a whole, please indulge me as I share some personal news.

Last weekend I received a promotion, not in this House, but something much more important than that. I went from being a father of three to a father of three and a grandfather of one. As tradition has it in my family I am now known by this precious little boy as “Pip”. My grandson, Levi James Lewis entered the world on May 8. He is the first-born son of proud parents Cody and Grace. As other grandparents in this House can attest, there is no feeling like it. When I left for Ottawa on Sunday he was still in the hospital. Our first meeting was virtual. I can hardly wait to get home to wrap my arms around him.

Now I will get back to the important issue of the day.

With the intended closure of Line 5 much is at stake, not just in the present, but also in the future. As the current government prints money, deficit spends, accumulates massive debt and jeopardizes key industries such as our oil and gas sector, will the next generation be able to provide for their family, own a home or even buy a car?

For over six decades, the Line 5 pipeline has delivered crude oil and other petroleum products across Wisconsin and Michigan to Sarnia through the Straits of Mackinac. In all that time, the pipeline has operated efficiently and responsibly. It has never experienced a leak. The pipeline is tested regularly with the latest and most advanced technology available. Recent inspection reports show that Line 5, from an engineering and integrity perspective, is like new and in excellent condition. Nevertheless, Enbridge has been working on a plan to reroute the pipes through a tunnel beneath the bedrock of the straits.

According to The Daily Mining Gazette:

The Line 5 crossing features an exceptional and incredibly durable enamel coating, and pipe walls that are three times as thick—a minimum of 0.812 inches—as those of a typical pipeline.

It further states:

...renowned for the Hoover Dam [the builder] built Line 5 in an area of the Straits that would minimize potential corrosion due to lack of oxygen and the cold water temperature.

Built in 1953, this feat of engineering, Line 5, currently has 540,000 barrels a day flow through it, providing half of all the supply of light crude oil, light synthetic crude oil and natural gas liquids in Ontario and Quebec. That is a lot of households that rely on this ready supply of crude for their basic needs. While they put the highest value on the importance of protecting our waterways, particularly the magnificent Great Lakes, which just so happen to be in my backyard, they support measures to preserve our environment for future generations. Shutting down this pipeline will have catastrophic consequences in the near future not only for the workers whose livelihoods will be jeopardized, but also for those citizens, communities and industries that are dependent on this pipeline for an affordable supply of energy.

To put it in real terms, this oil heats homes and businesses, fuels vehicles and powers industry. This includes fuelling Ontario's airports, including the Pearson International Airport. As the airline industry makes a comeback, the last thing it needs is fuel shortages at exorbitant costs. Small businesses left in tatters because of the pandemic cannot afford another hit. Workers and their families need the stability these well-paying jobs provide. Many farmers use propane to heat homes, barns and commercial greenhouses, as well as to dry the grain. Sourcing propane elsewhere could drive the costs of agriculture production up, along with the cost of food for Canadian families.

• (1755)

Aaron Henry, the senior director of natural resources and sustainable growth at the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, describes Line 5 as “probably one of the most critical pieces of infrastructure for energy use in Central Canada”. Further, shutting down this pipeline will not reduce the demand: It will only shift the transport to other modes, by truck, rail or ship, with potentially more risks.

The Minister of Natural Resources told the House that “it would take 800 rail cars and 2,000 trucks in Canada alone to move an equivalent amount of petroleum products”.

There is a tendency among environmentalists, in their surrogate legislatures, to minimize the importance of the oil and gas sector and to magnify its supposed negatives. I know that it is fashionable to do so, but I view such tactics as counterproductive as Canada moves in the direction of a greener economy. If we are going to move certain industries to zero emissions, such as the auto sector, we need to root our goals in reality. To do otherwise is to create unnecessary hardship and suffering and to risk energy poverty instead of substantial growth.

Even though ideological opponents of the oil and gas sector are loath to admit it, the revenues from the oil and gas sector provide significant revenue to government coffers. These revenues facilitate transfer payments that benefit all Canadians and allow Canada to afford the social programs upon which all Canadians depend. As well, our technology is among the cleanest and most advanced in the world. We should be capitalizing on that as part of our contribution to our green global initiatives.

The current government's record on the oil and gas industry is among its saddest legacies. It alleges support for Line 5, the minister describing it as non-negotiable, but the government has done little to demonstrate that support. I was encouraged to hear the minister say in QP today that Canada has worked with several provincial ministers of energy to file an amicus brief with the Michigan court. That is commendable, and good news indeed. However, the urgency and importance of keeping Line 5 open for business needs effort on several fronts, not just last-minute court briefs. It also requires political will.

Has the Prime Minister called President Biden? Has he made the case directly to the President for upholding the 1970 treaty with the U.S. that guaranteed the uninterrupted transit of crude oil across the border? In January 2021, the leader of Canada's Conservatives and the official opposition stated:

Enbridge Line 5 is an essential part of our Canadian energy supply chain. The results of the cancellation are clear: immediate and alarming fuel shortages across

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Ontario and Quebec, increased truck and rail transportation of oil, increased fuel prices, and greater environmental risks.

He went on to say:

[The Prime Minister] and his government need to ensure this vital infrastructure link remains uninterrupted and jobs are not lost. Canada can't afford another Liberal failure like Keystone XL.

In February 2021, he urged the acting American ambassador to Canada to tell Washington to preserve the Line 5 pipeline to the United States. He appealed to the Americans' self-interest, saying correctly that shutting down Line 5 would have a negative economic impact on both countries.

To wrap up, so far the current government's approach to Line 5 looks a lot like its approach to Keystone XL in November. It is praying for the best and hoping the worst does not come to pass. That is not leadership. Canada needs real action to secure our future.

Today, the leader of the official opposition again raised the issue in the House, saying, “Tomorrow, the Governor of Michigan was to shut down the Line 5 pipeline that is critical to the Canadian economy. After months of inaction, this morning, mere hours before the deadline, the Liberal government failed again”. These are legitimate questions. The Conservative leader has exemplified true leadership in the defence of Line 5.

In closing, I wish to thank again my colleague, the MP for Edmonton Manning, for introducing this motion and giving me the opportunity to speak to the importance of Line 5. Thousands of Canadians are depending on the government taking action.

• (1800)

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The member for Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia.

There are seven minutes remaining before the right of reply.

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Madam Speaker, it is obviously always a pleasure to speak on behalf of the Bloc Québécois and my constituents in Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia.

Honestly, I do not even know where to start after reading the terms of the motion. I am certainly not the first to do this, but I still want to use these seven minutes to break down this motion together.

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The member for Edmonton Manning is calling on the government to recognize that “replacing oil and gas with more environmentally sustainable options is not technologically or economically feasible”.

I see a huge problem right there, because we have many reasons to believe that the opposite is true. It is possible to replace oil and gas with more environmentally sustainable options and it is technologically feasible to do so. In fact, this is already being done in Quebec and in other places. Furthermore, scientists say that oil is a finite fossil fuel energy resource and that we will eventually need to learn to live without it.

Many have already replaced this energy source with electricity produced by wind energy, for example, which is a renewable energy. Wind will always exist, but the same cannot be said for oil.

I would even add that I find it absolutely deplorable that a company like Enercon has to close its Matane plant because wind energy is not valued as much as oil is. I find it absolutely deplorable that a company like Marmen, also in Matane, has to lay off more than half of its employees because it has no work to offer them. The company is not getting enough contracts to produce wind turbine blades because our governments do not place enough value on renewable energy projects.

Instead, the federal government continues to provide subsidies to the oil and gas industry, knowing full well that it will never meet its greenhouse gas reduction targets if it continues to do so.

For the benefit of those who say it is not economically feasible, I reiterate that there are several indications to the contrary. Last June, the International Renewable Energy Agency, an intergovernmental organization with 161 member countries, reported that more than half of the renewable energy capacity added in 2019 was cheaper than any other available option on the fossil fuel side.

The best part of all this is that solar and wind energy prices are going to continue to drop dramatically, which means there is a golden opportunity here to stimulate the economy while doing good for the environment.

With all due respect, the first item of this motion simply does not hold water. It is not only possible but actually necessary to replace oil and gas with greener options, and this is feasible, both technologically and economically.

I would add that the energy transition we must make is fundamental. We must change the ways we produce and consume energy to eliminate our dependency on oil. We can move to a low-carbon economy by replacing fossil fuels with renewable energies. By stating that the transition is impossible, the motion clearly denies the growth potential of renewable energy in Canada. That is just not true, for Quebec and for Canada.

Coming back to the economic argument, it has to be said that the oil and gas industry is primarily responsible for pollution, which is very costly. Greenpeace estimates that it costs approximately \$50 billion a year. Besides the economic cost, there is also a cost in terms of human lives. Air pollution contributes to the premature death of approximately 21,000 people in Canada every year.

Therefore, we absolutely must not deny the fact that burning fossil fuels impacts our health and our economy. Decarbonizing the economy helps reduce the economic costs associated with non-renewable energy.

Renewable energy sources are definitely profitable, according to Desjardins and the Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec, who are increasingly investing in them. The Desjardins Group announced in 2020 that its 17 SocieTerra funds and portfolios would completely move away from oil and pipelines. The investment in fossil fuels went from 5% to 0%. That speaks volumes. Even investment firms think it is time to walk away from oil.

That being said, on top of wind power, hydro and solar power both have a future in Quebec, as do geothermal energy, offshore wind power, tidal power, bioenergy and forest biomass.

In Quebec, the more we power our industries and transportation with our own clean energy, the less we need to import oil and gas, which will do wonders for our trade balance. We will be less dependent on oil and we will pollute less.

I realize that this motion contains several elements and that I will not be able to go over all of them in detail. I certainly had a lot to say on this point. If I may, I would like to quickly address the third part of the motion, which asks the government to recognize that “Canadian oil and natural gas are produced with the highest environmental standards in the world, and domestic producers are global environmental leaders and responsible corporate citizens”.

● (1805)

My colleague from Repentigny said it best, in her brilliant way. According to her, the truth is that even if oil and gas producers meet the highest environmental standards, they are meeting the highest standards set for their industry, which is still a polluting industry. Complying with environmental laws is not a great moral accomplishment, but rather a requirement.

The oil and natural gas producers of Canada are heavily publicizing their measures to minimize environmental impacts, and that is the same talk we hear from the Conservative Party. Even if producers are making efforts to mitigate certain environmental impacts or if they invest in technologies to improve efficiency, the fundamental problem remains: greenhouse gas emissions associated with these industries are the biggest source of Canada's emissions and they are incompatible with meeting our Paris targets and reaching the Liberals' much desired net-zero by 2050.

It is unfortunate to have to say it, but the main objective of producers remains to produce more, to sell more and to export more. I am perhaps in agreement with the part of the motion that says “using Canadian resources creates Canadian jobs”. Indeed, harnessing the power of water to produce hydroelectric energy creates many jobs for many Quebecers.

The Conservatives often forget that the oil industry is not the only job creator. If renewable energy sources were developed more and if we moved away from fossil fuels, it would certainly create jobs for people who might have lost theirs in another sector.

I also want to say a few words about the fifth point of the motion, which asks the government to recognize that “First Nations involved in Canada's oil and gas industry experience significant and profound positive economic effects, including higher rates of employment, higher incomes, and improved health and educational attainments”.

I assume that the first nations' deep attachment to their lands and the fact that building a pipeline on their lands without their consent is completely unacceptable was purposely omitted. The Conservatives seem to have quickly forgotten about the Wet'suwet'en nation's opposition to TransCanada's Coastal GasLink project since 2010. Their resistance came to a head last January, when the Wet'suwet'en feared a violent repression by the RCMP after an escalation of tensions surrounding the pipeline. I would not be so confident about claiming that first nations fully support of the oil and gas industry. I think we should ask them first.

As for the part of the motion that says that “Canada's oil and gas industry from Western to Atlantic Canada is essential to the well-being of the nation and should be celebrated”, I would just like to note that journalist Andrew Nikiforuk's book *Tar Sands* was published in French with the subtitle “Canada's shame”. The tar sands certainly do not deserve to be celebrated.

I will close by saying that the Bloc Québécois believes Quebec's future lies in ending our dependence on oil, using our electricity in our transportation, increasing the development of our renewable forest resources, and trying to develop a zero-emission plane.

Balancing the economy and the environment is not a constraint. Rather, it is an opportunity to create wealth. With all due respect to my Conservative colleagues, I think they should start considering this angle instead of clinging to an energy source that belongs in the last century and that is going to disappear one day anyway. That is the only way we will meet our greenhouse gas reduction targets and contribute our share to the global effort.

● (1810)

[*English*]

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Madam Speaker, before I begin my final remarks, for God's sake, can anyone tell me what the Bloc Québécois Party stands for?

Today is the last hour of debate on my private member's motion, Motion No. 61, before it goes to a vote next week. It has been a pleasure and an honour to present this motion and to listen to the discussion on it in this place.

I know that I have said before that this motion would call on the House and the government to support our oil and gas industry. I know that I have also said before, and I am happy to say again, that this industry deserves our support. It creates jobs for Canadians, for men and women from coast to coast to coast. These are jobs for Canadians of all stripes and creeds. It also puts food on the table

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and puts kids through school. It is an industry that I am happy to throw my support behind.

However, that is not all it does. It is also a massive source of government revenue from resource royalties and taxes. It provides a stream of revenue in the billions of dollars to our provincial and federal governments. Right now, while we are fighting a global pandemic, with deficits in the range of hundreds of billions of dollars, these are revenues we need so that we can fund health care programs and schools and support Canadians during the pandemic, which has brought so much hardship to all of us.

Just as importantly, not just to present but to the future Canadians, this industry has been at the forefront of developing green technologies and carbon capture technology. Our oil and gas industry is a world leader in green technologies and innovation, and just as importantly, it is a world leader in environmental preservation and restoration.

Our oil and gas sector needs our support more than ever. Not only is it under attack from special interests groups, but it is now under siege from the American Democrats' green strategy. Keystone XL was shut down by President Biden and now Line 5 is at risk thanks to Michigan's governor, Gretchen Whitmer. This line supplies oil and gas for essential public infrastructure, such as Toronto Pearson International Airport. If Line 5 is shut down, all Canadians from coast to coast to coast will feel the economic downturn, as gas prices will rise drastically across eastern Canada.

I would like to think the choice on how to vote on this motion is rather obvious. Our oil and gas industry does so much for Canadians and for Canada. There are few other industries that provide the triple whammy of good, well-paying jobs for Canadians, revenues to help fund programs in health care and education and an industry-wide commitment to help combat climate change. Our oil and gas sector is an industry that has done so much to help Canadians, directly or indirectly, and it is the reason that hundreds of thousands of Canadians are able to support their families.

As I said in the speech that I delivered when I introduced Motion No. 61, this is an industry that has done so much to support Canada. I think it is time that Canada, the House and this government support it. That is why I am asking that all of my colleagues support this motion, so that we can stand in support of one of Canada's most important industries.

● (1815)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): It being 6:18 p.m., the time provided for debate has expired.

Accordingly, the question is on the motion.

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If a member of a recognized party present in the House wishes to request a recorded division or that the motion be adopted on division, I would invite them to rise and indicate it to the Chair.

Mr. Bob Saroya: Madam Speaker, I request a recorded vote.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Pursuant to order made on Monday, January 25, the division stands deferred until Wednesday, May 26, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

• (1820)

[*English*]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Madam Speaker, on April 26, I posed a question to the Minister of Public Safety about gun safety and the answer I received missed the mark, so I am very grateful to have the opportunity for this follow-up question.

I was prompted to ask that question last month in response to a gangland-style shooting in broad daylight in my community of Langley, B.C. A man was shot and killed in front of the Langley Sportsplex where my grandkids play hockey, so it hit pretty close to home to see that on the six o'clock news that evening. It was reported that it was the third such gang-related killing in B.C.'s Lower Mainland in a period of a few weeks.

Fast-forward a couple of weeks and I am sad to report that the murders, in broad daylight, in crowded places in the Lower Mainland, continue, the most recent being this past Sunday, Mother Day's, at Vancouver International Airport. The Vancouver Sun reported that fatal shooting was the 10th in the Lower Mainland since the middle of April. People in B.C. are very concerned and, no, this not about supporting gun manufacturers, as the minister sarcastically suggested in his answer. My only concern is keeping our streets safe and I am supported in that by people in my constituency of Langley—Aldergrove, including the many hunters and sport shooters who live here. They, of all people, law-abiding citizens and lawful gun owners, want fewer, zero, illegal guns on our streets.

In his answer, the minister said that three ways that criminals get access to guns are being examined. They are smuggled across the border, they are stolen from lawful gun owners or they are criminally diverted, where people buy them legally, sell them illegally, or "straw purchasing". I thought I would fact-check the minister's answer and I was surprised to learn in the process that we do not really know the source of gun crimes because Canadian law enforcement agencies are not required to track this in any meaningful, consistent or reliable way and they do not always share this information.

There is not even a consistent definition of what a crime gun is. Is it a gun used in violent crime or is the definition so broad to also include guns, for example, owned by lawful gun owners who inad-

vertently allow their licences to lapse? This is a very important question because the answer could make the data we gather either very useful for developing policy or completely useless. Where is Canada in this data-gathering process?

According to the CBC about a year ago, May 2020, "Statistics Canada has started a project to increase the amount of information collected on guns used in crime." It is a good thing, of course, because we need good, reliable data, but I was quite surprised to learn that we are just starting that project.

In the same article, a professor at the University of Toronto, Dr. Lee, who studies gun violence, is quoted as saying:

It's important to determine the origin of crime guns because any attempts at legislating the sale and flow of firearms has to recognize that the United States is a global supplier of firearms....We just simply don't know how many guns are Canadian in origin versus American in origin.

This is my follow-up. Toronto's chief of police said that 80% of crime guns were smuggled into the—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Langley—Aldergrove for his comments today. I had the pleasure of sitting with him on the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

This is a very important issue and a reminder that every incident of gun violence in Canada is one too many. We really must do everything we can to combat this type of violence, which we have certainly seen too much of, and our government is determined to fight it.

However, with respect to what the member just said about the theft and diversion of legal firearms, I would like to set the record straight and remind the House that the chiefs of police of Edmonton, Saskatoon and Regina have all said that this is one of the most common forms of diversion of firearms from the legal to the illegal market.

It is also fair to say that, when the Conservatives were in power, their deficit reduction action plan slashed funding for the RCMP and the Canada Border Services Agency. They cut the human and technical resources dedicated to fighting gun violence in Canada.

It is equally fair to say that, at every opportunity, the Conservatives voted against more funding for our security agencies and police forces, funding that was intended to better equip them so they could combat diversion and smuggling, which is how weapons get into Canada and end up being used in violent incidents.

Lastly, it is fair to say that, if we look at the Conservative leader's stance on firearms, it is eerily similar in every way to the gun lobby's.

Let us look at what the government has done and continues to do to address gun violence in Canada.

Starting in 2018, we began investing more than \$327 million in the provinces, territories and local police forces to better equip them for law enforcement and prevention activities. We have invested in the RCMP and the Canada Border Services Agency to repair the damage done by the previous government, with its decade of austerity and cuts, precisely where it has the greatest impact on our police forces, in the fight against gun violence. Again in 2018, the Conservatives stayed true to form and voted against these reinvestments in our police forces, including the RCMP.

In the 2020 fall economic statement and in Bill C-14, we committed \$250 million over five years to municipalities and indigenous communities to help them invest in upstream prevention and intervention programs to reduce the risks of gun violence. Again, the Conservatives voted against that.

In budget 2021, we went even further. On top of the \$250 million in the fall economic statement, the government made a commitment to invest an additional \$312 million over five years starting in 2021-22. After that, there will be \$41.5 million to protect Canadians against gun violence by continuing to support the work of the RCMP and the CBSA.

I hope that this time, the hon. member for Langley—Aldergrove will support that. I have only spoken about investments, but we did not stop there. I remind the House that our government tabled Bill C-21, which increases prison sentences for smuggling and illicit trafficking of firearms from 10 to 14 years.

I think this sends a clear message to judges about the importance we attach to these crimes. I hope the Conservatives will support the bill. The bill has a much wider scope, but I unfortunately do not have enough time to go over all the ways in which it helps combat gun violence in Canada.

• (1825)

[English]

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Madam Speaker, it does not answer the question of the source of gun crimes in Canada. We need that information. With that information lacking, we will not be able to develop good policy. Therefore, I will restate the question.

How many guns? What percentage of guns used in homicides or attempted homicides in Canada come from these three sources: smuggled, stolen or diverted? Is the Toronto chief of police correct when he says that the vast majority are smuggled into the country and not sourced from lawful gun owners?

We need that information so we can have good, data-driven decision-making in keeping our streets safe.

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Madam Speaker, we know that there is no miracle solution. We have to work on all fronts and give the CBSA more resources to fight smuggling. We need stricter storage mea-

sures, as we are proposing in Bill C-21, and we must continue to make new investments like those we have made to prevent gun violence upstream. I am thinking in particular of the investments I mentioned in my first response.

By fighting all these facets of gun violence, we will reduce the number of cases of gun violence in Canada. That is certainly our government's objective.

I would like the Conservatives to be less “tough talk and no walk” and finally start supporting these new investments in our law enforcement agencies. These investments are helping us curb smuggling and armed violence and provide our police forces with the right tools in terms of both human resources and technology.

• (1830)

[English]

HOUSING

Mrs. Tamara Jansen (Cloverdale—Langley City, CPC): Madam Speaker, as we all know there are two things in life that are inevitable: death and taxes. Unfortunately, as the government has been overspending on poorly targeted pandemic programs, and plans to continue to add enormous amounts of debt over the next five years, higher taxes in the near future are inescapable.

As the Liberal government looks around for ways to raise funds that are not printed by the Bank of Canada, it seems they are now gazing longingly at the equity Canadians have in their homes. What other reason would explain the CMHC-sponsored study with Generation Squeeze, which explicitly stated in its charter that, “There is an inequitable and uneven playing field for younger and older generations in the housing market, one that is hindering current Government of Canada goals to create affordable housing opportunities for Canadians?”

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According to its charter, which states that a key source of that hindrance is “tax policy that privileges home ownership and shelters housing wealth, especially in principal residence”, Canadians who own homes are targeted. I had an opportunity recently to question CMHC and Generation Squeeze at the finance committee about this study, and they had some interesting things to say. Although they stated they were not specifically studying a home equity tax, they “encourage a focus on a bit of a tax shift. How might we focus on the 9% or 10% of homes that are valued above \$1 million in Canada? How could we ask those homeowners to contribute more?” Mr. Kershaw from Generation Squeeze went on to say, “this is something that I think is gaining momentum among a range of parties federally, and with good reason. A tax shift would talk about how we want to raise more revenue for the governments”.

With this study, the government is failing to acknowledge that homeowners pay a huge portion of their income and taxes to three levels of government before they can even save for a down payment. There is no acknowledgement of the costs of owning a home, such as maintenance, repairs or insurance, let alone any renovations that enhance the value of that property. Canadians who take on the risk and responsibility of home ownership should not be penalized for doing all that hard work.

In actual fact, the government has done the most of anyone to worsen the situation around housing affordability. It has been inflating housing prices in all sorts of different ways. I live down in the Fraser Valley, and we know that three levels of government red tape adds hundreds of thousands of dollars to the costs of new homes by way of zoning regulations, development charges and housing limits. The C.D. Howe Institute did a study and said these things add \$644,000 to the cost of a home in Vancouver. There is also the hidden tax of quantitative easing.

Easy, low-interest, printed money has fuelled the rise in housing prices. That was a government policy decision, so from where I sit, I think the government has done enough damage to housing affordability already. We need less red tape and less government interference, not more.

I have some questions for the member opposite today. Will he unequivocally state that no new punitive taxes on homeowners will be introduced by the Liberal government? Will he agree that the problem of housing affordability is in part caused by his government's reckless monetary policy and red tape across all levels of government?

Will his government commit to making it easier to increase the housing supply in this country by addressing these two problems?

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing), Lib.): Madam Speaker, let me begin by unequivocally answering the question: No, there is no contemplation, no desire and no will to tax people's primary residence. The capital gains tax is not being touched by this government and will not be touched by this government. It is the third time the member opposite has received that answer. Maybe this is the lucky time it lands.

In terms of what our government is doing to create affordability, the zoning issue she talks about and the provincial guidelines she talks about are beyond our jurisdiction. We can talk about what we

are doing to make housing more affordable for Canadians, whether they choose to rent or whether they choose to own.

Let us begin by talking about home ownership. We have put in a vacant homes tax to try to chase out of the market speculators who buy homes but do not allow people to live in them. We have put in beneficial ownership requirements and rules in place to make sure that money laundering is chased from the Canadian market and takes that speculative forced inflation out of the market.

We have provided support for first-time homebuyers. In fact, we just recently announced new measures to deal with the riding and geography the member represents in the Lower Mainland and Victoria in B.C. and in Toronto to increase the capacity of that program and to increase the threshold to make sure those two particular urban regions are addressed through the first-time homebuyers program.

We have also taken steps to make sure that we move toward providing supply through the national housing strategy, a \$70-billion program, which provides a lot of new market rental housing, a lot of deeply affordable housing, including the rapid housing initiative, which recently produced close to 5,000 units of new housing. It has also done things like block financing for Habitat for Humanity and provide \$58 million in funding to provide low-income home ownership opportunities for Canadians looking to purchase their first home.

What did the Conservatives do with every single one of those measures? They voted no, no, no and no, and then no one more time just for good measure. What does that do? It protects the status quo. It protects the market as it is, which is interesting because the Conservatives effectively created this market. When the member for Carleton was minister for housing and I was in opposition, we sat there and watched him brag about how unregulated the housing market was. He bragged about it. The unregulated housing market has created a speculative bonanza that is driving first-time homebuyers out of the dream of owning a home.

It is Conservative policy that got us here, and the worst policy was when Jim Flaherty double-crossed the Prime Minister, double-crossed his caucus and cancelled all the income trust. The one he did not do was the real estate income trust sector, and that has galloped into the housing market and has driven inflation so that housing is beyond the reach of most Canadians. When the Conservatives stand up here and protect the status quo, the status quo is a market that they have designed and delivered to Canadians, and that is the housing crisis we inherited as a government.

When I was a journalist covering Parliament Hill, Stephen Harper once told me that if I wanted to talk about housing in Parliament, I should read the Constitution first, because there was no federal responsibility toward housing. That is why I put down my pen and I picked up an election sign. I planted it in the front lawns of the communities I represent, including a lot of condominiums with first-time homeowners who are renting right now, and I got to work on the national housing strategy, providing federal leadership on this program for the first time in over a decade.

If the member opposite was serious about housing, and I do not really think she is, if she was serious about helping Canadians make the choices they want to make, and I really do not think she is, she would start supporting the federal housing policy proposed by the Liberal government, instead of protecting the status quo designed and delivered by the member for Carleton, by former Prime Minister Stephen Harper and by former finance minister Jim Flaherty.

The member joined a party that has walked away from housing, walked away from the needs of Canadians looking for housing, whether to rent or to own, and now she is trying to pretend that there is a tax to be worried about. I will say it one more time to her, for the fourth time: This government has no plans to change the capital gains tax exemptions for primary residences—none, not one bit, not at all, never.

I do not know what CMHC has hired to do as a study. What I can say is that the government has made a very firm decision, a very clear decision. We will not be introducing a tax on someone's principal residence to change the exemptions for the capital gains tax. It is not going to happen on our government's watch—

• (1835)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Cloverdale—Langley City.

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: Madam Speaker, I wonder, then, why anyone would put a quarter of a million dollars of taxpayers' money into a study about the problem of housing wealth if they are not planning to tax that wealth, which is supposedly getting in the way of housing affordability. Will he agree that the problem of housing affordability is, in part, caused by the government's reckless monetary policy and the red tape across all government levels? When will the government stop confusing subsidized housing and housing affordability?

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Madam Speaker, when we provide leadership on housing at the federal level, we have to provide leadership across the full spectrum of Canadians' housing needs. Yes, some people are looking to buy, some people are looking to rent and some people need supports to live in the housing they have acquired because of a whole series of challenges. These could be medical, or they could have to do with income challenges or with what part of the country one lives in.

Our government has focused on giving Canadians support regardless of what choice they want to make for themselves. We are focused on making sure there is a housing system that meets their needs and recognizing their human rights to access a housing system that does meet those needs. That is our government's investment.

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In terms of the conversation the member had about a study being done. I recognize that the party opposite has trouble with science. I recognize that it has trouble with universities and colleges. I recognize that most of the Conservative governments in this country are gutting public education here, there and everywhere.

If she is worried about what we study as opposed to what we do, it is probably because she is worried about education. If she is worried about education, she might want to join a party that actually fights for public education and investments in the public education system—

• (1840)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Bow River.

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Madam Speaker, speaking about COVID, there is an institution in my riding that we call the weekly newspapers. They are Brooks Bulletin, Chestermere Anchor, Strathmore Times, Vauxhall Advance, Taber Times, Vulcan Advocate, Bassano Times, Milo Can Opener, Rocky View Weekly and Three Hills Capital.

What does all this have to do with COVID? These weekly newspapers are the ones that cover those things in the community, so people know what is happening with COVID in their community. They also know what is happening with the municipal government, what is happening in schools, clubs and associations and the cultural activities in their communities.

At one time a few years ago, there was government advertising that went to weekly newspapers. It used to go to weekly newspapers. Now where does it go? The Prime Minister and the Minister of Canadian Heritage complain about the social media giants, Google and Facebook, but that is where the government is putting its advertising dollars. They are taking Canadian taxpayer dollars and putting it in the social media giants, so the weekly newspapers in Canada, like those in my riding, are getting one-third of 1% of what they used to get.

These are the papers that are highly read. The percentage that are read in the communities, whether it is print, online or both, is huge because they are covering things in their local community. That is where people are getting their information about COVID in their communities, not from the social giants.

However, the federal government now complains about the social giant media and it wants to tax them, but if it had spent those taxpayer dollars in the weekly newspapers in our ridings, those weekly newspapers would not be going out of business. They are providing that media in our local communities, which is critical.

The local daily newspapers are not in my riding. Those big daily newspapers are not going to cover all of those local communities in my riding. The weeklies do. The government has shifted our taxpayer money to the foreign social media giants, the Facebooks and the Googles. That is where it has put our tax dollars.

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If we want to protect our culture in our rural communities, then we should be putting advertising dollars in those weekly newspapers, which pro bono support the cultural activities in our communities. However, the government prefers to put its advertising dollars, which comes from Canadian taxpayers, outside our country. They then want to tax them back. That is hypocrisy. We need those advertising dollars in our ridings.

There is another group I have talked to which includes Judith Coates, Nancy Wilson, Vicki Penrod, Brenda Slater, Carol-Ann Drummond, Laurie Umscheid, Shelly Neal, Jolene Williams and Brandy Macdonald. Who are they? They are our travel agents and our travel advisors.

Our MP for Calgary Midnapore has really done an excellent job of talking about the support for our airline industry, but this subsector is brutally suffering as well. They have lost their commissions because the airlines clawed them back, so they lost commissions for a year. Now they are not getting anything for another year. This is a brutal aspect of the travel industry, and it needs support.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I know that my hon. friend from Bow River's comments are heartfelt. Let me try and take them in order.

As he had given notice of a question that had to do with vaccinations and vaccine contracts, I would be happy to return to him on that subject as well, but let me answer as best I can, without due notice, the issues he has posed.

The first is on weekly newspapers. I have no doubt there is a lively, colourful bunch of weekly newspapers in Bow River, just like there is right across the country. Heaven knows that many communities rely on them for the things the member posited, such as coverage of local government, local events, retail and the economic sectors in all those communities. I share the member's earnest desire for us to maintain that vitality. That is why the government has, through a variety of means that we could go on at length about tonight, supported our media sector. We have done so at arm's length to ensure not only its continued independence, but also its continued vitality.

The member asks about government advertising. The Department of Public Services and Procurement does in fact contract with the central media buying organization for the Government of Canada and various departments access that service. I would point out for the member that our department really has no operational view or direction it applies to these. It is up to individual departments to devise their campaigns, plan them and, of course, purchase the media that goes with them. I know any one of my colleagues would be happy to look into any specific advertising buy in which he may be interested.

I know we want to continue to support a lively and vital local media sector in Canada to the extent it is possible, all the while watching carefully how tax dollars are invested.

On the issue of travel agents, we of course, by definition, all have travel agents in our riding, and I have heard from those in my riding who I suppose have really no difference in views from those of my hon. friend. Travel agents have been considered in our support for the airline industry. They have been given various dispositions that I am sure my colleague from Transport Canada would be happy to expand on with the hon. member should that interest him.

We are extremely sympathetic to the travel sector writ large, and travel agents in particular, who I know have suffered from what is frankly a collapse of that industry. We will continue to keep them front of mind, just like we do the restaurant sector and the other service and hospitality industries as we go through this pandemic.

• (1845)

Mr. Martin Shields: Madam Speaker, a further issue for which he might think a question would be asked has to do with the delay in second dose of vaccine from four weeks or 21 days to four months. The mixed messages on that has been really concerning to people when they see across the border in the United States Blue Jay fans showing up by the thousands to see games in different places. The U.K. is doing similar things. In Canada, we have been asked to wait four months for our second shot instead of four weeks or 21 days. That is a great concern. We need to have a plan to move ahead. We need to get that communication straight. We need to get those second shots done, but we are not.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: Madam Speaker, I am sure my hon. colleague knows our decisions have been based on the best available science and, of course, the urgent need to get vaccines into Canadian arms, so we can get ahead of these very troubling variants that are circulating worldwide. We are providing that first immunization to as many Canadians as we can, as quickly as we can.

The member also knows that the number of vaccine doses will be well in excess of the total Canadian population by the end of June, and then far more than enough to vaccinate all Canadians with two doses by the end of September. I know we all look forward to that day.

I know we are following events in other countries, and I would merely point out to my hon. friend that Canada is third in the G20 in vaccine doses administered. Every day we watch very closely to see how—

• (1850)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:50 p.m.)

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