



HOUSE OF COMMONS
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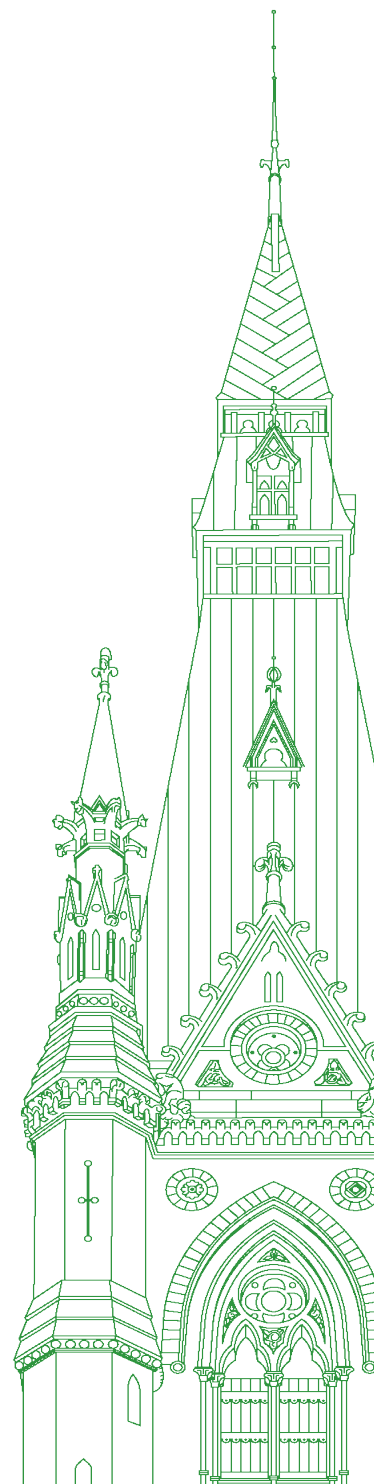
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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, February 22, 2021

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1105)

[*English*]

GREENHOUSE GAS POLLUTION PRICING ACT

The House resumed from November 23, 2020, consideration of the motion that Bill C-206, An Act to amend the Greenhouse Gas Pollution Pricing Act (qualifying farming fuel), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to be able to address the chamber.

This morning I would like to provide some thoughts in regard to Bill C-206. Its intent is to ultimately expand fuel charge relief provided for farmers by making some changes to the definition of "qualifying farming fuel". Specifically, I understand the bill would add natural gas and propane to the eligible fuel list.

As we continue to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, it is really important to recognize that we are not in a position in which we can afford to ignore the real and immediate threat that climate change poses to our environment and our economy. I think it is important to recognize that fact, even in these very trying times.

We will continue, as we have in the past, to work to support Canada's farmers as they attempt to also fight climate change. I think it is also important to recognize that our farmers, and the farming industry as a whole, have contributed so much with the way they are fighting climate change. The modernization and technology that is being used on our farms is absolutely incredible, and every year it continues to get better.

I can recall the days in Saskatchewan of running on to the fields with the big John Deere tractors and cultivators. When we compare the way farming was back then to today, we see some significant changes in the way farms operate. We need to acknowledge that. We will support farmers, ranchers, food businesses and food processors because we recognize the important role they play in our economy, our society and our lifestyle.

It is also important that we recognize that pollution pricing is the most effective and efficient way to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions associated with climate change, and we have been saying that since the very beginning. In fact, all the direct revenues from the price on pollution go back to the jurisdiction that it came from.

That has been the goal of the government, and Manitoba has benefited from that significantly. We are getting into the tens of millions of dollars. The majority of the constituents I represent get a net gain as a direct result of the price on pollution.

I think if we look around the world, we would see a huge amount of support for having a price on pollution. We can look to the Paris Agreement or talk about other provincial governments. In fact, British Columbia's government has led the way. Ironically, we would have to go back probably over 15 years to see when even the Province of Alberta initiated the idea on some form of price on pollution.

Instituting a price on pollution across Canada has been a priority of this government, and it has been, for the most part, very effective. For those jurisdictions that do not have something of a similar nature, Ottawa steps in to ensure that there is that sense of equity, in that all Canadians are contributing. We saw legislation that was brought in earlier with regard to net-zero emissions. This legislation is a first of its kind and was introduced by this government.

Again, we are very sensitive to the farmers. We will see what happens when this bill goes to committee, but the government, even during these trying times, has been there to support our farmers. We can talk about the \$5 billion in additional farm credit that was unlocked, or the \$100 million for the new agriculture and food business solutions fund. We also increased the Canadian Dairy Commission borrowing capacity by \$200 million.

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There was also an additional \$35 million to improve health and safety on farms. We spent well over \$100 million for agricultural recovery initiatives, which will ultimately support a national approach to responding to some of the huge additional costs people in farm businesses have had to incur. Also, from what I understand, we launched a \$75-million emergency processing fund to help modernize and automate some of these facilities.

Our government knows and understands our Canadian farmers. They are a part of the climate change solution, and we will be there to continue to support them in the months and years ahead.

[Translation]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to rise in the House this morning to participate in the debate at second reading on Bill C-206, which is sponsored by my Conservative colleague from Northumberland—Peterborough South.

I want to stress how pleased I am, because I consider this colleague to be not only a friend, but also an ally in our work on the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. I know how much energy he puts into defending his constituents and all taxpayers, because of how rigorous he is when it comes to our committee work. His bill reflects how much he cares, which is very admirable and does his constituents proud.

I also want to point out that he takes a collaborative approach in all his undertakings, which, despite our profound political differences, allows us to engage in courteous discussions and, above all, to move forward on issues that are important to us. That is ultimately reflected in the work we do for the good of the population in general.

Bill C-206 proposes to amend the Greenhouse Gas Pollution Pricing Act, which is currently referred to as the federal carbon tax.

We all know what the Conservative caucus thinks of this act. Even so, my colleague's goal is a worthy one deserving of our attention. His bill would directly affect the agricultural sector, which the current government believes is firmly on side despite all evidence to the contrary.

My colleague from Northumberland—Peterborough South's Bill C-206 contains one single clause, one simple, short amendment to the existing act that would allow a whole lot of our farmers to stop paying huge amounts of money to the state just so they can run their farms and feed the people of Quebec, as well as people in the rest of Canada and even around the world.

As it stands, the act mandates a blanket charge on fossil fuels to be paid to the government by the supplier at the time of delivery. Sales that meet certain criteria, such as eligible fuels sold to a farmer, are exempt from payment of that charge.

Technically, for all those watching us, the current legislation defines qualifying farming fuel as any "type of fuel that is gasoline, light fuel oil or a prescribed type of fuel". This is where my colleague shows some real foresight.

Bill C-206 seeks to amend this definition by adding marketable natural gas and propane. Anyone who has ever used a barbecue

knows what propane is. Marketable natural gas is a fuel that consists of at least 90% methane and that meets the specifications for pipeline transport and sale for general distribution to the public. It is the same natural gas that heats and cools thousands of homes, buildings, and facilities of all kinds.

My colleague's bill is crystal clear and deserves to be passed by the House. We hope that the Liberals will take the time to study it properly. We will also find out at the last minute where the NDP stands. They might yet again betray their principles to ensure their survival. We will see what happens when they vote.

That said, I remind members that all farmers, without exception, depend on propane and natural gas to run their operations. Grain producers are even more reliant on these fuels. I would remind everyone of the CN strike in November 2019, when rail deliveries of propane to eastern Canada were interrupted creating a crisis that the Liberal government utterly failed to resolve. Grain must be dried quickly so it can be stored in silos without rotting. That is pretty obvious, and every day counts when trying to save an entire harvest.

Although some grains are grown in Quebec, agriculture in that province focuses on other products. In Quebec, we produce the best milk in the world, the most delicious pork on the planet and the most nutritious eggs, not to mention the plump and tender chicken that our farms have been producing forever.

No matter what they produce, all farms rely on propane and natural gas fuels. If the government keeps forcing farmers to pay a fuel charge for these fuels, there is no question we will all lose. In my view, this bill needs to be passed because farmers' profit margins are already too low for the hard work they do.

Farmers need this tax exemption so that they can get us the highest quality products, which are envied around the world. All we need is for the Liberals to step up and amend a few words in the existing legislation to give the entire agricultural sector a little breathing room and to ensure the sustainability of family farms.

• (1110)

Farms are a key economic sector, key even to our very survival. I have a strong relationship with farmers in my area, the Lower St. Lawrence, so I know the farming sector well enough to know that, despite the ideological considerations that guide the Liberals, they should admit they were wrong and fix things while there is still time. My colleague from Northumberland—Peterborough South is giving them the opportunity to do just that. I hope they will recognize the huge sacrifices made by grain producers in particular and farmers as a whole.

Before closing, I want to point out that the carbon tax is a tool for action meant to incentivize all industries to change their behaviour, but that means technology needs to be accessible and affordable in rural areas. It is not, so propane and natural gas are still the only options.

We have a common duty to support all of our farmers, but the Liberal government does not currently have the best track record in that regard, to be honest. However, we have an opportunity to fix that, and a simple amendment to the existing legislation, as proposed by our Conservative colleague in Bill C-206, would be a step in the right direction.

I could talk for hours about specific farmers in Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques who would benefit from this measure. All of them would say that the environment is a daily concern because it is essential to their work. These people live off the land and its bounty. We have a responsibility to help and support them. The current markets are fiercely competitive, and a simple tax break to support them would show that we appreciate everything they produce and their contribution to our economy, not to mention the food they put on our plates.

Because the Bloc Québécois supports farmers, because we are extremely proud of their work and because they are as reliable as we can be, we will support Bill C-206. The Liberals should do their part. If not, they will have to answer for it.

• (1115)

[English]

Ms. Lianne Rood (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise today to speak on Bill C-206, an act to amend the Greenhouse Gas Pollution Pricing Act. It is the private member's bill of my Conservative colleague, the member for Northumberland—Peterborough South.

First, as the official opposition shadow minister for agriculture and agri-food, I want to congratulate the member for Northumberland—Peterborough South and thank him for this bill. The member is well aware of the challenges faced by farmers and producers in his riding and is clearly in touch with their concerns. I believe his constituents can look forward to his long and fruitful service on their behalf.

I have heard many concerns from farmers and producers in my own riding of Lambton—Kent—Middlesex and how the carbon tax negatively affects their cost of production and puts them at a competitive disadvantage against imports coming from our neighbours to the south, especially given our close proximity to the U.S. border.

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I turn now to the bill itself. If the government refuses to support this bill, it will send a clear message to Canadians generally and to Canadian farmers, ranchers and producers in particular. The message the Liberals will send is that they do not care how their carbon tax negatively affects Canadians and our domestic food security and production. The Liberals will also show how sadly out of touch they are with Canadian farmers.

I want to point out to this House the current situation with the Liberals' carbon tax and producers. Farmers are already exempt from paying the federal carbon tax on gasoline and fuel oils, which includes diesel fuel, where these are used for agriculture production on the farm. Let me be clear: This bill is only proposing to extend this existing federal carbon tax exemption for farmers to include propane and natural gas.

Last March at the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food and again on a video conference last June, the agriculture minister suggested that the farmers' federal carbon tax payments on propane and natural gas are less than 1% of their expenditures and insignificant, but that is just not the case. As one might imagine, the Liberals' carbon tax on propane and natural gas is far more than that. Many farmers and producers use propane or natural gas to heat their barns and dry grain and oilseeds.

Last November, the parliamentary budget office released a report on the carbon tax showing that farmers, ranchers and producers would pay \$9 million for the remainder of just this fiscal year, plus \$226 million over the next four fiscal years, for using propane and natural gas in their operations. For that period of time, that is a total of \$235 million. It appears the Minister of Agriculture has a problem not just with math but with arithmetic, so let me press further on the arithmetic and math.

The profit margins for most Canadian producers are very narrow. For most Canadian farmers, there is very little room for error or additional input costs. For Canadian farmers, the Liberals' carbon tax is an input cost on their production, and most producers are price-takers, not price setters. That means farmers have no way of recovering what they pay in the Liberals' carbon tax from the next stage of the supply chain. To be clear, the Liberals' carbon tax takes from most Canadian farmers' profits and from their families' standard of living.

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Canadians count on a reliable supply of food on their grocery shelves, and this just in: Food must come from a farm. If a farm is not profitable, the farm must shut down and the farmer must leave the land. As Canadian farmers are driven off the land and out of business, less food is produced here in Canada. A reliable supply of food must be found elsewhere and Canadian food sovereignty is put in doubt.

By bringing forward this bill, my colleague has shown he understands the challenges farmers face, but the minister's resistance to extending an exemption to the Liberals' carbon tax shows just out of touch she is with farmers.

The Minister of Agriculture's problems do not stop there. The minister has recently suggested that farmers should innovate so as to avoid using propane and natural gas in their production, but for many farmers, using propane and natural gas is the only option. Propane and natural gas are widely used by producers and farmers for heating their barns and drying their grains and oilseeds, and there are no other options available currently.

Ironically, at a recent meeting of the Keystone Agricultural Producers in Manitoba, the minister indicated that farmers could finance the purchase of a new, more efficient gas or propane grain dryer using the climate action incentive fund, so on the one hand she is telling farmers to find a viable alternative and on the other she is proclaiming that her government will pay for it. Which is it? Could the minister be any more out of touch with farmers?

• (1120)

The existing federal carbon tax exemption for farmers' use of gasoline and fuel oils raises another question. Compared to gasoline and fuel oils, both propane and natural gas are very clean fuels in respect of their emissions.

According to the United States Energy Information Administration, the carbon dioxide emissions from diesel and heating oil are 16% higher than for propane. The CO₂ emissions for diesel and heating oil are 37% higher than the emissions for natural gas. The CO₂ emissions for gasoline are 13% higher than for propane and 17% higher than for natural gas.

According to the Canadian Propane Association, "Studies have found that propane can emit up to 26% fewer GHGs than gasoline in vehicles, 38% fewer GHGs than fuel oil in furnaces.... Propane's end-use GHG emissions are significantly lower than gasoline, diesel, coal and heating oil. When upstream life-cycle emissions are taken into account, the case for propane becomes even stronger." That is the science.

Here is the question: Why is the government refusing to extend the federal carbon tax exemption to propane and natural gas when they emit less carbon dioxide than gasoline or fuel oil? This is clearly not a science-based decision. Not only does the government have trouble with mathematics and arithmetic and not only is it out of touch with farmers, but it has trouble with the science too.

Let me draw to the attention of the House the wider consequences of the government's failure to be in touch with Canadian farmers and producers. Let me underscore the problems with the

Liberals' inability to understand the issues around farmers' profit margins.

As farmers' profit margins move toward zero or cross over to become losses, it becomes more and more difficult for farmers and ranchers to stay on the land and in the business of producing food and feedstocks. How many times on this side of the House have we heard from farmers and ranchers whose families have been on the land for generations, but who now can no longer afford the uncertainty of knowing whether this year would see profit or loss? How many farm families who have been on the land for generations have shut down operations because their children saw little future in staying on the land with losses year over year? How many farm families have seen their standard of living gradually fall as costs pile up and the market prices for their commodities are static or in a downward trend?

Some of these Canadian families have been on the land for three, four, five or more generations. Despite producing a reliable supply of food for all Canadians, Canadian farmers are faced with a Liberal government that seems to think that food security is only about food banks. The Liberals are wrong. They are putting the ability of Canadians to produce food and Canadian food sovereignty in doubt.

Despite being prudent managers of the land they hold, Canadian farmers, ranchers and producers see little recognition from the Liberal government for their contribution to maintaining a safe, clean outdoor environment. Despite being conscientious taxpayers who contribute to the treasuries of their municipality and their province and the federal treasury, Canadian farmers, ranchers and producers are faced with a government that believes they should pay even more in the form of the Liberals' carbon tax.

On this side of the House, we say, "Enough." On this side of the House, Conservatives believe that the challenges Canadian farmers face should be top of mind. Conservatives know that agriculture producers may be Canada's most important natural resources producers. Conservatives know Canadian families rely on Canadian farmers for a steady, secure and reliable supply of food on grocery shelves. Conservatives understand that farming is both a way of life for many Canadian families and their business.

Conservatives understand that the way of life requires that farming be profitable. Conservatives understand that ranchers pay property taxes, sales taxes and income taxes. Conservatives understand that agricultural producers cannot afford to pay the Liberals' carbon tax on fuel used for production, including propane and natural gas. Conservatives offer Canadian farmers, ranchers and producers a bright future for their families and for the generations that will follow in their steps.

For those reasons, as the official opposition's shadow minister for agriculture and agri-food, it is my honour and privilege to support the member for Northumberland—Peterborough South and his bill, Bill C-206.

• (1125)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today to take part in the second reading debate on this private member's bill, Bill C-206. The bill proposes to amend the Greenhouse Gas Pollution Pricing Act in order to modify the definition of what qualifies as farming fuel. It would further modify and expand the definition to include marketable natural gas and propane, in addition to gasoline and light fuel oil.

The sponsor of the bill hopes to provide relief to grain drying farmers. While I appreciate the goal of the bill as written, it would not provide relief for fuel costs of grain drying while also balancing the importance of executing Canada's climate action plan.

Allow me to explain. The bill adds natural gas and propane to the eligible fuel list, but does not add grain drying as an eligible farming activity under the Greenhouse Gas Pollution Pricing Act. Because of this, it would not provide relief for grain drying activities. This is why I think it is important that we take a closer look at the implications of the bill.

Our hard-working farmers are an integral part of our economy and indeed cultural fabric. They do important work in helping grow, store and sell crops that Canada and indeed the world rely on. Our government will continue to support Canadian farmers as they work to bring their goods to market.

As it stands, this act provides relief for farmers for gasoline and diesel, subject to certain conditions. In particular, to qualify, all or substantially all of these fuels must be used for eligible farming activities. Relief from the fuel charge generally applies to the operation of farming equipment and machinery, such as a combine harvester. Only limited emissions from the agricultural sector are covered under the federal pollution pricing system, such as those resulting from the use of natural gas or propane for heating or cooling a building or similar structure.

During the past year, as we have been fighting the pandemic, we on this side of the House have not forgotten the serious implications of climate change. It remains one of Canada's and indeed the world's most important long-term challenges. We continue to see the impacts of climate change through extreme weather events.

Right now, Texas has been dealing with winter storms that have posed severe problems to its power grid. In the Indian part of the Himalayas, the melting from a glacier has resulted in several deaths and many more missing because of floods. From the threat and after-effects of wildfires in western Canada, California and Australia

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to the increasing powerful hurricanes, typhoons and storms that batter communities around the world, these continue to have an impact. It is not increasingly a question of whether or not an extreme weather event will happen; it is a question of where it will happen.

Our government is serious in its commitment to confront and address this generational challenge. Canada needs to play an important role in this global fight. We need to act now to ensure that our children and grandchildren have clean air to breathe and a strong and healthy economy.

Canada's work to combat climate change is built on four pillars: pricing pollution, complementary actions to further reduce emissions across the economy, measures to adapt to the impacts of climate change and build resilience, and actions to accelerate innovation, support clean technology and create jobs.

Pricing pollution is central to the government's pan-Canadian framework on clean growth and climate change. A price on pollution reduces pollution at the lowest overall cost to businesses and consumers. A well-designed price on pollution provides an incentive for climate action and clean innovation while protecting business competitiveness. It is efficient and cost-effective because it allows businesses and households to decide for themselves how best to reduce their emissions.

• (1130)

The federal pollution pricing system has two components: a regulatory charge on fossil fuels and an output-based pricing system for large industrial facilities, which provides a price incentive to reduce emissions and spur innovation.

All direct proceeds from pricing pollution under the federal system are being returned to the jurisdiction in which they have been collected. Returning proceeds from pollution pricing helps Canadians make more environmentally sustainable consumption choices, but does not change the incentive to pollute less. Every time a consumer or business makes a purchase or investment decision, they have a financial incentive to choose greener actions.

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Our government has been clear that it should not be free to pollute in Canada. In addition, I want to be clear that the federal pollution pricing system is not about raising revenues. Indeed, as I have said many times, this is not a tax. The government is not keeping any direct proceeds from the federal pollution pricing system. A pollution pricing system is about recognizing that pollution has a cost, encouraging cleaner growth and a more sustainable future.

Canada has been a leader in this regard. In its most recent article IV mission report for Canada, the International Monetary Fund noted that pollution pricing “is the most efficient policy for reducing emissions while returning the revenues to households in transparent tax relief helps with acceptability.” The IMF specifically mentioned, “At the global level, Canada’s carbon price floor could be a valuable prototype for an international carbon price floor arrangement among large emitting countries.”

These are all important considerations that Canadians will expect us to take into account in assessing the potential merits of Bill C-206. I want to thank the hon. member for raising this very important issue.

As I said earlier, the bill adds natural gas and propane to the eligible fuel list, but it does not add grain drying as an eligible farming activity under the Greenhouse Gas Pollution Pricing Act. As written, it would not provide relief for grain drying activities.

Should the bill go to committee for study, I would recommend that the committee hear from a wide range of stakeholders, including farmers, environmental non-governmental organizations, officials and industry associations, to fully evaluate the impact that the bill would have. This wide-ranging consultation would allow the committee to examine the bill in its entirety and evaluate the legislative and legal implications of moving forward with it.

• (1135)

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-206, introduced by the hon. member for Northumberland—Peterborough South. I will not keep anyone in suspense, as my colleague has already announced that the Bloc Québécois will support Bill C-206.

However, people may be wondering why the Bloc Québécois is intervening on this bill, since Quebec actually already has its own carbon market and is not subject to the federal carbon tax program. Nevertheless, I think it is important that we speak to this issue, since there seems to be some question as to whether agriculture and environmental protection are compatible. It is a problem that we have noticed with regard to several topics on which the Bloc Québécois has been called upon to intervene in the past. We know that there are serious challenges for both agriculture and the environment, and there is often a delicate balance between the two.

Consider, for example, all the pressure on farmers, particularly regarding riparian buffer zones, a problem that is often raised. Riparian buffer zones help protect rivers that border farmland, but they sometimes hurt profit margins. However, it is important to understand that farmers want to do the right thing and help protect the environment. When we take the time to speak with farmers, we learn that buffer zones can be narrower in some places because of

the nature of the soil. Some riparian buffer zones can protect the environment while also generating revenue. For instance, some farmers plant fruit trees along these buffer zones. Collaboration can lead to good solutions.

The same question has been raised about the use of certain pesticides. Again, farmers do not get up in the morning excited to generate pollution and put hazardous chemicals into the environment. Rather, they are forced to use certain pesticides because of a lack of resources or alternatives.

One-size-fits-all measures are not necessarily the best. For example, if the government were to ban a particular pesticide, farmers could just end up having to ask agronomists to prescribe even more dangerous pesticides. On certain issues, farmers need to be treated as collaborators.

As for the carbon pricing issue specifically, I would remind members that it was designed as a way for Canada to combat climate change by taxing pollution to discourage the use of fossil fuels. The problem is that farmers do not really have any other options for drying grain.

This reminds of an experience I had. In late October, after the 2019 election, I spent some time riding along with my father as he trucked grain from the fields to grain dryers for some local farmers. It was a wonderful day of father-daughter bonding. I remember that a huge snowstorm hit the region after November 1, making the grain very wet. On top of that, it had been an unusual season. Planting had been delayed for three weeks due to cold spring temperatures. Then, in early fall, September was very cold, so the grain did not have time to mature, and the harvest was quite late. The grain had to be harvested in the snow, so it had very high moisture levels.

Because it never rains but it pours, a propane shortage occurred right after that, on the heels of the CN strike. I started getting phone calls from many farmers who were devastated because they had no other way to dry their grain. Grain has to be dried before it is stored, or it will rot. Although the moisture level may seem all right, if it is not low enough, mould may be present without anyone realizing it. In some cases, animals that eat this grain can fall ill. Distraught farmers were calling me, and I was working with them to find solutions.

Climate change aside, they would like to move away from fossil fuels such as natural gas and propane. As I talked with them, I realized that there are very few alternatives. It is impossible to heat storage facilities sufficiently and dry grain with hydroelectricity alone. The demand for energy would be too great. The other problem is that the Hydro-Québec power grid cannot deliver so much energy.

• (1140)

Other alternatives do exist, such as freeze drying, where the grain is stored in large dryers. The problem is that this method cannot always be used because the weather has to be perfect for it to work. That was not at all the case in 2019, when planting was delayed, there was a snowstorm, and the harvest was late. Using fossil fuels is therefore an option.

Some farmers have also turned to biomass, but it is not yet suitable for large-scale farms. Those who have switched to biomass are mainly poultry farmers. They can use biomass to heat the barns where the animals are kept and to dry the quantity of grain needed to feed them. These tend to be small-scale farmers. For larger producers, fossil fuel energy is unfortunately still necessary. Given that there are no real alternatives, it is important to understand that increasing the price of propane and natural gas will not decrease the use of these energy sources, since farmers have no choice. The only thing this will accomplish is to continue eroding farmers' profit margins, which are often already razor thin, especially when the weather conditions are not good, as was the case in 2019.

Even if the government increases the price on pollution, farmers do not have any other consistent options available to them. In light of this, farmers are not the right target. If we maintain the tax on fossil fuels, there is a risk that even more farms will not be passed down from generation to generation, which will diminish our ability to have food sovereignty. That means we would have to rely more heavily on other countries to support us, although they do not have the same standards as Canada does. Ultimately, the quality of our food would suffer.

Farmers are already making great efforts to protect the environment. They want to help protect the environment, but they need the right kind of help. It is important to consider that they are not always the right target when it comes to addressing climate change.

I would like to draw a parallel with a news release that the Bloc Québécois recently published on tax havens. It reads, and I quote:

Canada is a world laggard when it comes to addressing tax avoidance by multinational enterprises. Before contributing to the global fight against tax havens, Canada first needs to stop making the problem worse by allowing these companies to legally use tax havens.

That is a rather interesting parallel because the government is not focusing on the right thing when it targets farmers. The first thing we need to do is to turn off the tap where the impact is greatest, for example, by refusing to continue to fund certain fossil fuels and, more importantly, by putting an end to projects like Trans Mountain. We need to go after these major players first, rather than attacking agriculture, which is already a collaborative partner. Farmers already want to do a better job of fighting climate change because it has a direct impact on their own culture.

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[English]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Resuming debate.

The hon. member for Northumberland—Peterborough South has the right to reply.

[Translation]

Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to begin by thanking all the members who studied Bill C-206 and spoke about it.

[English]

I would like to thank all the members who have spoken for their tremendous support with respect to the legislation, particularly the member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, who has been a terrific partner working in the public accounts committee. I thank everybody for their time and consideration. We have even heard positive reports from the other side of the aisle, particularly from the member from Prince Edward Island, and I would like to thank him for his great comments.

Getting directly into the rebuttal, I want to address the comments from the member for Kingston and the Islands. I have the opportunity once again to enlighten him, which I am sure he will appreciate.

The Greenhouse Gas Pollution Pricing Act actually says that eligible farming machinery means "...an industrial machine or a stationary or portable engine". That would include a grain dryer 100 out of 100 times. I would encourage the member to research perhaps before he gets up to speak.

It is an honour to speak about my private member's Bill C-206, which seeks to amend the Greenhouse Gas Pollution Pricing Act. I have had the opportunity to talk from coast to coast to coast with farmers. Every single one of them has supported the bill, and they have been absolutely terrific. I give a big shout out to the grain growers, who have been tremendous supporters, and I really appreciate their support.

As has been outlined, currently there is an exemption for some fuels for farmers with respect to the Greenhouse Gas Pollution Pricing Act, or the carbon tax. This includes diesel and gasoline, but it does not include, I think through an oversight, natural gas and propane. Natural gas and propane are actually cleaner fuels, so why would we exempt gasoline and diesel, which are dirtier fuels, and not natural gas and propane?

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All I am trying to do with this proposed legislation is help our farmers and clean up another Liberal mess. Quite frankly, our farmers are being let down. They have been let down now for months and months, if not years and years, by this government, and this is our opportunity to help them a little bit. We are competing globally and our farmers have to take their goods all around the world, while many countries do not have to fight a pollution-price barrier or a carbon tax. We need to give our farmers every opportunity to compete.

The minister and the government have said again and again, unfortunately, that the carbon tax has no really big impact on farmers, which is just not true. That is not the reality. The problem with the Liberals is not that they do not know things, it is just that they know so many things that are not true. That is the reality.

Many farmers have sent us bills that show us that the carbon tax is costing them \$10,000 to \$30,000. The Saskatchewan Association of Agricultural Societies and Exhibitions has said that the carbon tax is 8% to 12% of agricultural producers' net income. This is the difference between our farmers making it and not making it. This is the difference between our farmers competing in global markets and not. This is the difference between our farmers holding on to their farms and losing their generational farms.

Although Liberals do not want to admit it, the reality is that, for farmers, the carbon tax is not revenue-neutral. The non-partisan Parliamentary Budget Office said that our proposed exemption would save farmers tens of millions of dollars. Farmers live in a world of extremely slim margins. These tens of millions of dollars spread to our farmers could make a tremendous difference, not just for our farmers but for our rural communities. Our rural communities are struggling through the pandemic. These farmers bring money and drive the economy of our rural communities. They pay for tractor dealerships, they pay for restaurants and they pay for the families that they support. We need to rally behind our farmers.

Our farmers are among the first environmentalists, along with our indigenous people. They have stood up for our land time and again, and the plants and the animals that exist. They are the ones standing up and protecting us. Agriculture, farming, was net zero 40 years before this Liberal government would achieve net zero. Our farmers have already done it. We need to stand up for them as they stand up for us and our environment.

• (1145)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): 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.

I see that the hon. member for Northumberland—Peterborough South is standing.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I am very excited to request a recorded vote.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Pursuant to an order made on Monday, January 25, 2021, the division stands deferred until Wednesday, February 24, 2021, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The House will now suspend until noon.

(The sitting of the House was suspended at 11:49 a.m.)

SITTING RESUMED

(The House resumed at 12 p.m.)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1200)

[English]

ECONOMIC STATEMENT IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2020

The House resumed from February 19 consideration of the motion that Bill C-14, An Act to implement certain provisions of the economic statement tabled in Parliament on November 30, 2020 and other measures, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Kerry Diotte (Edmonton Griesbach, CPC): Madam Speaker, from coast to coast to coast Canadians are struggling, both with a pandemic that has cost far too many people their lives and with an economy in deep trouble. These two crises have hit working Canadians very hard. Lives and livelihoods have been lost. Despite all this, Canadians are persevering, as we know they can. Through adversity, they are getting the job done. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for the Liberal government.

The most important role the feds have is to procure vaccines and, sadly, they are failing. Canada is falling behind scores of countries in getting COVID-19 vaccines. We are standing north of 50: There are probably 50 countries ahead of us for vaccine procurement and its use. Israel has vaccinated about 80% of its population and the United Kingdom more than 25%. The United States has vaccinated more than 17%. In fact, I saw a statistic the other day that said more people were vaccinated in the United States in just one day than have been vaccinated in Canada, period. Canada is looking at a vaccination rate of about 3.60%, according to Bloomberg News. We are behind Greece, Chile, Morocco, Portugal, the Maldives, Serbia and many other countries.

For everyday Canadians, failure to procure vaccines will mean we will continue to be at risk and under lockdown, and the lockdowns will take place for longer times. These lockdowns have real-world consequences. I recently called a friend at a seniors' facility near Toronto. He is forbidden to leave his room. He told me it feels like he is in a jail cell.

Obviously, without enough people vaccinated, we will also be late to reopen our economy. While scores of other countries will reopen, we will still be locked down, with our businesses shuttered, and that is a true tragedy. This failure will have a significant impact on jobs and Canadian businesses. It certainly already has.

Being left behind is the last thing that struggling Canadians need, and workers are in a very dark place. It is especially true in my home province of Alberta. In addition to facing the pandemic and its economic consequences, Alberta is facing a federal government hostile to its number one industry: an industry that creates thousands of good-paying jobs right across Canada. I think a lot of Canadians should realize that the oil and gas industry is not all about Alberta: It is about all of Canada. It is a vital industry to Canada.

During the 2009 global recession, the energy industry helped Canada weather the storm. Because of the energy industry, Canada had the strongest economy in the G7 through that global recession, but the Liberal government has squandered that national asset. The government and its hostile legislation have attacked the goose that laid the golden egg. Take, for example, the Liberal government's recent lacklustre response to the Americans scrapping the Keystone XL pipeline.

In June 2018, the United States, under former president Donald Trump, placed tariffs on Canadian steel and aluminum. Canada quickly responded with measures of its own. Canada took action to protect its vital economic interests. It did that despite knowing, at the time, that it was a campaign promise by then president Trump. Back then, the foreign affairs minister said, "the United States has taken the absurd decision to harm its own people at a time when its economy is suffering". That was a reasonable approach, and we need that same reasonable approach with Keystone XL for Canada's largest export industry.

• (1205)

In 2019, our energy exports were valued at more than \$134 billion. Let that sink in for a bit. Think what that money could buy. Think how much worse we will be when we do not have that money. Instead, Canada's current foreign minister said that we should understand and respect the decision on Keystone XL. The Prime Minister only said that he was disappointed. That is not the type of response they gave when manufacturers were under threat from tariffs during NAFTA renegotiations. Why is the energy industry treated differently?

During the NAFTA renegotiations, we took a team Canada approach in defence of Canada's vital national interests. Canadian government officials and politicians, including myself, went to Washington and lobbied key American stakeholders. We talked to Democrats, Republicans and everyone we could, yet today when another vital industry is under threat, all we hear are crickets from the Liberal government. We have actually heard more from American politicians and union officials in support of Keystone XL than from our own government.

On January 21, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters said:

The Teamsters strongly oppose yesterday's decision, and we would urge the administration to reconsider it. This executive order doesn't just affect U.S. Teamsters; it hurts our Canadian brothers and sisters as well who work on this project. It

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will reduce good-paying union jobs that allow workers to provide a middle-class standard of living to their families. America needs access to various forms of energy that can keep its economy running in the years ahead. This decision will hurt that effort.

Senator Tom Cotton of Arkansas called out the Biden administration cancellation of the Keystone XL pipeline, saying "The Biden administration is already killing jobs in Arkansas—in the middle of a pandemic—to appease far-left environmental groups. This isn't what America needs right now."

This is a vital Canadian interest. Where is Canada's response? This lack of leadership has real world impact.

Recently, the Calgary Herald ran a story about Muhammad Ali, who has the same name as the famous boxer. Muhammad is a proud Calgarian, as he should be. Calgary is a fantastic city. It is the second biggest city in Alberta, the second best. He is currently finishing his business degree at the University of Calgary where he is majoring in supply management. Muhammad hoped once he graduated he would be able to find a career in the energy industry in Alberta, but now he is forced to leave the province for the U.S.A. He said, "I would have really loved to stay in Alberta, especially Calgary, it's a really great place to live. And I was looking forward to maybe working in the energy industry here." Unfortunately, those hopes have been dashed. As Muhammad put it, there just seems to be so much more opportunity for him in the U.S.

Muhammad is just one of many young western Canadians who are finding their career prospects leading them south of the border. Despite having the one of the largest oil deposits in the world, because of the neglect and outright hostility that the Liberal government has shown to our energy industry, it has seen its investment and jobs go elsewhere. At a time when it is essential to begin the process to rebuild our economy, seeing stories like Muhammad's is really disappointing. I wish him all the best. He seems like a talented and hard-working young man and I am sure he will be a real asset wherever he goes. However, the fact that he must leave, despite wanting to stay, is a huge loss to our communities.

Last year, we saw the largest deficit in Canadian history, \$331 billion. We are going to need the skills and hard work of people like Muhammad in Canada to help us pay off the enormous debt the Liberals have racked up. That is why we need the federal government to end its hostility to the energy industry, Canada's golden goose. It needs to stop exporting good Canadians jobs and facilitate the export of Canadian energy. We need to get Canada working.

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● (1210)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, today, we are debating the economic statement implementation act. The bill was introduced by the Minister of Finance to put forward measures to take care of Canadians right now during a pandemic. The hon. member talked about vaccines. He talked about NAFTA. He talked about oil. He seemed to talk about anything he could think of except this issue.

I know the Conservatives have really been holding onto this bill for a while now. They need to desperately talk about it to ensure they have their opportunity to debate it before we pass it. That is what I have been hearing from the other side of the House for days now.

Would the member actually like to speak to anything that is in legislation?

Mr. Kerry Diotte: Madam Speaker, this is another instance of a member from that side of the House not understanding the value of the key industry in Canada. What could be more important than vaccinating people, getting our country back and our jobs back? Maybe the problem is that the member has lost track of what is really important in our country.

I think people in Alberta and right across the country are seeing the neglect of the energy industry, the industry that fuels our country. We will not have much of a country at all unless we get on-board with that industry.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to follow up on the comments about vaccinations. I was astounded when the health minister was asked how many people would have to be vaccinated before the lockdowns would end and we could start to reopen the economy. Her response was that they were not even sure whether someone could transmit or get COVID after having a vaccine.

It is clear that the government does not have a plan to exit the pandemic. I wonder if my colleague could comment on that.

Mr. Kerry Diotte: Madam Speaker, that is a great observation. It is the real fear. Canadians are following public health orders. They are doing everything they are being told to do, generally speaking. They are trying to look around the corner to see what is coming. Unfortunately, that future still looks rather grim.

As I mentioned in my comments, I read this morning that the United States had vaccinated more people in one day than Canada had vaccinated in its entirety. To me, that speaks of a very weak Liberal plan. Unfortunately, it is very grim news for everybody when there is so little planning.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, if people listened to the previous Conservative member's question and that member's answer to it, they would have no idea what we are talking about.

This is nothing more than a delay tactic by the Conservatives because they do not want this bill to be voted on in the House. They are using certain pandemic measures put forward by this government to take care of Canadians during a pandemic as a political tool to prevent the bill from moving forward. They are basically forcing this side of the House to at some point move closure on the bill because they refuse to have a vote on the floor. It is shameful that the

member is part of this action. It is easy to see that in the last exchange between him and the other Conservative member.

I will give the member one last opportunity to actually talk about something that is in the bill. Would he like to do that?

● (1215)

Mr. Kerry Diotte: Madam Speaker, it is interesting that it is a Liberal who believes that rigorous debate should not be allowed, and that just shows you how out of touch you are. I am sorry that—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I do not think you are out of touch. The member said that you are out of touch. For the record, you are not out of touch; you are a fine Speaker. He should not be talking about you like that.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I thank the hon. member for defending my honour.

The hon. member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Madam Speaker, on that point of order, and not to speak for my colleague, as often happens in this place, members in responding to one of their colleagues, through you, do direct their comments in that fashion. While I agree with the member for Kingston and the Islands that the Speaker is not out of touch, I expect that the member for Edmonton Griesbach was referring to the member for Kingston and the Islands being out of touch.

Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is unfortunate I am not in Ottawa when I talk about Bill C-14 today. That is where my constituents expect all MPs to be when the House is sitting.

Before I begin my remarks, I would like to take a moment to recognize and thank my constituents in Souris—Moose Mountain. I thank them for having faith in me as their member of Parliament, a role I am proud to serve in each and every day. I also commend them for how they have been handling this past year and all the uncertainty that came with it. It has been inspiring to see communities come together in the face of adversity, and I encourage everyone to keep up the great work. They are making a difference.

With respect to today's debate, I am disappointed but not surprised at the state Canada finds itself in thanks to the government's uncontrolled spending and lack of action where it counts. As it stands, Canada has the second-highest unemployment rate in the G7. This places us just above Italy, a country that has been plagued with fiscal problems and instability for years now. This is not exactly a ranking to be proud of, yet the Liberals have not taken any concrete measures to improve Canada's standing in a meaningful way, despite their claims to the opposite.

In fact, under these Liberals, Canada has seen the slowest rate of economic growth in the G7. It is no mystery why competitiveness has fallen dramatically, as these go hand in hand. Without solid economic growth, there is no incentive to invest in Canada, and without those necessary investments, Canada becomes less and less competitive on the world stage.

Furthermore, the government has done little to nothing to encourage actual meaningful investment in the industries that need it now more than ever, such as the energy industry. One example of the government's failure in this regard is the recent cancellation of the Keystone XL pipeline. This pipeline stood to benefit thousands of Canadian workers through the jobs it would create, not just temporarily during construction but also through the longer-term jobs associated with maintaining and operating this pipeline. In some cases, Keystone XL and the economic boost from it was bolstering entire communities. The economic spinoff would have created significant private sector industry tax dollars, which provide for many social programs.

The Prime Minister does not seem to realize the potential severe impacts of the trickle-down effect. When any key project like Keystone XL is cancelled, it immediately impacts the workers who are directly employed to work on it, such as construction crews or transportation companies. Many will need to consider moving elsewhere to find gainful employment, such as those working for service companies, restaurants, movie theatres, clothing stores, city, town and village staff and more. This means that many communities experience a mass exodus, something we continue to see the devastating impacts of.

I would like to take a brief time to talk about just two of the many of my constituents hugely affected by this situation. Jeff is a young oil field worker from the Moosomin area who lost his job in March with the usual slow down from the spring breakup, and who went on EI and spent months trying to get support. However, Service Canada closed down and there was nobody to talk to in person. Nobody would answer his phone calls or respond with call backs. He was desperate and close to broke.

Jeff searched high and low for work and found some with K+S north of Regina. He was then laid off. He went to Fort St. John and found work as an apprentice pipe-fitter, but he was laid off again before Christmas. He was rehired last month and finally, fingers crossed, last week, which is now closing in on a year, we managed to get him in contact with somebody and hopefully he will get some resolution to his EI issue. Bill C-14 has done nothing to assist him or many others like him.

Let me also introduce the House to Ryan, another hard worker who lost his job due to the government's lack of interest in assisting people who work in the energy sector. He is a young father of two, whose wife is expecting her third child. He is struggling to make ends meet in a community that has been severely impacted over the last five years by the loss of jobs. He searched and searched for work throughout this time, spending any savings he had to survive, paying power bills, heating bills, clothing bills and family bills, as they had a brand new baby. They were so desperate they had to start going to the food bank. I thank all those who donate and assist the food banks, specifically the Salvation Army and the Communi-

ty Hamper Association of Estevan, including Char Seeman, Julie Bayda, Mel Pearson and Shelley Dayman, just to name a few.

Christmastime came to Ryan and his family and the limited food they got had a huge impact on the family's self-esteem and mental health. Ryan finally found some work last month, and the first thing he and his wife Stephanie did was take what extra cash they had to help by buying support meals for others who are just as desperate.

• (1220)

These Canadians do not want a handout; they want a hand up. They want jobs. In my riding of Souris—Moose Mountain, communities like Estevan, Weyburn, Moosomin and Coronach were hit hard. We saw first-hand what happens when a key industry is reduced to a fraction of what it once was.

This pandemic has compounded the problems. Businesses closed left, right and centre, and not just those connected to the energy industry. Restaurants, retail stores, supply companies, auto garages, etc., were forced to close their doors because the customers were simply not there. Families had to uproot from the towns and cities and, most importantly, the people they knew and loved, because they had no way to pay the bills.

When the federal government, specifically the Prime Minister, failed to advocate for the continuation of projects like Keystone XL, it was tantamount to telling everybody affected, the energy workers, that the government does not care about them. It is not just Keystone XL; Keystone is just one high-profile issue. The energy industry in general has suffered from a lack of support and advocacy by the current government.

As I stated before, Canada has dropped in its ranking of competitiveness, and part of that is certainly due to the lack of investment in our energy sector. Why would a private company see Canada as a stable place to invest when its our Prime Minister regularly helps to stymie the network of development and large energy projects that would help boost our economy? This lack of leadership and support is pushing businesses away from Canada, and the Prime Minister does not care. It is clear that he cares more about the image of his party. As I am an MP for a riding that has seen the devastation that his apathy causes, I am truly disgusted. Perhaps the Prime Minister will wake up should Enbridge Line 5 be cancelled, but I am not counting on it.

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I would like to go back to the numbers now, as I believe they paint an alarming picture of the situation Canada is currently facing. While we certainly understand that programs are needed to help Canadians get through the pandemic, it is concerning that there seems to be a plan to increase spending and yet no plan to recover our economy. This year, the deficit is projected to be over \$380 billion, which will bring the national debt to a record-setting \$1.1 trillion. We have now gone two years without a federal budget, and the bill we are debating today does not outline how we are going to dig ourselves out of this deep hole. It is both reckless and irresponsible.

When these alarmingly high numbers are coupled with a Prime Minister who does not aggressively advocate for Canada, whether in regard to our vaccine supply, the future of our much-needed energy projects or the entirety of the oil and gas industry, which accounts for over 10% of our country's economy, it paints a scary picture of our future. Even before COVID-19, we were worried that our children and grandchildren would be footing the bill for the current government's ludicrous spending, and now that seems to have become an inevitability. In fact, it will be our great-great-grandchildren will have to wait see a recovery from this.

In conclusion, my constituents want to be confident that their Prime Minister has a plan for them and for the recovery of this country's economy. Bill C-14 would do absolutely nothing to instill this confidence. If anything, all it shows is more money going out the door, without any kind of indication as to how we will rebuild. In a time of fear and uncertainty, the government owes it to Canadians to show real, committed leadership, but all the Prime Minister does is add to his laundry list of failures.

As for me, I will continue to fight for the great people of Souris—Moose Mountain, including the energy workers, the agricultural producers, the small business owners and everyone in-between. Our country deserves much better than the current Liberal government has given over the last five years and it is time for a change.

• (1225)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Questions and comments.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: On a point of order, Madam Speaker, I was actually raising my hand for questions and comments, and I am speaking as well afterwards. May I ask a question, or did I miss the window for that?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Yes, the member may ask a question, of course.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, my colleague comes from Saskatchewan and I am from Alberta; we have similar issues with the impact on energy workers. There is a lot of frustration with some of the earlier bills: Bill C-48 and Bill C-69. We know those bills predate the pandemic. However, when we are thinking about how the economy is going to recover post-pandemic, those bills are a big barrier to Canada's looking like an attractive investment destination.

Could the member speak further to some of that legislation and share his feedback on what could and should be done in response to that climate of Canada's not looking like a great place to invest with these bills in place, particularly in the context of our energy sector?

Mr. Robert Kitchen: Madam Speaker, the hon. member is right. Ultimately, we are seeing investment dollars leaving this country, left, right and centre. The money is leaving from the western part of the country, heading south or to other parts, because investors are seeking better places to invest. Why would they not?

If we want to talk about what is going on in Bill C-14, I would like to point to the Borrowing Authority Act that the bill is going to amend. The government seems very quiet about the fact the bill is going to increase the amount it can borrow to \$1,831,000,000,000. That is sort of like when someone gets their Visa bill and they have to pay their limit, and all of a sudden they see at the top that Visa has increased the amount, without telling them.

I do not hear the government speaking at all about this amount, so that Canadians could truly see how much the government is actually trying to increase its spending.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech. I think the fall economic statement was full of intentions and promises to spend billions of dollars going forward, but it lacked a real plan or any concrete sense of direction for how the government planned to actually invest that money. That is deeply troubling, especially considering all it has failed to do in the past.

I would like to know if my colleague is concerned about that lack of a plan, that lack of a planning process, and all the ad hocery in the fall economic statement as it pertains to the future of the Canadian economy.

• (1230)

[English]

Mr. Robert Kitchen: Madam Speaker, the member makes a very good point, and that is the fact that the present Liberal government has done no planning whatsoever for the last five years.

A prime example is right here, on investments and getting people and businesses going in this country, but it is also evident in how the government has been doing with the rollout of vaccines and PPE. There was no planning. The government made a statement on a Friday, before the weekend, and then all of a sudden, without hearing any responses or having any idea of what is out there, it rolled it out without any type of plan for its impacts.

The government has not talked with the Conservatives at all on this aspect. It rolls things out on its own. Planning and being a team coach means talking to players. It means hearing from each and every one of them; then taking parts of what they say to help improve what is being done. It is not just running out helter-skelter without having an official plan and procedures. It is not A, Z, B, D; it is A, B, C, D.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, if I understand my colleague correctly, for the past weeks and months, the Liberals have been talking about a “Team Canada” approach to COVID-19 and negotiating with the United States. That is just lip service though, because in practice, they are not really behaving like part of a team.

[English]

Mr. Robert Kitchen: Madam Speaker, that certainly is correct. As someone who has been involved in coaching hockey my entire life, the one thing we learned is that when we talk about team work, we talk about working with the team.

That would be someone who is actually working with the team, and the Liberal government has not made any effort to work with the team. It is purely acting as a coach who does not talk to—

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to speak to Bill C-14 and pick up on many of the themes discussed by my colleague from Souris-Moose Mountain. I do not know nearly as much about sports as he does, so I probably will not be as well versed on those issues, but I certainly share a concern about the impact on our energy sector.

Right now the government is talking about its various proposals for government spending. In reality, the government is saying that it is not going to support the existence of jobs and will put in place policies that will likely kill jobs. However, it tells us not to worry; it will have some money afterward.

What I hear from Canadians over and over again is that they are interested in working. Their desire is to get back into employment and have the joy, satisfaction and pride that comes from earning income. They also understand that the government's long-term approach is not realistic. We cannot have fewer and fewer jobs with more and more government subsidy and expect this to be an economic plan that will give us the capacity to provide support to people in the long run.

We are debating Bill C-14, which lays out aspects of the government's fiscal agenda. Part of the bill is for correcting errors in previous bills. The government has put forward other bills and pushed hard to rush them through quickly, but they have had significant technical flaws or other flaws. They have had a big negative impact on individuals and businesses. We are carefully reviewing and understanding this legislation to make sure we do not create more errors in the process of the government correcting errors it has made in the past.

The Conservatives are supportive of providing essential support to people in the midst of very challenging circumstances. However, our major concern, as we look at the government's fiscal plan for

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the present and for the future, is that it does not have a plan for jobs, growth and getting Canadians back to work.

There is a discussion of providing various kinds of benefits without thinking about jobs and growth. However, the government misses the reality that if we do not have a plan for jobs and growth over the long term, inevitably we are going to run out of the fiscal capacity to provide Canadians with the support they need. We have to be growing the economy and creating wealth before we are in a position to redistribute it. That is where I want to focus my arguments today.

This is the frame through which I see questions of fiscal policy. The cost of government programs depends on two things. It depends, first, on how much those programs allocate to individuals who need them and, second, on how many people need them. If we have very generous unemployment benefits when a very small percentage of the population is unemployed, it is going to cost us less than if a larger percentage of the population is unemployed in the midst of lower benefits. It is not just a function of the size of benefits we are providing; it is a function of the level of need for those benefits, as well as the size of them.

Logically, then, if we notice enormous levels of government spending and runaway deficits, as we see right now, and we need to reduce government spending at some point, then there are two ways of doing that. One might be to reduce the amount of money allocated to individuals or as part of individual benefit programs. The second might be to strategically think about how we can reduce the need for government benefits. If we can find ways of increasing the employment rate, there will be less need for unemployment benefits and it will cost the government less even if it is providing sufficient benefits to help people in those situations. Similarly, we might say this with respect to criminal justice: If we can reduce the crime rate, we will need to spend less money on responding to crime.

If we look at the causes of the need for government response and can find ways of addressing the underlying need, then it costs government less and we have more fiscal capacity to provide resources to people in situations of significant need. I think we would all generally agree that reducing people's need for or reliance on government services is a much better route to go than simply reducing the availability of those services without taking into consideration how we can address the issue of people's real or perceived need for them.

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• (1235)

This underlines the point that we should not be measuring the success, effectiveness or commitment of government in terms of spending alone. We might have a government that is spending a lot of money on providing benefits to people but doing so in a way that is poorly targeted and does not address the underlying root causes of the need. It is therefore not there for those who are in a position to need support. On the other hand, we could imagine a situation where a government has very generous and targeted benefits in situations where people have need and at the same time is addressing root causes such that there is less need for government services. In the latter case, that government would be spending less money. It would be spending less money by having more targeted benefits and by thinking about the need for government services, not just about the magnitude of the services in place.

As we think about the current dynamic with COVID and the various economic challenges facing our country, it is important that we think about creating jobs and growth, reducing the need for government services, strengthening communities and strengthening the supports individuals face independent of government. We would have a greater capacity to focus the public resources we have on those who are not able to find assistance any other way. If we have a lower unemployment rate, it stands to reason that we can provide more, better, longer-term effective supports to those who are not employed. However, if we have a higher level of unemployment, our collective capacity to do that is somewhat reduced. Unfortunately, what we see right now from the government is the lack of a plan for jobs and growth. That is really what is going to get us moving.

There are many different ways we can think about what that plan could and should include. What we need to keep in mind is that a great deal of our jobs are coming, and will continue to come, from resource extraction and manufacturing. There are a variety of sectors in our economy that people are working in, but there are many people in my riding and across the country who are working in resource extraction and manufacturing. We need a government that appreciates the value of that work being done, one that does not live in some fantasy world where everybody is working in an office behind a computer. The hard work people do with their hands in resource extraction and manufacturing are the jobs of the present and future and require our protection and support.

What we see from the government is a piling on of regulation and red tape that nominally is often about the environment but is very ineffective at allowing us to reach our environmental objectives. We also see a sense of unwillingness to defend the rule of law in cases where natural resource development projects have been through an appropriate review process and have been signed off by affected communities, but there are a few people trying to physically blockade them. We have cases of end runs, where projects have gone through the whole process and people are trying to stop them, even if they meet the existing requirements. That undermines investor confidence in the Canadian economy.

In a conversation I had with an ambassador regarding the opportunities in Canadian energy development, the person said that, more and more, Canada is being seen as a country of political risk. People can do all the work and have all the technical pieces in place

and the project can make sense and conform to regulations, but there is a risk that some political factors will come into play and the rug will be pulled out from under them. That kind of environment makes it very hard for investors to want to invest in Canada.

People try to make the argument in the House that resource extraction and manufacturing industries are industries of the past. On the contrary, these investments are being made in other parts of the world; we are just not seeing many of those investments happen to the same degree in Canada. When we see growth in energy sectors outside of Canada but not the same kind of investments being made in Canada, we see that the problem is political.

In conclusion, to be able to provide support to Canadians who are unemployed, we need to have more Canadians who are employed. That means respecting and supporting our resource extraction and manufacturing sectors. That means working to have reasonable regulations, not unpredictable, constantly changing red tape for people who want to pursue projects. That is what we need for jobs, growth and opportunities—

• (1240)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Questions and comments, the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am paraphrasing, but toward the beginning of his speech, the member said the government has not been doing much to support existing jobs. That is probably one of the most ludicrous statements I have heard in the House.

I will recap for the member. In period one, there were 3.6 million jobs; in period two, 3.9 million; in period three, 4.2 million; and in period four, 4.1 million. The job numbers stay consistent up to periods nine, 10 and 11: there were 3.3 million, 2.5 million and 1 million jobs. These are the job numbers in the country, and each period is reflective of a one-month period from the beginning of the pandemic. This is the number of jobs in this country that have been supported by the Canada emergency wage subsidy.

How is it possible, when so much of our economy is being supported by the government right now through this program, that the member can say the government is not doing anything to support existing jobs?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, despite the volume, the reality of what I said is completely true. It is evident in the member's question. He is measuring success by the amount of money the government is shovelling out the door, instead of looking at our unemployment rate and seeing that Canada has a very high unemployment rate, even relative to many other countries that are similarly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. We have spent substantially more than many other peer countries, yet we have higher unemployment.

What I talked about in my speech is the importance of measuring results, not just saying that we spent a bunch of money so look at how great we are. We should be measuring the results and the impact.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his speech. I am reminded of Félix Leclerc, who said the best way to kill a man is to pay him to do nothing.

What is needed in order to jump-start the economy are vaccines. Two provisions in Bill C-14 will help speed up distribution, but our dependence on foreign vaccines will increase further because the Patent Act was not updated before September 30.

I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on the importance of reviewing the Patent Act, in relation to the highly specialized resources we have in Quebec and Canada.

• (1245)

[English]

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, I very much appreciate the quotation that my colleague shared at the beginning of her question. I think it underlines the fact that work is not just about earning money. Positively, for many people work is about their engagement with and their investment in the community. It is a way of earning income but is so much more than just a way of earning income.

To her question about the Patent Act, perhaps a longer discussion can happen on that at some point. I do think we need to work to increase domestic vaccine manufacturing capacity. We have called on the government to have a plan on vaccines and are regularly doing so, recognizing how far behind the government is. We see clearly the government's failure in procuring a necessary supply of vaccine, as now it is trying to draw supply that is generally focused on helping developing countries. This demonstrates how much it has failed to secure the necessary domestic supply of vaccine, and it is showing up in the numbers as well.

There are many areas we need to look at about how to do this better.

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Madam Speaker, as we have seen over the decades, a number of trade agreements have gutted our manufacturing base in Canada and refocused us on exporting raw materials, such as raw bitumen and raw logs. We are seeing this problem right now with vaccines and the lack of pharmaceutical capacity in this country. We used to have a lot of capacity for this. We used to be a leader in vaccine manufacturing and providing vaccines around the world.

What does the hon. member think we should be focusing on here? Have we had the wrong focus? Should we be doing more on the value-added side and less exporting of raw materials? As we are seeing with the death of a pipeline—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, it is important to underline, in response to that question, that generally the data suggests Canada has benefited significantly as a result of most of the trade

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agreements that it has entered into and that they have been associated with significant economic growth in Canada.

There are many opportunities in different industries, including in value added, but we have to emphasize competitiveness as opposed to building up insulation—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Madam Speaker, it is always a pleasure to speak in the House.

As part of the discussion on the November 30 economic statement, I would like to provide some concrete examples of the impact the crisis is having on my riding, Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, and the measures that need to be put in place to help the people and organizations back home.

There is also the issue of the need for the current government to be transparent on spending and the fact that it is unacceptable that it has not introduced a proper budget in more than two years. I think this is an ideal opportunity to reiterate the Bloc Québécois's calls for a green economic recovery.

The opposition does more than just criticize. As parliamentarians, it is important to acknowledge the government whenever it does something right. I must say that, as far as the Lower St. Lawrence and the Gaspé are concerned, the fact that Bill C-14 promises additional funding for the regional relief and recovery fund is important because many of our businesses still need support.

In Chaleur Bay, in the Gaspé, the Maison d'aide et d'hébergement L'Émergence, which provides emergency support for women who are victims of domestic violence and their children, will soon open a second-hand shop that will fund the organization's services and help women return to the job market. L'Émergence has already received \$80,000 from the RRRF program. That is not peanuts. I applaud the commitment of the organization and its director to helping women and families dealing with domestic violence. Without this funding, this project would have been in jeopardy.

In Matapédia-et-les-Plateaux, the Corporation de développement économique also received funding from the RRRF program. This spring, a welcome centre will be set up for visitors touring the Route des belvédères, a route of magnificent locations in the Gaspé that are still not very well known. The \$56,000 provided by the RRRF program is vital to the coordination of the project. The fact that the federal government is maintaining and enhancing its investments in this program, which gives the RCM a lot of room to manoeuvre, is all important.

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On a somewhat less positive note, I want to talk about health care. The flaws in Quebec's health care network were exposed by the pandemic, but this situation is completely ignored in the Liberal government's economic statement. Bill C-14 does not provide a substantial and sustainable increase in health transfers, but it does allow for additional restrictions and oversight from federal government. My colleagues who have already spoken have made it clear that the federal government's approach does not respect Quebec's jurisdictions, especially with respect to health care. This government wants to interfere in how the provinces manage themselves, but it has yet to present a clear and transparent budget since the beginning of this pandemic. Transparency is a whole other story. I will get back to it later.

Quebec's experience with long-term care for seniors, for example, is a prime example of the impact of underfunding health care. A report on the investigation of a seniors' residence in my riding, Résidence des Bâisseurs de Matane, was released last week. The investigation had been done in response to complaints, and the report outlined some serious issues with the care provided to residents, and in particular the most vulnerable and incapacitated ones.

Let us be clear. We are not talking about a lack of standards or a flawed monitoring system within the institution. The report is clear. The crux of the problem is the lack of resources to ensure the well-being of seniors. There is therefore absolutely no point in having the federal government create more standards. What the government needs to do is invest to address the desperate shortage of qualified personnel.

The shortage of workers in health care, and, incidentally, in many other areas, is a major problem in my region. The heartbreaking situation of seniors living in the Résidence des Bâisseurs de Matane is a perfect illustration of the results of federal cuts to health transfers. Perhaps the current government needs to be reminded that with an aging population comes an increased need for long-term care. Since the health care transfers to Quebec were not increased, services for the most vulnerable seniors in our society have gone downhill throughout Quebec's health care system.

Successive Quebec governments have had to adjust to a decrease in available funding for health care. They have turned over responsibility for some care to private companies, but private means profit. That is how things work in a capitalist society.

I think it is fairly obvious that privatization is not the best approach to health care for a population as vulnerable as the elderly because it prioritizes profit over care.

I would like to take advantage of this opportunity to reiterate the Bloc Québécois's expectation for increased health transfers for Quebec and the provinces. They are united in their demand for more money, Quebec's National Assembly supports that demand, and if the federal government is truly concerned about our seniors, it must agree and increase its annual share of Quebec's health care costs to 35% on an ongoing basis.

The Fédération des médecins spécialistes du Québec supports this demand. Members may recall that in 2019, the provinces, Quebec and the territories were covering 45% of health care costs compared to the Canadian government's measly 22%.

According to the Conference Board of Canada, the way things are going, the federal share of health care funding will slide to 20% by 2026. We need to stop the bleeding now.

• (1250)

Another sector that could certainly use some extra attention is tourism. The tourism industry is vital to the Gaspé and Bas-Saint-Laurent, two regions that overlap in my riding. The tourism industry in the Gaspé accounts for more than 3,000 jobs in high season, 1,300 businesses, more than 785,000 visitors per year, and revenues estimated at more than \$380 million annually. In the summer of 2019 alone, the economic benefits of this industry totalled \$271 million, making that a record year. In the Bas-Saint-Laurent region, tourism is also an essential economic sector, accounting for some 850 businesses, 7,800 jobs, 1,143,000 visitors per year, and over \$345 million in economic benefits annually. We must absolutely support this industry, which is among those most affected by the pandemic.

Hotel operators, promoters and presenters of cultural events, restaurant owners and tour operators have been asking us for many weeks about the terms and conditions of the highly affected sectors credit availability program. More than two months after the program was announced in the fall economic statement and one month after the launch of the HASCAP by the minister responsible, the government finally announced the terms and conditions of the program.

However, from day one of the pandemic, the Bloc Québécois has talked about the importance of developing assistance programs that are adapted to the reality of each industry and each region. Standardized approaches are not working. In May, the Bloc was very clearly calling for targeted assistance for seasonal industries, the tourism industry in particular. Some programs such as the Canada emergency commercial rent assistance program were not well suited to these sectors.

When the government comes up with a game plan for the economic recovery it will have to consider the needs of the regions. In fact, it should be thinking about that right now. The federal government needs to understand how important the tourism industry is to the economic vitality of many regions in Quebec, including the ones I represent.

Let us now talk about the Canada recovery benefit. Many workers back home, including indigenous workers, have had to deal with unreasonable delays due to having to navigate the machinery of the federal government. I am thinking about a self-employed worker from Saint-Omer in Chaleur Bay who waited eight weeks for the federal government to verify whether she was eligible for the Canada recovery benefit, which blocked CRB payments. Finally, the lockdown was lifted in her sector and she went back to work. Nevertheless, eight weeks without income is a long time. We understand the need for these verifications, but the government assured us it had the necessary staff to do the work quickly. Obviously that is not the case, and it has not been since the start of the pandemic.

People without any income who need support are not getting anything. Others, who should not be eligible and who could be working, are receiving multiple cheques. We are asking for a little more diligence, and for the government to accelerate its audits.

Also, economic recovery goes hand in hand with significant spending. It is more crucial than ever that the government be transparent. The Parliamentary Budget Officer denounced the lack of transparency and accountability in federal finances. The government has not presented any fiscal anchors to ensure that spending is viable in the long term, nor has it presented a budget since the beginning of its mandate, which is not only unacceptable, but irresponsible as well. The federal government should be helping citizens, organizations and businesses, but it should also be accountable to the House and to the public. It should be accountable in particular to the younger generation, the young Canadians who will be living with the costs of this economic recovery, those who are also demanding a green recovery.

In its recovery plan, the Bloc Québécois puts forward green transition measures involving the use of hydroelectricity and other clean energies such as biomass, wind power, solar energy and geothermal energy. Canada must stop basing its economic recovery on the fossil fuel industry. The economic recovery should not be accompanied by an increase in greenhouse gas emissions. We need to invest in sectors that reduce our environmental footprint and that will have long-term economic benefits for Quebec and Canada.

Businesses here, such as Lion Electric in Saint-Jérôme, a manufacturer of zero-emission heavy vehicles, are already benefiting from the transition. We can reduce our net greenhouse gas emissions to zero by 2050, as the government intends to do, but we need to implement policies that go well beyond what we have seen so far. Action is urgently needed.

The government should seize the opportunity and show that it is truly a green government, that it really has an ecological conscience and that it wants to ensure the well-being and survival of its regions.

• (1255)

[English]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the Bloc member's intervention should serve as an example to my Conservative colleagues as to what a proper speech should be like. She was by no means flattering to the government. She addressed her concerns and also mentioned at the beginning what she liked about the bill, but most importantly, she stuck to the content of the bill, which was extremely refreshing. If this ever gets to committee, I hope she will have the opportunity to have her concerns addressed there.

I did pick up on one particular thing the member talked about. That was about the possibility of delays with respect to the CERB and other government programs. This bill has been in the House now for seven days; most budget bills are only here for five days. There is no doubt that there are going to be delays in services to Canadians as a result of the tactics that the Conservatives are using right now.

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Is the member concerned about the delays that might occur for Canadians as a result of this bill being held up by the Conservatives?

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question and his kind words. As I said at the beginning of my speech, I think it is important to acknowledge the government whenever it does something right. However, there are a number of times when it got it wrong, and we need to acknowledge that, too.

The government has a busy schedule, in particular because of the prorogation of Parliament last summer, as you will recall. As a result of the prorogation, several bills were put on the back burner, including the one on medical assistance in dying, which still has not been dealt with. Several businesses here are waiting for the assistance this bill, which we are still discussing, could provide. I would therefore not be too quick to blame the Conservatives for any delays, because I think that the government bears a share of the responsibility for the situation. Let us work together to pass these bills promptly.

[English]

Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC): Madam Speaker, I too would like to compliment the member on her excellent speech.

The member was talking a little about the long-term care crisis in Quebec and other provinces, and the fact that it has a lot to do with resources. Could the member expand upon whether she believes it is better for a few Ottawa bureaucrats to fix the Quebec long-term care health system or whether it would be better done in the provinces?

• (1300)

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his very relevant question.

We cannot repeat it often enough: There is plenty of health care expertise in Quebec and the provinces. The federal government's job is easy: All it needs to do is to increase health transfer payments and pay us the amounts we are still waiting for.

We see the problems this is causing. Certain colleagues have pointed out that only a tiny portion of the money spent by the government since the beginning of the pandemic has been allocated to our health care systems. In a cruel twist of irony, we are in the middle of a health crisis. I think that it is high time that the federal government funnel more funds into health care. Once it has done so, Quebec and the provinces, which have the necessary expertise, can hire staff for our long-term care facilities and perhaps even increase personal care workers' salaries. They can do what they want with the money. The role of the federal government is to provide the funds.

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Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, there is much in the hon. member's speech that I agree with. She spoke to the needs of tourism operators in her region and the fact that the current support programs have not necessarily met their unique needs.

This speaks very closely to the situation in northwest B.C., where so many tourism operators in places like Haida Gwaii have lost an entire tourism business season and stand to lose another one. The current programs have not met their needs.

Perhaps the member could speak to how she sees the programs being improved so that small tourism operators could make it through this pandemic in one piece and look forward to prosperous days ahead.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question. As I said in my speech, a uniform approach rarely works, and we need programs adapted to regional realities.

My region is a tourist region. As much as 2019 was a record year for the tourism industry, 2020 was probably the worst. We need to help these businesses keep their head above water but, unfortunately, a single Canada-wide program may not work well enough. We need to consider regional realities and find ways to help these businesses.

[English]

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Madam Speaker, I do not think any of my colleagues, from either side of the aisle, would disagree with me when I say that this bill is incredibly important to Canadians.

We are now over a year into this pandemic. I know that the first case in Canada was confirmed in January 2020, and the first recorded case of COVID-19 in Alberta was in March of last year. However, I do not know when the first plan to get back to normal will be presented, either to Canadians, or to the House of Commons. I honestly cannot believe that I had to say those words.

We are now over a year into this pandemic, and the government has not yet presented a plan. I do not think there is a way for anyone to easily describe how disappointing that is, and how disappointing it is that the bill before us does not present any sort of plan either. Of course, this raises the question of what the government would do if it did have a plan.

I am not asking about policies here. I am asking about how the government expects to get its plan through the House of Commons. While I and many of my colleagues appreciate the time we have had to go through the contents of the bill before us, I have to seriously ask what the government is thinking. The fact is that we are debating the 2020 fall economic statement in the winter of 2021. Obviously, we had our winter break, which contributed to the delay, but the government has a bit of a secret that I would like to let members in on.

The Liberals are big procrastinators. They love to leave some of their most important bills, the ones Canadians are asking for, until

the last minute. They will also introduce a bill, have the first reading, and then sit on it for weeks on end until it finally goes to second reading. That is the tactic of this government.

There are far too many examples of this for me to list. However, there are plenty of examples from this very parliamentary session. I will start with a big one, which I know my colleagues from the Standing Committee on International Trade have heard me ask about plenty of times. I am referring to Bill C-18, an act to implement the agreement on trade continuity between Canada and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

As the title of the bill so clearly lays out, it would implement a trade deal worked out between Canada and our close friends and allies the United Kingdom. Originally, we were going to lose many of our preferential tariff levels with the United Kingdom by the end of last year, and we had to pass the bill to ensure that would not happen.

What did the government do? It introduced the bill about a week before we rose for the winter break. As I am sure members are aware, we only voted on the second reading of the bill on Monday, February 1, 2021. The only reason we still have those preferential tariff levels with the United Kingdom is because the government realized its folly and signed a memorandum of understanding that temporarily extends those levels until we pass Bill C-18. Believe it or not, this is not the only bill the Liberals have delayed on.

● (1305)

I am sure all my colleagues, and of course many, many Canadians, are very familiar with Bill C-7 by now. We had a court-imposed deadline to pass this bill, which was December 18, 2020. I am sure my colleagues opposite will try to blame the opposition for it taking a long time to get to the other place, but it was nearly two weeks between the Speech from the Throne that kicked off this session and the bill being introduced. I wonder why.

This was not a surprise. The court decision that mandated the law be changed was made back in 2019, but it took two weeks to reintroduce this bill. On top of that, last February was the last time we looked at Bill C-7, an act that would amend the Criminal Code with respect to medical assistance in dying. That is right, it was February of 2020.

Why was this not introduced right after the 2019 federal election, as soon as we returned in December of 2019? Why not in January of 2020, or early February? The answer is that the government loves to delay the introduction and debate of important pieces of legislation. The bill we are debating today, Bill C-14, is no different.

Obviously she needed some time to be introduced to the job, but why did the Minister of Finance wait until November 30, 2020, to introduce this bill? By that point, Canadians had been asking for a plan for eight and a half months, if not longer, depending on the province. Why did she wait for two whole months after the start of the second session to introduce this bill?

It was certainly not to give my colleagues in the opposition and I time to study the bill. The Minister of Finance complained on Twitter that we were allegedly delaying this bill, but I think the answer is a little different. I think it was simply another example of Liberals leaving important business until the 11th hour.

I know my Conservative colleagues and I welcome some of the parts of this bill, such as the Canada child benefit top-up, which our leader has been calling for, but we want to make sure we have time to discuss it. The Liberal government has had plenty of poorly written legislation during this pandemic. How else does one explain that this bill would do such things as amend the rent relief legislation for the second time? This is the third try for the rent relief legislation. I know Canadians across the country are hoping this third time will be the charm, but I am not sure.

Liberals like to blame Conservatives for everything, and I know they love blaming former prime minister Harper for everything too, but in the case of Bill C-14, I am pretty sure any and all problems are their fault and theirs only. At this point, it is unacceptable that the Liberals still cannot get anything done.

I know all my colleagues in this House want to support Canadians who are still struggling against this pandemic, but the Liberals are still playing their classic game of delaying and blaming the Tories, and it is doing anything but helping Canadians. The Prime Minister and his party are just busy preparing for a snap election. They are not busy making sure the lives of Canadians are better. A fiscal update has to be in place so we know where we are going in these tough times.

• (1310)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member could not be any more wrong. Let us be realistic. I would like to say very clearly to those following the proceedings of this House that the Conservative Party, and the games it plays in order to filibuster what takes place in the House, are absolutely and completely a destructive force. Bill C-14 has had many days of debate, and it is a good example. The government has a limited number of days to bring in bills, and the Conservatives continue to come up with ways to prevent the government from passing legislation. That is the reality, whether the member recognizes it or not.

When will the Conservative Party start contributing positively to ensuring we can pass the important legislation we need to pass for Canadians, such as Bill C-14? It is time the Conservative Party starts behaving—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Edmonton Manning.

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Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Madam Speaker, the hon. member needs to probably find some market where he can sell the nonsense he is saying. There is no market for what he is saying because there is no credibility in what he is saying. The government controls the agenda of the House, and it was very good at blaming others when it screwed up on that specific agenda.

It is time for the member and his party to act with transparency. At that time, we will all be looking to help Canadians, but when the government is not acting with good faith and in the best interests of Canadians, then it is going to have to expect delays. That will be its fault, and only its fault.

• (1315)

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Madam Speaker, speaking of transparency, a huge amount of money is currently being spent, and we, the Bloc Québécois, believe that it is important that a committee be established to review and study all COVID-19 spending, in order to ensure that past and future spending is managed soundly and responsibly.

What does my Conservative colleague think of this?

[English]

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Madam Speaker, I happen to serve with the member on the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates.

The answer is very simple. I came from the business world where accountability, productivity and results are important. There have to be results. The government is only good at how much it spends on a credit card. That is its strategy.

However, with results, it does not want anyone to question how productive its policies were or how it was able to generate the proper results out of what was spent. The member is correct that the government needs to be questioned about that, too.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, we still do not have a date for the budget. The fall economic statement was late. Instead of a budget, they delivered a very improvised economic statement.

The Liberals have been saying since this morning that the bill is being filibustered.

So far, 22 Liberal members have spoken to Bill C-14. Would my colleague agree that what the Conservatives have to say is just as important as what the Liberals and my Bloc Québécois colleagues have to say?

I think it is important that we get things straight. If 22 Liberal members were able to speak, we also have the right to speak because this bill concerns all Canadians.

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[English]

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his very straightforward point. We know the government has dragged its feet on everything since the start of the 42nd Parliament. It drags its feet on every piece of legislation in the House in order to give less time to opposition parties to question. Unfortunately, government members get very upset and disappointed when we take our time to ask questions on behalf of Canadians and the people we represent.

We know the government's style. We know this is the way the government wants to operate. It is unfortunate, because it is becoming a burden on top of the worries Canadians are carrying through the difficult times we are going through right now.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to participate virtually this afternoon from Central Alberta.

When the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance introduced the fall economic statement in late November last year, many people finally realized just how dire the financial situation we face here in Canada actually is. Unfortunately, very few, if any, of these people are part of the Liberal government, which seems to be content with the concept that putting good vibes out into the world with platitudes like “build back better”, “budgets balance themselves” and “the economy will come roaring back” are somehow enough to just will the outcomes back into existence.

The reality is the fall economic statement has highlighted a number of reasons for deep concern, yet proposes to continue many of the Liberal government's reckless economic tendencies without offering any of the necessary solutions.

There absolutely has been a need to spend money to support Canadians over the past 11 months. I was in support of some of the government's programs that helped support families and small businesses, and Conservatives played a key role in improving these programs for Canadians. While the Liberals like to suggest that criticizing the amount of debt they may have accumulated since taking government means that Conservatives would somehow be less generous had we been in government, that is just a false narrative and another example of putting politics before the well-being of Canadians.

The reality is that successive bad decisions, like delaying the initial closing of the borders, trusting the World Health Organization's data over Canada's own experts, and relying on China for our initial tranche of vaccines, decisions that we Conservatives would not have been naive enough to make, has in many ways forced this situation upon us.

Mismanagement from the outset seems to have stemmed from a total lack of a plan to deal with this pandemic. We came into this crisis with an additional \$100 billion in unnecessary debt racked up by the government since 2015. We had less personal protective equipment and other critical supplies because of the government's decision to purge emergency supplies, and we were without our pandemic early warning system, a program cancelled by the government.

We would never have had to make these trade-offs because we would never have allowed ourselves to get into a situation of having among the highest unemployment rates in the G7, while also running the largest deficit in the G7, and having the fewest people per capita vaccinated. I believe we are 52nd in terms of our vaccine rollouts. That is abysmal. We are paying more under the Liberal government to get less.

Perhaps it is unfair to say there was no plan. In fact, retired lieutenant-colonel David Redman, who previously served as the head of the Alberta Emergency Management Agency, has suggested that governments across the country seem to have discarded their pandemic plans and core principles in favour of starting brand new when the virus began to appear here in Canada. Mr. Redman's resumé includes being tasked with closing the Lahr military base in Germany, leading the unplanned withdrawal from former Yugoslavia and re-establishing staging bases in the area, and leading the development of Alberta's counterterrorism strategy after 9/11. All that is to say that he is a serious and well-credentialed individual who has advocated from the beginning that the pandemic cannot be viewed through the lens of solely a public health emergency, but as a public emergency writ large that requires a different type of response.

It is hard to argue that the pandemic has not impacted virtually every part of our lives, and not just people's respiratory health and the health care system at large that supports us in the time of need. I understand that many people are comforted by the status quo of lockdowns and restrictions of civil liberties, because as much as it is hard to do and everyone seems to hate it, it gives some people a sense of control.

Meanwhile, the true cost of these measures will take years, if not generations, to actually determine. While some people may find small comfort in these measures, the financial situation in our country necessitates a reconsideration of how we are responding to this pandemic. My friend, the hon. member for Carleton, outlined perfectly in his speech why the situation is no different from past situations in other countries and how a debt crisis truly is a looming threat.

The Liberals' failures have left Canada in a very precarious situation. We have been forced to abandon the debt-to-GDP ratio as a fiscal anchor, which has now exceeded 100% in terms of government debt alone. During the 1990s debt crisis, our debt-to-GDP ratio was only 92%. In that case, high inflation and increasing interest rates nearly led to Canada's having to go to the International Monetary Fund for a bailout. At that time, the deficits were smaller than they are currently.

The deficit in the 2021 fiscal year is \$381.6 billion, which is greater than the total federal spending the entire previous fiscal year. Our federal debt alone reached \$1.2 trillion in 2020, with the expectation that it will continue to sharply rise for the next several years, potentially getting as high as \$1.6 trillion by 2025. The government is banking on interest rates remaining low for the foreseeable future in order to ensure that we can manage the debt load.

• (1320)

These low rates are the only thing keeping our nose above water right now. While there are many countries taking advantage of these low interest rates, this is not without risk. Some international banks are actually betting that Canada will be forced to increase interest rates ahead of many of our partner countries, suggesting that we will be more susceptible to inflationary pressures. If interest rates exceed our economic growth rates, we will be in for a very difficult time. When we consider that Canada's GDP growth averaged out to around 1.7% between 2015 and 2019, we realize just how dangerous a game we are playing.

While I appreciate that the governor of the Bank of Canada plans to keep interest rates pinned near current levels for the foreseeable future, the reality is that the bank must respond to the market like everyone else. Rates will not stay low forever, and in order to be prepared for when they inevitably do rise, we need to create high, sustained economic growth.

Creating economic growth is another area where the fall economic statement falls short. It appears to be more of an afterthought than a target for the document, which should not be surprising, since pesky things like a strong economy always seem to be secondary to making announcements about woke concepts that never really deliver for this government. This trend cannot continue, if we hope to avoid a financial crisis coming out of this pandemic, and we cannot afford to wait to get started.

We need to get people back to work safely. We need to empower the private sector, from our small businesses right up to major corporations, and create jobs and prosperity here in Canada, instead of having all of that capital fleeing to other jurisdictions. We need to give potential infrastructure proponents predictability when it comes to their investments, so that they are willing to invest in major projects here in Canada, whether in extraction projects, pipelines, renewable resources or something else altogether. Jurisdictions around the world are going to be competing to attract investment and the jobs and additional revenue that accompany them. Without a concerted effort to make Canada the most desirable place to invest and create, those opportunities will go elsewhere.

The government cannot continue to move the goalposts and signal that it does not want certain well-paying sectors to set up shop in Canada, based on its ideological bent. The energy sector has led Canada out of dire financial straits in the past, and it will be able to strongly contribute again this time, if it is not shackled by the current government's policies.

We also need to empower small businesses to succeed. For the past 11 months, many have been asked to go into an economic coma. Businesses have barely been getting by, and far too many of the shops we love on the main streets in our communities will not reopen. This is not just an economic loss to our country, but an example of shattered dreams for business owners and a physical reminder of the difficult, but sometimes not impossible, choices that families are being forced to make.

A recent survey by the Red Deer & District Chamber of Commerce indicated that over 70% of business owners expected their businesses to either contract or stay about the same for the next 12 months, with only 27% expecting to see growth. In that same sur-

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vey, nearly 42% of businesses acknowledged that they have had to make layoffs, 55% had substantially less revenue and over 20% were concerned they could not outlast the restrictions put in place by public health authorities. These numbers are very troubling. The Liberals keep saying they are trying to ensure that our economy will be able to come roaring back. However, the small business owners themselves are not confident this is going to happen. We need to create the conditions for them to succeed, something that the fall economic statement does not do.

In late January, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business released its 2021 edition of Canada's "Red Tape Report Card". It showed that for a business with fewer than five employees, including the owner, the cost of regulations was over \$7,000 per employee. For a business of five to 19 employees, it fell to \$3,380 and it was \$2,600 for businesses with 20 to 50 employees. These numbers excluded the cost associated with COVID-19 regulations. The report suggested that 28% of these regulations are red tape or excessive regulation that does not actually contribute to the public good.

We all understand the importance of health, safety and environmental regulations, but it is clear there is a great deal of red tape that can be cut without exposing ourselves to additional risk. The report suggests that the savings could approach \$11 billion a year, which equates to 205 million hours or 105,000 full-time job equivalents. There is a phenomenal opportunity just in red tape reduction.

Conservatives hope that the Liberals' vaccine procurement gets back on track. Success on this front would be for the good of all Canadians. That said, we cannot simply rely on vaccines to be the silver bullet.

I can see that my time is coming to a close. I look forward to the questions that are going to come. We need to get Canada back on track. We need to get Canada back to work.

• (1325)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, in fact, the government is on track with the vaccines and has been for many weeks and months now, since we indicated that we would have six million by the end of March, and then get to mid-to-high 20 millions by June.

The Conservative party wants to continue to put off seeing this bill go to committee. When does the member anticipate the Conservative party allowing this bill to go to committee? Does the member have any sense of the impact this bill would have on Canadians if it passes?

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Mr. Blaine Calkins: Madam Speaker, as both a G7 and G20 country, having a track record of being in 50th place in vaccine procurement is not something I would be particularly proud of. I would deflect from that track record by accusing my opposition of trying to delay things.

The reality is that we have the ability as members of Parliament to speak to these matters. I do not get to speak very often on behalf of my constituents because of the format that we have. We have had Parliament shut down quite excessively over the past year. We had a prorogation rather than getting some work done in the summer leading up to the fall.

The government has a number of tools at its disposal. If it wants this bill passed, it would use them to do so.

Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Madam Speaker, my friend made some very good and valid points.

One of the things I would like to ask is this. This pandemic has been over a year now and the government finally recognized the help that seniors and people with disabilities need, especially my community along with, I am sure, many other communities across Canada. It finally recognized the help they needed and gave them some assistance. Now we are in a second wave, but we do not know when it will end or when a budget will be in place to help people.

Does the member feel that it is important that a second assistance payment be made immediately to help low-income people get through some of these bad times?

• (1330)

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Madam Speaker, Conservatives have supported some of the programs put forward by the government that directly assist people. Seniors are very vulnerable and have had to bear some of the costs of this as well, such as drug dispensing fees due to shortages of medication, along with a number of other costs that were pandemic-related. If there is a need for this, I think that all members of Parliament would look to the government to do what is right on behalf of Canadian citizens.

The real frustration that I have is the expenditures just racking up the debt on the credit card. We seem to have no positive outcomes for it. We are fiscally adrift right now globally. We have no anchor to attach our fiscal ship to. Things are going to get a lot worse for us in the future if we do not make smarter decisions on where that money is going. That should not be politically motivated; it should be in the best interest of Canadians.

Ms. Nelly Shin (Port Moody—Coquitlam, CPC): Madam Speaker, my colleague pointed out that, despite accusations this morning by the Liberal government that Conservatives have been holding up passage of support for Canadians, the reality is that we have been helping to improve some of these benefits to be more inclusive of Canadians.

My question has to do with this. It is very clear that the Liberal government is positioning Canada for a snap election. Can the member speak to the delay that an election would cause in support going to Canadians?

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Madam Speaker, I think it would be largely irresponsible for the government to use the budgetary process or the fiscal snapshot process to enable the Liberal Party to position itself favourably for an election. There has been a lot of commentary in the media and even some hints from the Prime Minister and senior Liberals about that possibility.

We should be focused on actually helping Canadians. We should be focused on getting through this pandemic as quickly as possible. We should be focused on giving people back their liberties and freedoms as quickly as possible by procuring vaccines, implementing the use of rapid tests and other therapeutics that will help us get back to life as normal, as soon as possible. That should be job number one for every member of Parliament in the House of Commons: getting us through this situation as quickly and painlessly as possible both financially and when it comes to our mental health and our businesses. That is job one. It should be the focus of everyone.

Mr. Kenny Chiu (Steveston—Richmond East, CPC): Madam Speaker, we know Bill C-14 seeks to continue the pandemic relief strategy by implementing provisions from the fall economic statement. While its segments cover a breadth of topics, I would narrow my discussion on the bill to two topics today. I would begin with amendments made to the Income Tax Act to provide additional support to families with young children as the COVID-19 pandemic progresses. I believe that across party boundaries we may find that supporting Canada's youth, and young children in particular, is something on which we may find common ground.

Bill C-14 proposes amendments to the children's special allowances program to provide a similar benefit with respect to young children under that program. The CSA program provides payments to federal and provincial agencies and institutions, such as children's aid societies, that care for children. The monthly CSA payment is equal to the maximum Canada child benefit payment plus the child disability payment.

I am proud to say these benefits originated from Conservative government initiatives such as the Canada child tax benefit. This was a tax-free monthly payment available to eligible Canadian families to help with the cost of raising children. It was enacted under former prime minister Brian Mulroney in response to a commitment made by Parliament in November 1989 to eradicate child poverty in Canada by the year 2000. The CCTB could incorporate the national child benefit, a monthly benefit for low-income families with children, and the child disability benefit, a monthly benefit for families caring for children with severe and prolonged mental or physical disabilities.

Following the 2006 federal election, the newly elected, Stephen Harper-led Conservative government created the universal Canada child benefit, a new benefit of up to \$1,200 annually for children under age six. The UCCB Act received royal assent on June 22, 2006, and UCCB was paid the first time in July 2006. In the 2010 Canadian federal budget, the UCCB was made shareable between shared-custody parents and in that instance, the payment was evenly split between parents, each receiving \$50 per month. The measure entered into force in July 2011.

Though our nation, sadly, did not meet the aspirational goal of eradicating child poverty by the year 2000, we have made progress. Since its inception, the Canada child benefit has lifted about 300,000 Canadian children out of—

An hon. member: This is rubbish.

• (1335)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Can I remind the hon. members who are not speaking to please put their microphones on mute?

Mr. Kenny Chiu: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I assure you that this is not rubbish. This is actually the Canada child tax benefit, which has lifted about 300,000 Canadian children out of poverty and helped reduce child poverty by 40% from 2013 to 2017. We should all work to continue to protect Canada's children and youth. One of our largest duties as parliamentarians is to ensure that future generations of Canadians have a safe and prosperous Canada to call their home.

This leads me to measures taken for our teens and young adults, which is my second point. Bill C-14 proposes amendments to the Canada Student Loans Act, Canada Student Financial Assistance Act and Apprentice Loans Act. It seeks to provide that, during the upcoming fiscal year, no interest is to be accrued or paid on existing student loans. The Parliamentary Budget Officer estimated that this would cost the government \$315 million in unearned revenue for the 2021-22 fiscal year, and limit revenue generated to \$5 million for the next fiscal year. Given how marginal this expense is compared with the extravagance of less responsible and more poorly planned programs, I must ask why the government would allow interest on student loans to resume accrual in the first place?

The Liberals had months to reassess and act on student loan interest measures and did nothing until it was too late. Now students have had months of unnecessary interest accrual due to what has become all too common: Liberal incompetence.

Student debt in Canada is a major burden for more than 50% of Canadian post-secondary students. The effects of student debt are well documented, and impact debt holders' fiscal, financial and mental well-being.

During the early days of the ongoing pandemic, national student loan repayments were paused, with instructions given that the loan repayments would restart in October 2020. In November, however, preplanned payments were not coming out of many accounts and many people were confused. When students checked their loan accounts, they were surprised to find that their payments were shown as being past due and highlighted in red. Automatic payments were fully set up, yet payments did not come out. By November, all stu-

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dent loan accounts were shown as being past due, and many people were worried that this would negatively affect their credit scores.

I heard at that time that few people were able to get through to the government hotline, frequently facing long hold times, transfers and mysteriously dropped calls. When someone actually got through to the hotline, there was a wait of around 98 minutes. To make matters worse for young Canadians, the government website for repayment had crashed. Students were informed that their payments would be coming out immediately; however, some borrowers who logged in and made their past-due payments had to worry about double payments. If the loan came out automatically later that day, it created a huge issue for people on a fixed income. While this situation is now resolved, it did not need to occur in the first place and it stands as a testimony to our government's lack of foresight.

Mismanagement again occurred through CERB payments going to dependent teens who normally would have earned less income working part-time than the handouts the government gave. Much like our vaccine rollout, which was promised to occur at a certain time and has had the goalposts moved, we have been met with consistent failures to deliver, as more and more money is thrown at our problems in half-hearted attempts to appear as if the government is doing something meaningful.

As we stand here today, Canadians go without vaccines and face uncertainty respecting the health and security of their families. It is inexcusable that the current Liberal government has failed Canadians on multiple fronts, that our nation now ranks 52nd in vaccine rollout and that the climbing national debt burden will still be felt by my great-grandchildren. Even if the government persists in ignoring this generation, it will have to answer to these future generations. If our government truly wishes to help Canadian students and youth, I would encourage it to consider working toward a balanced budget and not to bury future generations under insurmountable debt.

Because the members opposite are so fond of asking for solutions to help dig them out of their holes, I would encourage the government to do more.

• (1340)

The government could increase the scope of debt forgiveness on student loans and retroactively cancel interest that should not have accrued through the legislative gap of its own making. It could encourage employers to do more by offering an employer-sponsored student loan repayment assistance benefit. Those are options we have yet to see put on the table.

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While I support Bill C-14 for doing something, I think we must all acknowledge it is too little, too late for Canadian students and youth.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member spoke quite a bit about the debt and the burden of the debt. He seemed to be quite critical of the amount of debt that has had to be taken on to support Canadians during this pandemic, so my question for him is quite simple. Why did he support it? All the measures that have been brought before the House to spend money over the last 11 months or so during the pandemic have been adopted by unanimous consent.

Why did he not say that he did not want to support it and not give unanimous consent to that? Why did the Conservatives and every party vote in favour of it?

Mr. Kenny Chiu: Madam Speaker, this is a common misunderstanding the hon. member across has been perpetrating. The Liberals seem to understand this as a black and white, one or zero, yes or no world. We can help Canadians on the one hand, but at the same time we could do it right so we do not waste so much of the taxpayers' or future generations' money. Besides that, we knew, even before the pandemic, the Liberals had been spending like there was no tomorrow. We know that Canada began 2020 with a deficit of \$40 billion. That was prior to the World Health Organization declaring the pandemic, so the members opposite have been in the habit of misspending, spending large and mismanaging the file. That is why we are here to oppose them.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Madam Speaker, I have some concerns about support for workers.

I am not sure if the member is aware of the troubling figures released by the Institut de la statistique du Québec regarding job losses in certain economic sectors that are not recovering. The unemployment rate among young part-time workers is very high.

How does the member plan to support these sectors that are in crisis and, in particular, young people, during the economic recovery? Investments will be required.

• (1345)

[English]

Mr. Kenny Chiu: Madam Speaker, it is a huge problem we are facing. Future generations will be taking up an insurmountable amount of debt because the current government has been spending recklessly and is incapable of spending on relief and recovery money. As we speak, the situation is dire. This is where we think the Conservative idea is what will respond best in Quebec, as well as in other provinces. We believe Canadians, including and especially our younger generations, would hugely benefit from a paycheque economy rather than credit card debt. This is where we think the government owes so much to Canadians. It has not been able to put us back on track for a recovery. For example, it dropped the ball entirely on—

Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC): I have a quick question here for you. More than 30 years ago, the Conservatives—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Remember that the question is not put to me, but through me.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I apologize, Madam Speaker. My question is for the member.

It was observed 30 years or so ago that Liberals defined compassion as how many people the government could help. The Conservatives define compassion as how many people the government does not have to help.

Would the member say that this debate is really framed in those terms? The Conservatives keep talking about how we reduce the unemployment rate and the the Liberals keep talking about how much money they are going to spend?

Mr. Kenny Chiu: Madam Speaker, absolutely. This is where the difference in philosophy between the two parties could not be more clear. We want Canadians to—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We will have to leave it at that.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Peace River—Westlock.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise to speak to Bill C-14. This is a baby budget or the fiscal update. It is not a full budget. We are in unprecedented times in that the country has been without a budget for almost 1,000 days, maybe more now.

The government will tell us that we are in unprecedented times, given COVID, and that is true. Nonetheless, during the Second World War, we still managed to have budgets and we still managed to have this place operate, holding the government to account, to give a reference for where all the money was being spent.

Bill C-14 would raise the debt ceiling. We are now a country with over a trillion dollars of debt, and the government is running out of room to take on more debt. The government has to come to Parliament and ask it to authorize a larger debt.

It is very interesting that there is no projection about where the debt is going. We are over a trillion dollars already. It is anticipated that the deficit will continue, that we are spending way more money than we are taking in as a country. It is anticipated that over the next number of years that deficit will continue.

What is fascinating about the request to raise the debt ceiling is that even given the exorbitantly high, unprecedented debt that we are taking on today, and the deficit that we have this year, and last year, given the trends, one would expect that once we get used to living with COVID and we get our economy opened up again that this deficit would start to go down over time. Three to five years out, we would expect that we would be reducing our deficit, not our debt, but our deficit. The debt cap that the Liberals are asking for is several hundreds of billions of dollars more than what is projected out, say, five years, and that is interesting.

Why do the Liberals need a slush fund? Why are the Liberals asking for much more room in the debt ceiling than they need? That is the big question I have with Bill C-14.

The Liberals always say that they are taking care of Canadians by spending all this money. That is true; they are spending a lot of money. However, the question is this. Are we getting a Rolls Royce for all that money or are we getting a K-car? If they are spending a lot of money and getting nothing in return, then they are wasting money. If they are spending a lot of money but getting more value than that money being spent, good on them. That is what we want to see.

The trouble is that we have spent billions and billions of dollars and we have seen no economy reopening. No vaccines are showing up. Thousands of business across the country are going bankrupt. There is no end in sight.

We are seeing the largest debt and deficit in Canadian history, unprecedented debt levels, yet there is no end in sight as to when the COVID pandemic will come to an end.

I read in the newspaper this morning that the United States was vaccinating, per day, more people than Canada had vaccinated in its entirety.

We might hear people saying that they are doing their best. However, we do not even have a budget to compare that to. We do not have a projection. When people buy a new car, they look at the market, they look at what they need in a car, the options they want, the colour they want. Then they look at their bank account to see if they have enough money for that car or they have a little more money to get that screen in the car.

• (1350)

If they then find out that the car they want, say a nice Dodge Challenger, is \$87,000 but then they go into the marketplace and find one for \$65,000, which is a lot of money for a car, it is still \$20,000 less than what they thought they would spend. Therefore, it is a good deal. However, if they spend \$100,000 on their new Dodge Challenger and it turns out the car is in writeoff status and cannot be insured, then they have a problem. They have spent more money than they needed to and have a car that does not work.

When it comes to the vaccines, Canada is at the back of the line. Not only are we at the back of the line, we spent all this money, unprecedented levels of debt, and we are not even in the line. We are at the food bank. We spent the money and did not get anything.

I am not sure if members know this, but essentially all manufacturers of the vaccines take a percentage of the vaccines they produce and put it with a not-for-profit organization to help out the rest of the world that is unable to afford these vaccines, much the same way a food bank works. Folks who can will donate food to the food banks and those who cannot purchase food can go to that food bank. This way everybody gets food.

We are at a point in time where we have spent all our money, have received nothing and are now raiding the food bank, not because we do not have enough money but we have spent our money foolishly. Now we have to go to the food bank of vaccines to get vaccines.

Last, on vaccines, the government brags endlessly about the suite of vaccines it has bought. That is like telling everybody how many fire departments we have contracted to come fight a fire in our

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house. We tell our wives not to worry because we have contracted 75 fire departments, which will take four hours to show up, when, in reality, only one fire department five minutes away would be helpful. By the time those fire departments show up the house will have burned down.

This is what we are talking about with this suite of vaccines about which the government keeps bragging. It is amazing how we have the largest suite, the largest portfolio of vaccines of any country in the world, which is really great. However, if they cannot be delivered in a timely manner, what is the point? When one's house is on fire, one needs the fire department there a minute ago, not four hours from now. It does not matter how many fire departments have been contracted to come to the rescue, if they are four hours away, the house has burned down before they show up.

We spent a lot of money and the government is asking us to raise the debt ceiling with no real rationale as to why it has to be as high as it is. I could see it if it were to match general projections, but why is it significantly higher than it needs to be? We have seen how we have raided the vaccine food bank when we are a wealthy country and have spent unprecedented amounts of money. We may have a Rolls Royce for all the money we spent, but it is a 1991, not a 2021. While 1991 may be the best year, I was looking for the 2021 edition of the Rolls Royce, not a K-car, not the 1991.

Last, there is no doubt that a large suite of vaccines is great, but a timely delivery of those vaccines is as important as how many vaccines we have and, in some cases, maybe more important.

• (1355)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member talked about this bill being a “baby budget”, and he is absolutely right. This is what we could consider this bill to be. However, is he aware that a regular full-scale budget requires five days of debate in the House? Meanwhile, we are on the seventh day of debate on this baby budget. I wonder if that has to do with the fact that the Conservatives will talk about everything, including cars from 1991, to hold the House up from passing the bill.

However, I will put that aside and address the member's argument about the return on investment. I do not blame him. The return on investment in society can only, from Conservative eyes, be measured through economics. He did not mention that, yes, we might have a high unemployment rate in the G7, but we also have among the lowest death rate per capita in the G7. Does he not think that investing in Canadians should also result in other changes than just pure economic changes in our economy, such as a lower death rate?

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Madam Chair, I said nothing about return on investment. In fact, I was looking for value for money.

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After one purchases a car and then drives it for a long time, there is zero return on that investment other than having had a car. I was saying that we have to line up what our expectations are and see if we are meeting those expectations.

At this point, the fact is that we do not have a budget, we do not have a template and we do not have a plan against which we can measure to see if we are spending money in a valuable manner.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Sudbury, Lib.): Madam Speaker, every casual hockey fan knows Willie O'Ree became the first Black player in the National Hockey League when he played for the Boston Bruins in 1958, but how many can name the second Black player in the NHL? Mike Marson was just 19 years old when he graduated from the Sudbury Wolves to the NHL in 1974.

Marson was the first Black player to be drafted into and play regularly in the NHL. Marson ended up playing six years for the Washington Capitals and Los Angeles Kings.

• (1400)

[Translation]

Black History Month is a time for us to recognize the impact that Black players have had on the sport. Mike Marson helped pave the way for many players of colour.

[English]

Marson retired at the age of 25, still in his prime but tired of fighting, and returned to Ontario to work.

As we reflect on and celebrate Black History Month, I hope we can give thanks for the men and women who opened the door to inclusion and diversity in Canada's institutions. We all know the stories of Jackie Robinson and Willie O'Ree, but the men and women who came after them still had mountains to climb, and often still do. That is why hockey and Canada are stronger when all we support diversity.

ACHIEVEMENTS IN PITT MEADOWS—MAPLE RIDGE

Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, Bollywood is a big deal for film production in India and internationally. Maple Ridge's Dr. Biju Mathew's book on Anand Kumar and the Super 30 is the inspiration behind a blockbuster Bollywood film starring Hrithik Roshan. The film dramatizes how Anand pours out his life to give underprivileged children in the slums the opportunity to overcome all obstacles to attend India's top institutions.

Dr. Mathew is also the founding president of the Ridge Meadows South Asian Cultural Society, or RMSACS. RMSACS organizes galas that showcase outstanding contributions by South Asian immigrants to Canada. Dr. Mathew was also a catalyst in expanding

psychiatric services at Ridge Meadows Hospital to 22 beds. Many thanks also go to Ron Antalek for his \$1-million contribution.

In addition, Dr. Mathew has helped establish our local Youth Wellness Centre, or the Foundry. This has been key to helping youth who struggle with mental health and addictions challenges.

I thank Biju for all that he has done and continues to do.

[Translation]

M1 COMPOSITES TECHNOLOGY INC.

Mr. Yves Robillard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, Lib.): Madam Speaker, this week I would like to talk about a company in my riding of Marc-Aurèle-Fortin called M1 Composites Technology Inc. This company, which is based in Sainte-Rose, recently achieved MACH 5, the highest level of the MACH initiative. The MACH initiative is a methodological scale that was developed to improve suppliers' mastery of key business processes, in order to achieve excellence in leadership, operational excellence, and excellence in workforce planning and development. M1 Composites Technology Inc. is the second company to have achieved MACH 5, but the first independent Canadian small business to do so. Reaching this level has real—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Order. The hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé.

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, here is some good news. For the first time in decades, Quebec saw an increase in its number of farms last year. Human-scale farming is what is popular among many new farmers. As the Union des producteurs agricoles or UPA explained, "Family farming, local agriculture and food processing on the farm are all factors that explain the increase that we saw last year." At a time when food self-sufficiency is on everyone's lips, I am proud to see that Quebec agriculture is ready to take on the greatest challenges.

However, just sharing good news is not enough and so I would urge the government to keep its promise and provide farmers and processors with the compensation they were promised to make up for the losses incurred under all the trade agreements, including CUSMA. All of the parties should also do as UPA is asking and support Bill C-216 so that the Canadian government can no longer chip away at supply management. They should join the Bloc Québécois in showing that they are proud of our farmers.

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House to recognize the importance of supporting official language minority communities.

During our first term, we increased funding for the action plan, whose envelope had been frozen for 10 years. We reinstated the court challenges program and appointed bilingual judges, which is something the Conservative Party leader failed to mention in his letter last week.

In 2019, we promised to enumerate rights holders in order to better serve linguistic minorities. Promise made, promise kept. On Friday, the minister tabled her white paper, a vision for Official Languages Act reform that includes plans to enshrine the appointment of bilingual judges in the act, entrust coordination of the act to a central government body and strengthen the commissioner's power.

Our caucus, our minister and our Prime Minister are not only listening to the community but also keeping their promises on official languages.

* * *

● (1405)

[English]

HEART MONTH

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, February is Heart Month. Earlier this month we celebrated Congenital Heart Disease Awareness Week. There is no known cause or cure for congenital heart disease or congenital heart defects. This condition exists from birth and can change the way blood flows through the heart. CHD can lead to irregular heartbeats, strokes and even heart failure. One baby in 100 is born with some form of congenital heart disease, and it impacts the lives of nearly 260,000 Canadians today. It is the number one birth defect in Canadians.

While most Canadians born with CHD lead long and successful lives, many must undergo surgeries or have lifelong cardiac care. I would like to thank my constituent, Allan Weatherall, on his work for the Canadian Congenital Heart Alliance. The alliance is dedicated to raising awareness of congenital heart defects while providing care support, mentoring and outreach programs to patients and families. This exemplary work should encourage constituents and colleagues alike to have a heart and recognize February as Heart Month.

* * *

COLDEST NIGHT OF THE YEAR WALK

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the COVID-19 pandemic has put a strain on food banks across Canada, but that did not stop them from keeping their doors open and working tirelessly to serve the most vulnerable of Canadians. Today I want to recognize Eden Food for Change, a remarkable food bank in my riding of Mississauga—Erin Mills that has been serving the needs of vulnerable residents for the past 30 years.

Over this weekend, Eden Food for Change hosted its annual Coldest Night of the Year walk against hunger and homelessness in

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a virtual and COVID-friendly manner. The goal of this event was to raise money for charities serving Canadians facing homelessness and hunger. This year, 188 walkers took part in this event, raising over \$73,000.

I thank the incredible staff, volunteers and participants who made this initiative happen. They are saving lives each and every day.

* * *

KAYE MCINNIS

Mr. Mike Kelloway (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with great sadness that I speak in the House today in memory of a Glace Bay icon, Kaye McInnis. Kaye passed away on February 1, leaving behind a legacy of strength, passion and resilience.

Kaye worked as a nurse at the Glace Bay General Hospital for over 35 years. As a nurse, Kaye went above and beyond to help her patients. She never, ever put herself first at any time, and helping others brought her great joy throughout her remarkable nursing career and beyond.

I have no doubt that Kaye will be remembered among many of the community of Glace Bay for her benevolent service as a dedicated nurse and community leader and for her countless charitable actions.

On behalf of Cape Breton—Canso constituents and members of the House, I wish to offer my sincere condolences to Kaye's family and her loved ones. She was an inspiration to all and will be deeply missed.

* * *

SPINAL MUSCULAR ATROPHY

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Kaysen and Harper are toddlers living in my riding and the neighbouring riding. Both suffer from spinal muscular atrophy, a rare disease that usually ends a life by age two. However, Novartis has created a miracle drug called Zolgensma. One shot stops the disease dead in its tracks. The problem is it is a brand new drug, it is \$3 million per treatment, and the governments was not covering it.

Statements by Members

Both families started fundraising. Ryan Reynolds, also known as Deadpool, even donated, but \$3 million is a lot of money. An angel donor stepped in to donate the money for Harper, and then Novartis came in and said it would cover the cost for Harper as well. Harper's family took the money and passed it on to Kaysen's family so that he would be covered as well. Now, six months later, both toddlers are doing great.

I want to thank Ryan Reynolds, all the donors, Novartis and especially the angel donor who helped save their lives. I thank them all, and God bless everyone.

* * *

● (1410)

INTERNATIONAL MOTHER LANGUAGE DAY

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to recognize International Mother Language Day, an annual observance led by the Bangladeshi diaspora in Canada and across the world, which is held on February 21. The day's goal is to promote respect for linguistic and cultural diversity, and it exists because of the fight for the respect of the Bengali language when Bangladesh formed one country with Pakistan.

International Mother Language Day has been recognized by UNESCO and has been enshrined by two United Nations General Assembly resolutions. No day is more important to persons of Bangladeshi origin or heritage, and I fully support its intended goal of promoting the preservation and protection of all languages.

Allow me to congratulate Montreal city councillor Marvin Rotrand and Souhel Miah, Toufiq Ezaz Akter and Dipak Dhar, whose organizations are active in my riding and champion this day. I invite all my colleagues to join me in celebrating alongside Bangladeshi Canadians across our country.

* * *

NATIONAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING AWARENESS DAY

Ms. Jag Sahota (Calgary Skyview, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to mark Canada's first National Human Trafficking Awareness Day.

Human trafficking is not something Canadians think of often, if at all, and when we do, we often think that this horrendous and dehumanizing crime is being committed elsewhere in the world. However, human trafficking happens right here in our own backyards. One in three victims of human trafficking are being trafficked by an intimate partner, and this crime is quickly becoming the most lucrative crime in Canada. This is why it is important for us to raise awareness, to let Canadians know that human trafficking does exist here in Canada, to recognize the signs of a person being trafficked and to report it to local law enforcement.

I encourage all members of this House and all Canadians to visit the government's website to learn more about human trafficking and help put a stop to this disturbing and dehumanizing crime.

[Translation]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Mr. Speaker, instead of focusing on the pandemic and getting Canadians vaccinated, the Liberals decided to introduce Bill C-21 last week, once again hurting law-abiding gun owners.

Worse still, in the same week, they introduced a bill to reduce prison sentences for criminals who had illegal firearms in their possession. It is always the same with these Liberals: Honest citizens are penalized while rule breakers call the shots.

The government should be investing in gang units to give police the resources they need to put a stop to smuggling and get dangerous criminals off our streets. Instead, our hunters and sport shooters, like the members of the Club de tir le Faucon de Jonquière, and the airsoft and paintball community are being treated like criminals.

The Conservatives will always support reasonable, common-sense firearms policies to protect our families and keep guns away from dangerous criminals.

* * *

[English]

EVERYDAY HEROES OF VANCOUVER KINGSWAY

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is in times of crisis that we see the very best in Canadians. I rise today to pay tribute to the everyday heroes who are doing so much to support the people of Vancouver Kingsway. From the front-line health workers at Evergreen and Lu'ma community medical centres to the staff at Collingwood and Cedar Cottage Neighbourhood Houses; from the first responders at Fire Halls Nos. 13, 15 and 20 to the paramedics serving at Station 245; and from the teachers and support staff at every school in the riding to the hospital workers at Mount Saint Joseph Hospital, B.C. Children's Hospital and B.C. Women's Hospital and Health Centre, we are deeply grateful for the skill and sacrifice of those who serve, protect and nurture.

I especially want to thank all of the small businesses in my community. These are the enterprises that employ our neighbours and provide the goods and services we need to survive and prosper. I know many are hurting and I ask the government to remember them and provide help in the upcoming budget.

To all, their courage, commitment and generosity will never be forgotten.

[Translation]

EI SICKNESS BENEFITS

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, one year ago the House adopted a motion calling on the government to increase the special EI sickness benefits from 15 to 50 weeks.

At present, people suffering from chronic diseases or workers with cancer who have paid EI premiums all their lives are falling through the cracks. Not only do they have to fight their illness, but they also wonder if they will be able to pay their bills at the end of the month. People who are ill often worry more about their financial situation than about taking care of themselves, and that is unacceptable.

The Bloc Québécois introduced a bill to fix this. We urge the government to immediately increase sickness benefits from 15 to 50 weeks.

* * *

• (1415)

[English]

COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are resilient. They have sacrificed so much over the past year. However, they need to know that their government is focused on securing their future. Unfortunately, the Prime Minister has repeatedly let them down during this crisis. The government has been consistently slow to respond, and it prioritized ideology over Canadian families.

The Prime Minister and his government cannot keep asking families to stay disconnected and for seniors to isolate. They cannot keep sacrificing jobs, ignoring sectors of the economy and avoiding transparency.

The government needs to do better. It needs to get the vaccine rollout right to secure jobs and secure our future. If it cannot, then it needs to get out of the way, because every Canadian, regardless of their age, where they live or what sector of the economy they work in, needs a government that has their back.

* * *

HEALTH SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN

Ms. Lenore Zann (Cumberland—Colchester, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, “one day at a time” is a life-saving mantra for millions, including the families of children living with a life-threatening illness. Our commitment to introducing the first rare disease strategy and national pharmacare will enable all Canadians to access vital medication.

As cancer remains the main cause of death by disease for Canadian children, our commitment of \$30 million to childhood cancer research has been endorsed by children's hospitals, cancer organizations and over 150 families experiencing this devastating diagnosis. Today I would like to add my family's name to the list in honour of our own young warrior, Maia Zann-Roland, who is battling osteosarcoma with grit, grace and “giv'er”.

Oral Questions

Budget 2021 is the first opportunity our government has to keep our commitment to sick kids. There is no time to waste. Just ask Maia. When one is 17 and living with cancer, every day is a gift.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, “For the next few months, we're not going to have a lot of people vaccinated. That's just a fact.” Who said that? Dr. Tam said it last Friday. That is because even if the Prime Minister's projections for April are reached, we will only have 8% of Canadians vaccinated.

Public health officers across the country are warning about a third wave, and new variants pose a new threat. Why has the Prime Minister's massive vaccine failure left Canadians so vulnerable to continued lockdowns and a third wave of COVID-19?

Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our vaccine procurement strategy is on track for the delivery of six million vaccines prior to the end of March, a cumulative total of 29 million prior to the end of June and 84 million vaccines prior to the end of September of approved suppliers alone. We may have additional vaccines coming online, and all Canadians who wish to be vaccinated prior to the end of September will have access to a vaccine.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are receiving 82,000 fewer doses of Moderna than we expected to get this week. That is not a victory. That is 41,000 more Canadians who will be stuck waiting for a vaccine because of the Prime Minister's failure to make smart decisions early on when it came to the vaccine. We need to vaccinate 300,000 Canadians a day in order to meet the September deadline.

Now, as we speak, the U.S. is vaccinating 1.7 million people per day, so we know it can be done. Where is the Liberals' plan, one that does not change by the moment, to get 300,000 Canadians vaccinated each and every day?

Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this plan does not change by the moment. This plan has been in place for many months.

I am happy to announce to the House of Commons today that we will be receiving half a million-plus vaccines in this country just this week alone. We are on a very steep ramp-up toward millions and millions of vaccines coming into this country, and I hope that all Canadians, including all members of the House, will work together to make sure we are executing a team Canada approach.

Oral Questions

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we really hope that happens, because as of this morning, Canada is 59th in the world in vaccine administration per capita. The United States has inoculated 63 million people and the U.K. 18 million. Israel has 83% of its population vaccinated, while the government has a measly target that is only going to see 8% of Canadians vaccinated by April.

If 8% and 59th is not good enough for the Israelis, the Brits or the Americans, why in the world does the Prime Minister think it is good enough for Canadians?

• (1420)

Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will mention again that we have a plan and we are executing that plan: six million vaccines prior to the end of March, 29 million vaccines prior to the end of June and 84 million vaccines of approved suppliers alone prior to the end of September.

As I said, additional vaccines, from AstraZeneca, Johnson & Johnson and Novavax, may come online during this time with approval from Health Canada, and that will mean additional vaccines for this country.

* * *

[Translation]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since 2014, the Uighur Muslim minority in China have been trapped in a nightmare.

Two million people have been sent to concentration camps. Hundreds of thousands of people have disappeared. Women are assaulted, raped and sterilized. Some twenty religious sites have been destroyed.

It is clear to us that this is a genocide. Less than an hour from now we will vote in the House on this issue.

Will the Prime Minister have the courage to act like a head of state, take a stand and vote on this issue?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we have said repeatedly, we are greatly concerned by the allegations and reports concerning the treatment of the Uighur people and other Turkic Muslim minorities in the Xinjiang region.

We made that clear to the Chinese government, and we demanded that they allow experts in to survey the situation. We are taking the allegations of genocide very seriously, and we are working with our international partners on this extremely important issue.

[English]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately for Canadians, the government is missing in action again.

[Translation]

In this crucial situation, we cannot merely talk about allegations, we need to take a stand.

The United States took a stand. The two key people in the Biden administration took a stand. They are not afraid to use the word “genocide”.

I will say it again, we will be voting on this issue in less than an hour.

Will the Prime Minister of all Canadians act like a head of state, take a stand and denounce the genocide?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for having asked essentially the same question again.

We have made our concerns about the reports and allegations regarding the treatment of the Uighur people and other minorities in the Xinjiang region very clear to the Chinese government.

We have also taken measures concerning the production of goods in the labour camps. The Government of Canada is taking these allegations very seriously. We will continue to work with our international partners on this issue.

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HEALTH

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we know that the best way to avoid problems when returning from a trip is not to travel at all, but the government's hotel quarantine program plumbs new depths of incompetence. It is the Phoenix system all over again. People call a government call centre and are told the wait will be three hours. They wait and at the end of three hours the call is disconnected. Some people have had to wait 25 hours to get a room. It is a phone line.

What is the government doing?

[English]

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every step of the way, we have protected Canadians from the importation of COVID-19 at the borders. Adding the additional layer of testing at the borders, with quarantine, while we wait to receive the results of those tests is an additional step to understand the role of variants of concern and how the virus is shifting and changing and how it will impact our success.

I want to thank Canadians for their continued hard work, and remind Canadians that now is not the time to travel internationally.

• (1425)

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we have known about the British variant of COVID-19 since mid-December. There were two ways to prevent it from coming here. The first was to quickly vaccinate the population, which has been a failure on the part of this government. The second was to impose mandatory quarantine on travellers arriving here. The government waited two months and ended up bungling things every step of the way. As a result, the British variant is now in our primary schools in Quebec. We can only hope that the lockdown measures will be effective.

Does the government realize that the public in lockdown is paying the price for its repeated mistakes?

[English]

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every step of the way, we have been monitoring this virus as it changes and taking appropriate steps as necessary at the border to strengthen our processes. I will remind the member that we have had a mandatory 14-day quarantine for quite some time now. In fact, we want to thank provinces and territories for the hard work they have been doing with us to ensure the enforcement of that quarantine.

Now, there is more that we can do. We know that fighting COVID-19 is an all-hands-on-deck endeavour and we will continue to be there for provinces and territories as they fight COVID-19, including by providing tools like vaccination.

* * *

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister talks a lot about how the government's relationship with indigenous peoples is the most important one. The Liberals talk about it during elections, they talk about it after they are elected, and they talked about it when they introduced legislation on UNDRIP, Bill C-15. However, that bill was introduced three months ago and we have only had two hours of debate, with no further debate scheduled. What is going on? It is almost like the Liberals do not want this bill to pass. If this relationship is really the government's most important one, when will the Liberals stop talking and get to work proving their words?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government remains firmly committed to implementing Bill C-15, which would ensure that indigenous rights are considered when reviewing and updating federal laws that affect those rights. At core, this is a human rights issue. It is about protecting the rights to self-determination, self-government, equality and non-discrimination. This bill is a major step forward in our reconciliation journey. We support it wholeheartedly. It remains one of our top priorities and we will see this through.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, damning media investigations have revealed that the government consistently green-lights water projects on first nations reserves to companies with bad track records and that the minister's insistence on the lowest bid has resulted in cost overruns, corners

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being cut and the ongoing denial of safe service, and yet the minister continues to stick to his three-point plan which is, number one, show concern; number two, act surprised; and number three, do nothing.

Why is the minister continuing to perpetuate this policy of incompetence, negligence and the basic denial of human rights to first nations people across this country?

Hon. Marc Miller (Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the member will note, at the end of November and the beginning of December, this government invested a further \$1.5 billion in water infrastructure with first nations and in partnership with first nations. The member is fundamentally mistaken about the process by which we engage with first nations. They pick the contractors; we work with them and we follow industry practice to ensure that these projects will move forward and that, ultimately, long-term water advisories get lifted. This is the choice of the first nations and we will continue to walk that path with them as we ensure that the long-term asset, the water infrastructure, is preserved in partnership with first nations.

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THE ECONOMY

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, to be the worst at one thing is a real distinction. To be the worst at everything takes real talent and effort. Unemployment in Canada, with 800,000 people losing their jobs, is the highest in the G7: the worst. Our vaccine results here in Canada are the worst in the G7, and the Liberals have paid for all of that failure with the biggest deficit, the worst fiscal record in the G7.

Can the Prime Minister explain to us how he has managed to deliver the worst results at the highest price?

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, to the contrary, I will point out that Canada has had fewer people die than many of the comparator countries the hon. member points to. Moreover, he is using mistaken statistics to try to trick Canadians into supporting him. If we actually want to compare the employment record of Canada against the U.S., 71% of the jobs lost during the pandemic in Canada have returned, and 56% in the U.S. We have a higher labour force participation rate than our G7 counterparts.

Oral Questions

We have had one of the most ambitious economic recovery strategies and pandemic response strategies, and if the hon. member wants to continue to try to trick Canadians into supporting the Conservatives, I invite him to remain on the opposition side of the aisle after the next election.

• (1430)

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will quote what the BMO says about the Canada's-U.S. comparison: "the unemployment rate in Canada was 3.1 percentage points higher than the U.S. [in January]—this compares with a 2 ppt spread over the past five years....we estimate that Canadian employment could be roughly 300,000 jobs below where it would otherwise be if GDP was keeping pace with the U.S. economy."

The member should stop torturing the data to make it confess to anything, and tell the truth. Does Canada not have the highest unemployment in the G7 today, yes or no?

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have watched the hon. member try to use the same statistics to trick Canadians for the last number of weeks. The unemployment data kept in Canada measure something different from what the federal labour statistics do in the United States. If he wants to compare apples with apples, I would point him to the labour force participation rate. In Canada, it is 64.3%; Japan, 62%; the U.S. 61.3%; and Germany 56.1%. If he is wondering how our pandemic response has assisted in this, I would point him to the fact that 71% of the jobs lost during the pandemic in Canada have returned, and 56% in the United States.

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FINANCE

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it has been over 700 days since the Prime Minister last tabled a budget for Canadians to see. That is unprecedented. The most important planning document for a federal government is a budget, yet for two years the government has operated with little transparency and even less accountability. Meanwhile, the Prime Minister has botched his vaccine rollout and failed to deliver a robust economic plan for the future.

Where is the transparency, and when will the Prime Minister finally table a budget for Canadians to see?

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to correct the record. The member may be aware there has been a global pandemic during the past year that has interfered with the way we ordinarily do things when it comes to our budgetary practices. If he is interested in transparency, I would remind him that during the heart of the pandemic a little less than a year ago when we were launching unprecedented strategies to get money to Canadians in need, we showed up repeatedly, in fact, every two weeks, with a report to the finance committee. I happen to know this, because I was a witness on one occasion who presented that data to the committee. Every step of the way, we have advanced measures to help Canadians keep food on the table, a roof over their heads, and helped—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Abbotsford.

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one cannot blame the pandemic for not having an economic plan.

The minister is asking Canadians for the right to borrow and spend billions of dollars more without a plan. Thousands of Canadians and small businesses are falling through the cracks because of the Prime Minister's failure to deliver a proper plan to reopen our economy. Canadians want their jobs back. They want their small businesses back. They want their lives back. They want their communities back.

What is the Prime Minister's plan? When will the minister table a budget to show all Canadians what her plan for the future is?

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been transparent about our plan from the beginning. Our plan has been to respond in an unprecedented and ambitious way to ensure Canadians have had the support they need to see them through this pandemic so they can help contribute to the economic recovery when it is safe to do so.

If he is curious about how our plan has panned out, I would point him to the nearly nine million Canadians who benefited from CERB. I would point him to the 4.5 million who were kept on the payroll because of the wage subsidy. I would point him to the nearly one million businesses that have been able to keep the lights on because of emergency support we have gotten to them in their time of need.

Our plan has been to support Canadians, to keep them—

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

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[Translation]

HEALTH

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government keeps repeating the same talking points and will likely brag about the number of vaccine doses that we will receive this week.

However, the quantity of vaccines that we are going to receive is still lower than the number of people getting vaccinated per day in some countries. Canada is now ranked 58th in the world in total vaccine doses administered, and only 8% of our population will be vaccinated by the end of March.

Can the Prime Minister explain why Canada is the only G7 country experiencing these kinds of delays?

• (1435)

[English]

Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to reiterate that Canada was one of the first countries to begin inoculations, one of the first countries to sign with Pfizer and Moderna and that in this week alone, we will receive well over half-a-million doses, at 643,000. This is the beginning of a continued steep ramp up, with over 400,000 doses arriving per week prior to the end of March and then millions and millions of doses arriving in Q2.

That is our plan, it has been our plan for months and we will make sure all Canadians who wish to have access to a vaccine prior to the end of September will indeed have such access.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we understand that that is the plan. We also understand that, according to that plan, only 8% of Canadians will be vaccinated by the end of March, regardless of what is announced every day.

The other problem we face has to do with travellers. Travellers are spending 20 to 30 hours trying to book an approved hotel where they can quarantine when they return to Canada. They cannot get in touch with anyone, and it is a complete nightmare.

The Prime Minister delayed in negotiating the procurement of vaccines and in securing our borders. He also delayed in introducing measures for travellers, and now those measures are not working. Can the Prime Minister tell us when he intends to resolve the problem with the hotels?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have some of the strictest measures in the world.

Flights south have been suspended, people have to be tested, and they have to stay in designated quarantine hotels, which are closely monitored, upon arrival. We are doing what needs to be done to protect people's health.

I would ask the Conservatives to stop trying to scare Quebecers and Canadians. We are doing our job.

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as we have been saying, the best way to avoid problems when coming home is not to travel in the first place.

However, if the government is imposing a mandatory quarantine, it has to be able to provide services. Wait times for the government phone line are ridiculous. The government says it takes three hours, which is too long as it is, but people have been waiting up to 25 hours.

Will the government confirm that it is going to add operators right away?

[English]

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said before in the House, it is important that Canadians re-

Oral Questions

member, now more than ever, that now is not the time to travel internationally.

We have added layers of protection on our border, including the need to be tested upon arrival and to quarantine until those results have arrived. We have added additional operators on the line.

We thank Canadians for their patience when they are booking their hotel rooms.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the House that these measures were requested to prevent people from travelling during the Christmas holidays and bringing COVID-19 variants back to Quebec. It took two months to set up a comedy of errors for not only travellers, but hotels as well. First, for quarantining purposes, the government chose the only hotel in Quebec that had had an outbreak. In addition, it cannot tell the hotels how many travellers to expect. It is asking them to implement health measures, but it will not give them the information they need to plan. Will it at least keep the hotels in the loop?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind my friends in the Bloc that we do not wait on them to make decisions. We are taking action and have been since the beginning. We have implemented some of the most stringent measures in the world. Travellers are required to quarantine when they return. They must quarantine in specific locations. Flights south have been cancelled. Travellers in quarantine are subject to enhanced monitoring.

While the Bloc Québécois has been making suggestions, asking questions, listening to themselves talk, we have been taking action.

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, mandatory quarantines were supposed to make people think twice before travelling but, in the end, the best deterrent is the federal government's incompetence, because it is incapable of setting up a quarantine hotline.

It is the same story when people try to call the Canada Revenue Agency, or when they try to call Service Canada about problems with EI. Three departments, three hotlines that make it almost impossible to talk to a human being. To think that this is the government that wants to tell Quebec how to manage its health care system.

Will it start by providing the public with the services it is supposed to be providing?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question and for all of the questions. The Bloc Québécois members are very good at asking questions, but when it comes to finding solutions, they are not much help.

On this side of the aisle, we have been taking responsibility since the beginning. Whether by stopping flights south, imposing a quarantine or collaborating with the Quebec government, the Government of Canada has been there since the beginning with our partners in Quebec and all of Canada.

Oral Questions

● (1440)

[English]

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a Liberal member of Parliament recently tweeted that provincial governments would be criminally negligent if they considered easing COVID restrictions.

However, the reality is that we are three months behind the rest of the developed world in getting vaccines. The public is tiring of restrictions and compliance may become an issue. We know COVID restrictions have caused increased domestic violence, a mental health crisis and countless business closures. They cannot continue indefinitely.

We need hope, leadership and a plan for safe reopening. How many Canadians must be vaccinated before the federal government starts recommending lifting restrictions?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would agree with the member that public health measures, including restrictions, have been difficult for all Canadians. I will start there, thanking Canadians for their enormous contributions to the safety and health of their friends, their families and their communities.

We are on a good path with vaccination and, as the member knows, we are set to receive well over 600,000 vaccines this week, 400,000 the week after. We know that the end is in sight, but Canadians must continue to protect each other. We will be there for Canadians and for provinces and territories during these next difficult weeks.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that word salad will not restore lost jobs and it will not reunite families. Enough.

The United Kingdom is delivering a plan to reopen its economy as we speak. Not everyone will agree with every element, but it is doing what leaders should be doing: making choices, explaining them and providing a clear, certain, safe path forward. We have not seen this type of political courage from the Liberals. Why?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think the member opposite knows that decisions around which public measures are applied and when lie with the provinces and territories. We have been there every step of the way to support them in these very difficult decisions. Whether they are financial measures to support individuals, businesses, indeed, the provinces and territories themselves, we have been there and we will continue to be there.

I look forward to the member's ideas about how to move forward together with provinces and territories and Canadians instead of constant questions. Perhaps there are some solutions.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a national rapid testing program; clear timelines on vaccine delivery; understanding how many vaccinated people need to be in place before restrictions are lifted; clear data that is being used to make decisions; choices around how we are moving forward; these are things the health minister should be doing, not just blaming the provincial government and saying that it is not her job.

We need hope. We need a clear plan that allows people to make plans for their futures. We need strategies that I just mentioned.

How many Canadians must be vaccinated before the federal government starts recommending lifting restrictions?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what we have been doing. We have been supporting provinces and territories. The member mentioned rapid testing. Millions upon millions of rapid tests have gone to provinces and territories and, even after that, guidance, support, training and working with the private sector to make sure that no matter where and when Canadians have access to testing that will help them understand their status.

There have been billions of dollars to support individuals, businesses and, indeed, provinces and territories to take those difficult steps, whether it is to impose restrictions or lift restrictions. We have been there, we will continue to be there and we will get through this together.

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INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week, we learned that President Biden will be contributing \$4 billion to COVAX. Meanwhile, Canada is the only G7 country that has accessed vaccines through the COVAX program, a program intended to prevent more people from dying in low and middle-income countries and to prevent dangerous variants from developing and affecting everyone, including Canadians. This is an international embarrassment.

Could the minister admit that the Liberals are accessing COVAX because of their failures to invest in domestic pharmaceutical research, development and manufacturing capacity?

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of International Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we very much welcome the contribution by the United States. In fact, Canada was the leading donor. We were the first to donate to COVAX and welcome countries all around the world making these contributions.

I would correct my hon. colleague, in that COVAX was intentionally set up to have wealthy countries contribute to COVAX both to procure vaccines and grow purchasing power so it could subsidize vaccines for low-income countries while working for equitable access.

Canada was the second-largest contributor to the COVAX AMC. We are very proud that we helped set up this historic global mechanism.

• (1445)

HEALTH

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on August 31, 2020, the Prime Minister publicly stated that Canada would produce 250,000 COVID vaccine doses per month last November and two million doses monthly by the end of last year. The co-chair of the federal vaccine task force just revealed that producing vaccines in Canada was never possible before the end of 2021.

If domestic vaccine production was never a possibility until the end of this year, why did the Prime Minister mislead Canadians by promising millions of doses a full year earlier?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the World Health Organization declared a pandemic on March 11. Twelve days after, we announced \$192 million to support biomanufacturing in this country. On April 23, we announced a further \$600 million. If we add it up, in about one month from the time COVID was declared a pandemic we made \$800 million available for biomanufacturing in Canada. We have made historic investments to restore biomanufacturing and we will continue to do so.

Ms. Jean Yip (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is on track to receive a total of six million vaccines by the end of March, and this week we will be receiving our single largest Pfizer vaccine shipment to date.

While all this is good news, we know there are a number of populations within Canada that have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and are at a higher risk, so I ask the hon. Minister of Health this.

What are we doing to ensure they are vaccinated in an equitable manner? At the same time, how do we combat vaccine hesitancy?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for her ongoing work and advocacy for those who are most vulnerable, including seniors. It has been a privilege to work with her on these issues.

I agree that there are some folks who are more vulnerable to death from COVID-19 and to contracting COVID-19. That is why the national advisory committee on immunization has provided advice and guidance to provinces and territories about how best to prioritize vaccines, so that they get to those most in need. The member is also right that as we begin to see more vaccines arrive in Canada, we will have to continue to encourage Canadians to take the vaccination when it is their time. I know Canadians are looking forward to getting vaccinated—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Wellington—Halton Hills.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today the House will vote on a motion that calls on the government to officially recognize the genocide against the Uighur people. Reports indicate that the Prime Minister and cabinet will abstain from this vote.

Oral Questions

Will the government uphold democratic norms, respect the will of the House and the terms of the motion and officially recognize the Uighur genocide?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said very many times in the past, we are very preoccupied with the reports that have come out of China with respect to the treatment of Uighurs. The Conservative Party brought forward a motion. We will vote on that today and I will not try to anticipate or predict the outcome of that vote.

• (1450)

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow the Prime Minister has a meeting with President Biden. We know that the issue of China will be discussed.

Will the Prime Minister raise the issue of the genocide against the Uighur people in his meeting with President Biden?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister and President Biden will discuss a number of issues, some of which are related to international matters and some of which are related to China. I cannot speculate on the specific content of those discussions, but China will certainly be raised.

* * *

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last Friday, the Minister of Official Languages once again treated us to plenty of pretty words and good intentions. She put on quite a show as she presented her new working paper to the House of Commons.

One very simple question remains. I hope the minister can provide an answer today for all the organizations that advocate for official language minority communities across the country.

When will she put words into action and introduce a bill to modernize the Official Languages Act?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to official languages, no one is better at putting on a show than the Conservative Party. A consensus is beginning to emerge. Francophone communities, including the FCFA, the Conseil du patronat du Québec and various chambers of commerce, support the reform.

I would ask my colleague to encourage the Leader of the Opposition and the Conservative Party to join the consensus and support our reform.

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister is clearly all talk. I asked her a very simple question but she is just buying time.

Oral Questions

Consultations on the modernization of the act have been going on across Canada since 2018. Several organizations, the Senate and the Commissioner of Official Languages have produced reports. More than 300 people even participated in a national symposium in Ottawa in 2019. We do not need a new document. We need an act with more teeth.

I will repeat my question to the minister. Could she stop with the rhetoric and tell us when a bill to finally modernize our two official languages will be introduced? All we want is a date.

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have always been clear that the bill would be introduced this year. We do intend to introduce the bill, but beyond that, my colleague is not answering my question for him. Does he support the reform?

We are a minority government. We will need the support of the opposition parties. Now is not the time for partisanship.

Does the Conservative Party support our reform document? Does it want to gain credibility on official languages? The party does, after all, have a history of cutting services to francophones.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, only one official language is in jeopardy in Quebec and Canada and that is French.

In Quebec, we have come up with tools to defend French, starting with the Charter of the French Language. The problem is that federally regulated businesses are not subject to it. Again, Ottawa thinks that it can do better than Quebec.

The solution is simple. Make federally regulated businesses subject to Bill 101.

Why complicate life when it can be so simple?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is not complicated.

We recognize that French is in decline in Quebec and across the country and we want to protect and promote our beautiful language of Molière. Everyone must do their part, both in Quebec and in the provinces and at the federal level. We will take our responsibilities.

We are acting in good faith and we recognize that we need to secure new rights, including in the private sector, to ensure the right to work and the right to be served in French in our federally regulated businesses. We are heading in the right direction.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois actually introduced a bill to make federally regulated businesses subject to the Charter of the French Language, as called for by the Quebec National Assembly, the Government of Quebec and all of Quebec's former premiers, including Liberal and PQ premiers. It seems that they cannot help themselves. The will of Quebec just does not matter to this government.

Why is the minister refusing to listen to Quebec when it is speaking with one voice? Why is she refusing to have the Charter of the French language apply to all Quebec workers?

• (1455)

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we all agree that we must protect French, that Quebec's official language is French and that we really must ensure that we look to the Charter of the French Language to protect the right to work and be served in French in our federally regulated businesses.

I had the opportunity to speak to six former Quebec premiers, three former prime ministers and two former premiers of New Brunswick. The consensus is that the federal government must assume its responsibilities.

In this situation, will the Bloc Québécois join us, stop trying to pick a fight, and protect and promote the French language instead of promoting sovereignty?

* * *

[English]

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for years the Liberal government has accepted implausible assurances from UNRWA that Canadian dollars are not being used to teach Palestinian children to hate. The minister has been duped once again, with proof last week that UNRWA continues to use educational materials that glorifies terrorists and urges children to wage jihad against Israel.

When will the government stop making empty promises to investigate and stop funnelling Canadian tax dollars to a corrupt agency that conditions innocent children to hate and terror?

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of International Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, upon receiving these allegations, I contacted UNRWA, and we have been in touch with UNRWA ever since. Canada takes our support for vulnerable people around the world, including Palestinian refugees, very seriously. Of course, there is no place for hate or incitement to violence.

We fund neutrality training, and we are working with UNRWA on this, but more importantly, we recognize that there are 500,000 Palestinian children who rely on UNRWA for their education and for their health care. We will continue to work with UNRWA and with these Palestinian children to ensure that they have access to education and ensure that the education is—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley.

Mr. Marty Morantz (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on January 27, I asked if the Prime Minister would suspend funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, given anti-Semitic classroom materials being distributed to Palestinian students. UNRWA claimed this was all just a big mistake and that offensive materials had been replaced with content adhering to UN values, so the current government just continued with its funding.

New reports show anti-Semitic materials are still being distributed to students. Given this, will the government finally suspend funding to UNRWA and find alternative mechanisms for Palestinian aid?

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of International Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said, there is absolutely no place for hate or incitements of violence. Canada is working with our partners in this regard with UNRWA, and we are getting to the bottom of this.

That being said, I would ask the hon. member to consider that there are 500,000 Palestinian children who rely on UNRWA for access to education. That is 500,000 Palestinian children whose hopes and dreams are reliant on having access to education. We are all committed to a peaceful situation between Israel and the West Bank and Gaza and the Palestinian—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable.

* * *

[Translation]

ETHICS

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this Prime Minister has said before that whistleblowers play an extremely important role in flagging how government can do better.

However, he broke his promise to strengthen the laws to protect them. We know why. The Prime Minister is known for his generosity in helping his friends. He is more worried about protecting his own cabinet's, his own office's, ethical lapses than he is about helping Canadians who want to report wrongdoing.

Rather than hiding behind outdated legislation to cover up his own lack of ethics, will the Prime Minister finally protect those who truly want to serve our country with transparency?

Mr. Greg Fergus (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board and to the Minister of Digital Government, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to promoting a positive and respectful culture based on integrity and ethics within the public service.

We need to ensure that public servants understand what constitutes wrongdoing and how they can report it.

Whether it is by actively encouraging whistleblowing, making public servants aware of the importance of a diversity of viewpoints, fostering a very inclusive environment within the public service or providing tools and support for mental health, we will continue to promote ethical practices in the public sector and—

• (1500)

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Brome—Missisquoi.

Oral Questions

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mrs. Lyne Bessette (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the official languages reform document is an important milestone for French in Canada.

For the first time, the government will strengthen French across the country, including in Quebec, and will add new rights with respect to language of work and service in federally regulated businesses.

Would the Minister of Official Languages tell us more about our government's plan to protect and promote the French language?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my gracious and competent colleague for her question.

French is in decline in Quebec and across the country. To achieve substantive equality of both official languages, we have to do more to protect and promote French all across Canada as well as in Quebec. Our approach gives francophones in Quebec and in regions with a strong francophone presence the right to obtain service in French and work in French without discrimination in businesses under federal jurisdiction.

We must also be an exemplary government, the public service must respect the Official Languages Act, we must support bilingualism, and we need to give the Official Languages Act teeth.

* * *

[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals have introduced legislation based on a political ideology that divides urban and rural Canadians rather than on evidence. Canadians want and deserve to be safe in their homes and their communities. The government should focus on finding solutions to gang crime, an issue that both urban and rural municipalities are struggling with. Going after law-abiding Canadians will do nothing to reduce violent crime.

Can the minister explain how this new legislation will reduce gun crime and gang activity in my community of Meadow Lake and in all of northern Saskatchewan?

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government promised Canadians that we would strengthen gun control, and of course, the Conservatives have promised the gun lobby that they will weaken it.

Oral Questions

There are three ways in which criminals get their hands on guns: They are smuggled, stolen or diverted. Through the important and necessary measures of Bill C-21, we are taking strong action to strengthen gun control and cut off the supply of guns to criminals. We are also introducing measures to remove guns from dangerous situations that could be made deadly by the presence of a firearm.

Through investments in law enforcement and in our communities, along with strong, new gun regulations and legislation, we are keeping our promise to Canadians to help keep them safe.

Mr. Gerald Soroka (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government's new gun confiscation bill is overreaching. Not only will the legislation confiscate real firearms from law-abiding citizens, but it will also prohibit the sale of airsoft guns. One of my constituents owns a small sport shooting store that sells airsoft rifles. His livelihood depends on business from the local airsoft club.

Why is the government going after airsoft guns instead of criminals with illegal guns?

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said, we have promised Canadians that we will strengthen gun control, and we know that the Conservatives have promised the gun lobby they will weaken it. We are also listening, not just to those who profit from the sale of these firearms, but also to those in law enforcement, who are tasked with the responsibility of keeping Canadians safe.

For over 20 years, the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police has urged the government to take effective action on replica firearms, including the airsoft devices the member referenced. When we publish these new regulations, the CACP came out strongly endorsing those measures as necessary and important to keeping Canadians safe. We will keep our promise of taking action to keep Canadians safe.

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been asking the Prime Minister to pick up the phone and ask President Biden to keep Line 5 open to save 50,000 jobs. The Prime Minister has a meeting with him tomorrow.

Considering the importance of Line 5 to our economy, will the Prime Minister ask President Biden to intervene on this issue?

● (1505)

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we take the threat to Canadian energy security very seriously. Line 5 is vital to Canada's energy security. I would like to tell my colleague we appreciate her advocacy on this.

We know that Line 5 is vital to workers, producers and consumers in Canada and in the United States. We have always made the case that this is vital infrastructure, and we will continue to make that case.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I stand today, again, regarding another tragedy in my riding of Humber River—Black Creek. A 14-year-old girl was struck by a bullet in the head, and she is fighting for her life because of a gun that should never have been on the street.

How many more young lives will be ruined before we find a way to say that enough is enough? Could the government please elaborate on exactly what its plans are to eliminate the gunfire and the continued guns in our communities?

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first of all, let me acknowledge and thank the hon. member for Humber River—Black Creek for her decades-long advocacy against gun violence.

As I have indicated, there are three ways in which criminals get their hands on guns. They are either smuggled, stolen or diverted. Through the legislation we introduced last week, we are taking very necessary and strong action to strengthen gun control and cut off the supply of guns into the hands of criminals. We are also taking steps to remove guns from dangerous situations.

We have also, in addition to the legislation, made significant new investments in law enforcement and, most importantly, we are going to invest in communities, including the member's community, together—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Winnipeg Centre.

* * *

COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, throughout the pandemic, front-line organizations in Winnipeg Centre and across the country have used additional COVID funding to provide life-saving services for low-income families, unsheltered individuals and women experiencing violence.

However, on March 31 this funding will expire. We are not out of the pandemic, and people continue to need help. Organizations are demanding answers about whether the government plans to continue providing support.

Will the government commit to ongoing funding for front-line organizations so they can continue assisting their communities during the pandemic?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we recognize the important work that front-line organizations do to support the most vulnerable, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

That is why, very early during the pandemic, we provided an emergency community support fund in the amount of \$350 million, so that those organizations that are facing a drop in donations and a drop in the number of volunteers could continue the critical work they engage in every single day to provide goods, services, counselling and other supports to the most vulnerable members of our community.

* * *

HEALTH

Mr. Derek Sloan (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, we have heard hundreds of questions in this chamber about vaccines, but nothing on what else the government is doing to find treatments for COVID-19. Does it have a team working night and day, creating clinical trials for promising treatments and research into repurposing of existing drugs for potential use? The New York Times has a tracker listing treatments that have shown promise, for example the drug ivermectin.

What is the government doing to test drugs like this, amongst other research, so these endless lockdowns and the detention of people at airports can end now?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am so proud to be part of a government that has heavily invested in science and research since 2015, when we took over from the Conservative government, which had in fact slashed investment in research, slashed investment in science and slashed investment in the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.

In fact, because of that prescient investment we made in 2015 and onward, we have been supporting our researchers, our scientists and our medical health researchers to not only look at solutions around vaccination, but certainly solutions around treatment. We will continue to support science every step of the way.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN CHINA

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

The Speaker: It being 3:08 p.m., pursuant to order made on January 25, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the amendment to the motion by the member for Wellington—Halton Hills relating to the business of supply.

[English]

Call in the members.

• (1510)

And the bells having rung:

Business of Supply

The Speaker: The question is as follows. May I dispense?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

[Chair read text of amendment to House]

• (1550)

(The House divided on the amendment, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 55)

YEAS

Members

Aboultiaf	Aitchison
Albas	Alleslev
Allison	Amos
Anandasangaree	Angus
Arnold	Atwin
Bachrach	Baker
Baldinelli	Barlow
Barrett	Barsalou-Duval
Battiste	Beaulieu
Bendayan	Benzen
Bergen	Bergeron
Berthold	Bérubé
Bezan	Bittle
Blaikie	Blanchette-Joncas
Blaney (North Island—Powell River)	Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)
Block	Boudrias
Boulerice	Bragdon
Brassard	Brunelle-Duceppe
Calkins	Cannings
Carrie	Chabot
Champoux	Charbonneau
Chiu	Chong
Collins	Cooper
Cumming	Dabrusin
Dalton	Damoff
Dancho	Davidson
DeBellefeuille	Deltell
d'Entremont	Desbiens
Desilets	Dhaliwal
Diotte	Doherty
Dowdall	Dreeshen
Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)	Duvall
Dzerowicz	Ellis
Epp	Erskine-Smith
Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)	Falk (Provencher)
Fast	Fergus
Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock)	Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Fisher	Fortin
Fragiskatos	Fraser
Gallant	Garrison
Gaudreau	Gazan
Généreux	Genuis
Gerretsen	Gill
Gladu	Godin
Gourde	Gray
Green	Hallan
Harder	Hardie
Harris	Hoback
Housefather	Hughes
Ien	Jansen
Jeneroux	Johns
Jowhari	Julian
Kelloway	Kelly
Kent	Khera
Kitchen	Kmieciak
Koutrakis	Kram

Business of Supply

Kurek	Kusie
Kwan	Lake
Lambropoulos	Lamoureux
Larouche	Lattanzio
Lawrence	Lehoux
Lemire	Lewis (Essex)
Liepert	Lloyd
Lobb	Long
Lukiwski	MacGregor
MacKenzie	Maguire
Maloney	Manly
Marcil	Martel
Masse	Mathysen
May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)	Mazier
McCauley (Edmonton West)	McColeman
McGuinty	McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
McLean	McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)
McLeod (Northwest Territories)	McPherson
Melillo	Michaud
Moore	Morantz
Morrison	Morrissey
Motz	Nater
Normandin	O'Connell
Oliphant	O'Toole
Patzer	Paul-Hus
Paupé	Perron
Petitpas Taylor	Plamondon
Poilevre	Powlowski
Qaqqaq	Ratansi
Rayes	Redekopp
Reid	Rempel Garner
Richards	Romanado
Rood	Ruff
Sahota (Calgary Skyview)	Sahota (Brampton North)
Saini	Saks
Sangha	Sarai
Savard-Tremblay	Scarpaleggia
Scheer	Schiefke
Schmale	Seebach
Shields	Shin
Shipley	Sidhu (Brampton South)
Simard	Singh
Sloan	Soroka
Stanton	Steinley
Ste-Marie	Strahl
Stubbs	Sweet
Thériault	Therrien
Tochor	Trudel
Turnbull	Uppal
Van Bynen	Van Popta
Vandenbeld	Vecchio
Vidal	Viersen
Vignola	Virani
Vis	Wagantall
Waugh	Webber
Williamson	Wilson-Raybould
Wong	Young
Yurdiga	Zahid
Zimmer	Zuberi — 230

NAYS

Members

Bagnell	Beech
Bessette	Blois
Casey	Easter
Finnigan	Fry
Khalid	Kusmierczyk
Lalonde	Lefebvre
Longfield	Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga)
MacKinnon (Gatineau)	McDonald
McKay	Regan
Robillard	Samson

Serré	Sgro
Simms	Sorbara
Tabbara	van Koeverden
Weiler	Zann — 28

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the amendment carried.*[Translation]*

The next question is on the main motion, as amended.

[English]

If a member of a recognized party present in the House wishes to request a recorded division or that the motion, as amended, be adopted on division, I invite them to rise and indicate it to the Chair.

Mr. Alex Ruff: Mr. Speaker, I would request a recorded vote on this motion.

● (1625)

(The House divided on motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

*(Division No. 56)***YEAS**

Members

Aboultaif	Aitchison
Albas	Alleslev
Allison	Amos
Anandasangaree	Angus
Arnold	Atwin
Bachrach	Badawey
Bagnell	Bains
Baker	Baldinelli
Barlow	Barrett
Barsalou-Duval	Battiste
Beaulieu	Beech
Bendayan	Benzen
Bergen	Bergeron
Berthold	Bérubé
Bessette	Bezan
Bittle	Blaikie
Blanchette-Joncas	Blaney (North Island—Powell River)
Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)	Block
Blois	Boudrias
Boulerice	Bragdon
Brassard	Brunelle-Duceppe
Calkins	Cannings
Carrie	Casey
Chabot	Champoux
Charbonneau	Chiu
Chong	Collins
Cooper	Cumming
Dabrusin	Dalton
Damoff	Dancho
Davidson	DeBellefeuille
Deltell	d'Entremont
Desbiens	Desilets
Dhaliwal	Diotte
Doherty	Dowdall
Dreeshen	Duguid
Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)	Duvall
Dzerowicz	Easter
Ellis	Epp
Erskine-Smith	Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)
Falk (Provencher)	Fast

Fergus
Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock)
Finnigan
Fonseca
Fragiskatos
Fry
Garrison
Gazan
Genuis
Gill
Godin
Gray
Hallan
Hardie
Hoback
Hughes
Jaczek
Jeneroux
Jowhari
Kelloway
Kent
Khera
Kmieć
Kram
Kusie
Kwan
Lalonde
Lamoureux
Lattanzio
Lefebvre
Lemire
Liepert
Lloyd
Long
Lukiwski
MacKenzie
Maguire
Manly
Martel
Mathysen
May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)
McCauley (Edmonton West)
McDonald
McKay
McLean
McLeod (Northwest Territories)
Melillo
Moore
Morrison
Motz
Normandin
Oliphant
Patzner
Pauzé
Petipas Taylor
Poilievre
Qaqqaq
Rayes
Regan
Rempel Garner
Robillard
Rood
Sahota (Calgary Skyview)
Saini
Samson
Sarai
Scarpaleggia
Schieffe
Seebach
Sgro
Shin
Sidhu (Brampton East)
Simard

Fillmore
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Fisher
Fortin
Fraser
Gallant
Gaudreau
Généreux
Gerretsen
Gladu
Gourde
Green
Harder
Harris
Housefather
Ien
Jansen
Johns
Julian
Kelly
Khalid
Kitchen
Koutrakis
Kurek
Kusmierczyk
Lake
Lambropoulos
Larouche
Lawrence
Lehoux
Lewis (Essex)
Lightbound
Lobb
Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga)
MacGregor
MacKinnon (Gatineau)
Maloney
Marcel
Masse
May (Cambridge)
Mazier
McColeman
McGuinty
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)
McPherson
Michaud
Morantz
Morrissey
Nater
O'Connell
O'Toole
Paul-Hus
Perron
Plamondon
Powlowski
Ratansi
Redekopp
Reid
Richards
Romanado
Ruff
Sahota (Brampton North)
Saks
Sangha
Savard-Tremblay
Scheer
Schmale
Serré
Shields
Shipley
Sidhu (Brampton South)
Simms

Singh
Sorbara
Stanton
Ste-Marie
Stubbs
Tabbara
Therrien
Trudel
Uppal
van Koeverden
Vandenbeld
Vecchio
Viersen
Virani
Wagantall
Webber
Williamson
Wong
Yurdiga
Zimmer

Points of Order

Sloan
Soroka
Steinley
Strahl
Sweet
Thériault
Tochor
Turnbull
Van Bynen
Van Popta
Vaughan
Vidal
Vignola
Vis
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NAYS

Nil

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion, as amended, carried.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

HYBRID VOTE

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, as we know, during a hybrid vote, members who are not sitting in the House have to say that they are for or against. We all know that sometimes people are making some comments. There is some tolerance that we have, and we recognize that there is no problem with that, but I think that what we have seen today in the second vote is a breach of this rule, and a serious one.

[*Translation*]

When he voted, the Minister of Foreign Affairs said he was voting on behalf of the Government of Canada.

No one here votes on behalf of anyone other than himself or herself. That is what our constituents have mandated us to do. The Government of Canada is made up of ministers and the Prime Minister. They have decided not to vote in favour of the motion. That is their decision, and they must live with the consequences. Conversely, no member can speak on behalf of anyone but their constituents. In the case of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, he represents the people of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Westmount.

I want to say this: The Minister of Foreign Affairs is an honourable man, a experienced parliamentarian who has brought honour to Canada throughout his professional career and has inspired millions of Canadians. Over the past few years, he has always behaved in an exemplary manner in the House. We believe that he failed in his duties today.

*Points of Order**[English]*

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, to add to that, when it comes to a vote, the votes of all members are equal; no one member's vote carries greater weight than any other member's. What we have seen and unfortunately witnessed time and again, including with today's vote, is a number of members saying that they stand in solidarity with a particular group and that they vote yes. I know you have tried to curb that in the past, and regrettably that has not worked, but I think it warrants your consideration in this matter given the fact that you have tried to curb this behaviour. Unfortunately, we see it from all sides of the House.

I am sure that if you go back and count the number of times an intervention of that sort was made during the votes today, you would find that there were more Conservatives who did it than anybody else, so I would encourage you to consider that—

The Speaker: We are starting to get into debate there. The point was good until then.

There are some other members with their hands up who are not with us in person.

The hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, I just want to point out that in my speech I noted that the minister said he was talking on behalf of the Government of Canada. This is the first time someone is saying he is talking on behalf of someone else in the House of Commons. There is no link in that way when people are voting, other than that they support it. He said he was voting on behalf of the Canadian government. This is—

The Speaker: I believe we are starting to get into points of debate. I thank both members for the points they have brought forward.

I will now go to other members who want to talk on the same topic.

The hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on the point arising out of the vote, particularly the characterization by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of his vote, I have a few remarks to make.

The first is that I agree it is a species of a more general problem, which is members taking the opportunity in the virtual Parliament to use the fact we appear on screen and are at liberty to say things to characterize their vote. That is something I know you have said is not appropriate, but I think you may need to give some thought to how you will enforce that better. When a member in the House of Commons does not wear a tie, I have seen more serious consequences than for when members continued to characterize their vote inappropriately online, so I would like to see an end to that.

Beyond that, I think what happened today goes a bit further with respect to abstentions and the point raised by the official opposition House leader just now in respect of speaking for the government on a vote.

I note that in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, on page 575, it states:

There is no rule requiring a Member to vote. A Member may abstain from voting simply by remaining seated during the vote. Such abstentions are of an unofficial nature and are not recorded although, on occasion, Members have risen following a vote to offer an explanation....

Clearly, members have the right to abstain, but I do not see anything in there that allows them to abstain on behalf of anyone else. In fact, abstentions are not normally recorded. It is only by virtue of the virtual Parliament that members have had occasion to mention an abstention, which has to do with the technical demands of the virtual Parliament, not because we have changed a principle in allowing abstentions.

As a further point from *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, I note also that on pages 582 and 583, in discussing the nature of votes, it mentions two kinds of votes: one the conduct of a party vote and another the conduct of a row-by-row vote. There is no government and non-government vote, so while I object generally to people characterizing their votes and do not think any member should be speaking on behalf of other members in respect of their vote, I also note that even the characterization itself is problematic, because nowhere does the government appear as an entity for voting in the House of Commons anyway. I think that is a bad precedent and I would appreciate your speaking to that point and making it clear that the government is not an entity represented for the purpose of the votes in the House of Commons.

● (1630)

Hon. Marc Garneau: Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to my hon. colleagues, and I am very happy to simply say “I abstain”.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, very quickly, to address the point that was raised by the opposition House leader, at the core of this issue is the fact that nobody should be saying anything other than “yes” or “no”. That is what you should be considering in this, not the context of what was said, otherwise you become an arbiter of what is acceptable—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I have one final small point on this matter. Abstentions are not recorded in the records of Hansard. There is no need to place an abstention on the record, but I do think that over time the practice of recording abstentions is a good one. It allows members to let their constituents know they were present in the House but had a reason of principle to abstain.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: I just want to say to the Minister of Foreign Affairs that he did the honourable thing.

The Speaker: There are two issues that we had to deal with, and we will start with the first one. When voters vote, please, I beg you, either vote for, against or abstain, but we do not need the comments. That is something you maybe keep to yourselves. We do better on some votes than others, but please, when you vote, all members, just say that you're in favour, against or that you abstain.

On the second issue, the hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs already took care of it. When he did speak the first time, I want to point out that he did mention he was abstaining and there was no vote recorded. That is just a clarification for everyone here.

I wish to inform the House that because of the deferred recorded division, Government Orders will be extended by 73 minutes.

[Translation]

It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable, Official Languages; the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands, The Environment; the hon. member for Cloverdale—Langley City, Persons with Disabilities.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

● (1635)

[Translation]

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association respecting its participation at the 2020 Westminster Seminar: Preparing Parliamentarians for a Changing World, held from November 23 to 27, 2020.

* * *

[English]

COPYRIGHT ACT

Mr. Bryan May (Cambridge, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-272, An Act to Amend the Copyright Act (diagnosis, maintenance or repair).

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise to introduce my private member's bill. It addresses copyright being used in a way for which it was never intended: to block the repair and maintenance of items that have been purchased by Canadians.

It is a targeted bill that would create specific exemptions to copyright. When someone buys something, it must be able to be repaired by that person and not restricted by the manufacturer. Repairing the things we own is key for our environment, for the safety of Canadians and to our livelihoods. These factors have never been more important than during the pandemic, when repairs are more critical than ever for manufacturing, infrastructure and agriculture.

I look forward to the debate and the support of all members of the House.

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

* * *

NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR A GUARANTEED BASIC INCOME ACT

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-273, An Act to establish a national strategy for a guaranteed basic income.

She said: Mr. Speaker, it is my absolute honour to introduce my private member's bill: an act to establish a national strategy for a

Routine Proceedings

guaranteed basic income. It would require the Minister of Finance to develop a national strategy to assess implementation models for a national guaranteed basic income program as part of Canada's innovation and economic growth strategy. It is time we find a 21st century solution to support Canadian workers, and for all Canadians to have an equal opportunity to succeed and contribute.

I look forward to the debate and to receiving support from all.

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

* * *

ELECTRONIC VOTING SYSTEM

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties and if you seek it, I think you will find unanimous consent to adopt the following motion. I move:

That, notwithstanding any standing order, special order or usual practice of the House, in relation to possible technical issues encountered by members in the course of voting with the electronic voting system, from its implementation until Wednesday, June 23, 2021:

a) subparagraph (p)(iv) of the order adopted on Monday, January 25, 2021, shall be rescinded;

b) any Member unable to vote via the electronic voting system during the 10-minute period due to technical issues may connect to the virtual sitting to indicate to the Chair their voting intention by the House videoconferencing system; and

c) following any concern, identified by the electronic voting system, which is raised by a House Officer of a recognized party regarding the visual identity of a Member using the electronic voting system, the Member in question must respond immediately to confirm their vote, either in person or by the House videoconferencing system, failing which the vote shall not be recorded.

● (1640)

The Deputy Speaker: Are any members opposed to the hon. member moving the motion? If so, please say nay.

I hear none. The House has heard the terms of the motion. Any members opposed to the motion will please say nay.

Hearing no voices, the motion is carried.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

INDUSTRY, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Mr. James Cumming (Edmonton Centre, CPC) moved:

That the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology, presented on Friday, November 27, 2020, be concurred in.

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He said: Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Niagara Falls.

I am happy to speak today to the order in council appointment of Marsha Walden to the position of president of the Canadian Tourism Commission, referred to the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology on Friday, September 25, which I was a proud to be part of for a short time before moving on to my portfolio now as shadow minister for the COVID-19 economic recovery.

Disease-induced crises are nothing new to the Canadian tourism industry, but certainly the crisis created by the novel coronavirus has been the most damaging crisis it has ever faced. This industry will never look the same post-pandemic. Even after we have all been vaccinated and the virus is just a foggy memory or a blurb in a textbook, it is clear and paramount that all levels of government have a role to play in the industry's eventual successful recovery.

The tourism industry knows what needs to happen for it to move ahead toward a successful recovery. Across the board, stringent measures have already been implemented in an effort to assure that all tourism-related activities are safe and communicated to the public. The industry is equally aware that confidence in travelling and the risk perception surrounding it are going to determine the speed of recovery.

This industry has done yeoman's effort to keep running. With methods for cleaning and sanitizing and with PPE requirements in restaurants, airplanes, museums, arenas, etc., it has really stepped up to try to have at least some level of business. Retrofitting or refurbishing facilities with advanced filtration, plexiglass partitions and the removal of soft furnishings, along with cleaning, cleaning and more cleaning, has been done. There are reduced capacity and occupation rates; 24 hours between occupancies in hotels; spacing at restaurants; booking times to visit a museum; and the advent of technology to help with innovation. We are using technology-based apps to streamline tourism activities, including self-serve check-ins and QR code menus, which we have all become accustomed to.

The government should only be there to meet efforts taken by these industries and ensure that compliance is met. The government must not impose unreasonable measures that thwart business owners' ability to operate or create an environment of disincentives that causes them to shut down. To make these onerous and expensive changes, our tourism industry needs credible and realistic measures from our federal government to allow companies and tourism services to confidently operate.

The government needs to move away from simply subsidizing and handing out aid and toward providing incentives for sustainable growth and innovation. Ideas include offering interest-free loans, guaranteed loans and creative financing options for sectors that have been hit incredibly hard. Incentives like this would benefit all sectors: airlines, cruise lines, hotels and restaurants. Other ideas include the lifting of visa requirements for countries as they recover, to increase international tourism; allowing provincial governments to regulate themselves without heavy-handed mandates from Ottawa; and protecting distressed assets from being scooped by predatory investors looking to take advantage of a weakened tourism sector.

While the government neglected to come up with a plan to innovate in this tourism space, we saw some amazing efforts and collaboration from our once-strong Canadian airlines and our world-class institutions, as they provided solutions with the now-defunct rapid-testing pilot program. This was a great example of an industry stepping up and of a private sector success, but it was shut down by the federal government with its new requirements. The airlines realized how critical it was to create a safe travel environment and they developed a pilot project for rapid testing at airports. I admire their efforts because they knew they needed something to be able to get going again.

Testimony given at the health committee last week did little to indicate that these new restrictions are going to be an improvement and that they are based upon strong data. However, there was some data from the rapid testing. On February 11, just over 49,000 people were tested and 1% tested positive. They were monitored and made to quarantine, and this worked successfully.

• (1645)

On an anecdotal note, in my riding, for over 30 years, a company called Paull Travel has provided tailored independent travel services. Like many other companies and individuals involved in the tourism sector, they are finding themselves faced with the impossible. These companies are failing, and while the rest of the economy may be able to experience some sort of a bounceback, it is really difficult in the travel industry. On top of this, the commissions the 13 women working at Paull Travel were expected to earn for services they did were clawed back because of cancellations.

The government's inability to provide rapid testing for Canadians and the much-needed support for airlines thwarted much of the travel during the pandemic. Many large travel agencies and independent providers are facing decreases of up to 90% today compared with 2019.

We cannot pretend that things are going to go back to normal. For decades to come, gone with be the days of banquets and large conventions. Travel agents and many other hospitality workers may not be required, and we will have to find suitable jobs for these individuals. The government has to be proactive and forward thinking when thinking about re-skilling and upskilling workers to move into other high-demand sectors, such as the emerging tech economy.

We need to start talking about what retraining is going to look like for those whose skills no longer match job demand, working with both the public sector and the private sector to identify gaps in the economy and the places where this talent is going to be needed. I have some important facts. Of the over 14,000 large and small travel agency businesses in Canada, over 90% are considered small business and 75% of travel agents are women. Travel agencies across Canada generate over \$30 billion in sales and \$3 billion in revenue on an annualized basis and many in this industry have not been able to qualify for standard or special EI benefits. This sector is desperate and it needs to be acknowledged.

At the beginning of the pandemic in Canada, the travel industry alone dealt with numerous travel advisories and with their clients, cancellations and all of the things that happened because of that. Due to the virus and its devastating impact on travel, the travel industry has experienced close to zero new revenue, and layoffs and closures have started to happen. This has an enormous effect on families. Any targeted relief for the travel industry must include these travel agencies. They need the government's help and they need to be sure that they are paid for services rendered.

If we can get in front of the health issues and demonstrate a safe environment for travel, we can give this sector a fighting chance. There will need to be significant investment in marketing to aid the recovery in both domestic and international travel. We must ensure that the public understands the health risk and the data that indicates what the risk is so they can make appropriate choices.

For every industry, a plan is more than financial support. It must be a road map that gives some indication of reopening and strategies. We cannot look toward the future without a plan. Canada has so much to offer the world: natural beauty, rich history and unique culture found nowhere else on the planet. It would be a shame if we let this sector suffer because of a lack of leadership. I look forward to when the government will come forward with plans that will help this industry get back on its feet.

• (1650)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, does the member of the Conservative Party currently support the restrictions that are in place today?

Mr. James Cumming: Mr. Speaker, there cannot be an economic recovery until there is a health recovery. Every area of the country has to be able to deal with this health crisis. Yes, I support the restrictions, but future restrictions and future policies should be based on strong data.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we are talking about restrictions, I am wondering if the member agrees with some of the assertions made by the member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke. She has been on social media quite a bit lately claiming that the Prime Minister was complicit in spreading this virus around the world.

Does the member agree with the member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke and her comments on that matter?

Mr. James Cumming: Mr. Speaker, what we have to focus on, and what I come back to in this health crisis, is that we cannot have

a recovery until we get through this crisis. That is a combination of making sure that we have vaccines here, we have execution of those vaccines and we have rapid testing. Having all those tools available will let us create a safe environment for people operating in this industry and people at large. Clearly, what people want is to get back to work. It is the job of government to make sure that we can do so safely.

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at this point in the pandemic, the tourism sector is looking for certainty. It is looking for a plan from the government. The member mentioned that travel agents and tourism operators have been put in a bad situation. They are looking for a signal from the government that there is going to be some relief and certainty. These individuals, particularly in the travel industry and predominantly women, have been very hard hit and are looking for action.

In the face of inaction, can the member share what he expects from the government in order to provide certainty to these folks?

Mr. James Cumming: Mr. Speaker, what businesses need is some level of certainty or planning so they can understand what the potential looks like. Unfortunately, this particular industry has seen very little. We have talked about the airline industry, and the government coming up with some sort of a plan. People in the industry are still waiting. This uncertainty slows down the opportunity for them to get back to work or at least to plan for the future so they know what they are up against.

• (1655)

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Via Rail workers are really struggling right now. We know workers throughout the tourism industry are really struggling right now.

Does my hon. colleague believe that one of the solutions, as we see the pandemic persist, would be to put in place a guaranteed livable basic income, particularly for those who are working in tourism and the travel industry, which has been completely gutted by the pandemic?

Mr. James Cumming: Mr. Speaker, the more important thing we need to look toward is how we can reopen these sectors and get people back to work. The people I talk to say that is what they want. They want to get back to their jobs. They want to get back to their way of life. They want to be able to do that as soon as possible. Again, that is why it is critical we get vaccine deployment, rapid testing and the things that can create a safe environment for people to get back to work. That would be their preference, and that would be mine too.

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Mr. Tony Baldinelli (Niagara Falls, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today in concurrence of the fourth report from the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology regarding the order in council appointment of Marsha Walden as President and Chief Executive Officer of the Canadian Tourism Commission, now known as Destination Canada.

On October 29, 2020, the committee met to consider Ms. Walden's appointment. At that time I had the opportunity to attend and take part in the session as we examined Ms. Walden's qualifications to assume this most important leadership position. Ms. Walden is assuming this position at a critical time for the industry. In fact, during our meeting in October, I noted that according to Destination Canada's own status of the industry report, it had forecast that our Canadian tourism sector would not recover to its record high levels of 2019 until 2024 at the earliest. The Destination Canada report indicated this would be "a catastrophic loss for our economy". Given COVID's continued impact, the Tourism Industry Association of Canada now estimates it will be 2026 before this sector recovers to its record-setting numbers set in 2019.

Also during our October meeting, I noted the industry report indicated that the federal government needed to "provide a light at the end of the tunnel". However, as we continue to watch the federal government struggle to secure our vaccine supply and implement widespread rapid testing, our tourism sector is left to struggle. In other words, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the federal government's dreadful and mismanaged response to it, has set the Canadian travel and tourism industry back instead of providing the much-needed light at the end of the tunnel that this industry so badly needs.

That is why we need the federal government to succeed in getting Canadians vaccinated more quickly. That is why we need the federal government to succeed in procuring and implementing rapid testing devices across the country so we can begin returning our lives to normal. Canadian businesses associated with travel and tourism have been some of the hardest hit. Many of them joined an advocacy movement called just that: the Coalition of Hardest Hit Businesses. When the federal government closed our land borders and implemented stringent travel restrictions in March 2020, our Canadian airlines and airports were immediately shuttered. While other countries were quick to financially support their aviation sectors, our federal government has yet to provide the financial aid that is so urgently required.

In addition to shutting the engines that literally drive our domestic and international travel and tourism economy, this pandemic has greatly impacted many small and medium-sized businesses including hotels and accommodations, restaurants and attractions. Nearly every sector within Canada's travel and tourism industry has experienced disruption, uncertainty and harm to its daily operations, revenues and business planning forecasts. When businesses are impacted at this magnitude, workers and employment are also severely disrupted; therefore, it is not surprising that we are continually hearing more about layoffs and job losses across these industries, and higher unemployment numbers in this industry compared with others.

For example, the Hotel Association of Canada says that in April 2020, there were 114,000 jobs in the sector. As of December 2020,

this number was reduced to 87,500 workers. Many hoteliers are now wondering how long it will be before they run out of cash: 40% of operators do not think they will make it past this month and 70% say they will not make it until the spring.

Another example of employment hardship is in the restaurant industry. According to Restaurants Canada, in the first six weeks of the pandemic, the food service sector lost more than the entire Canadian economy lost during the 2008-09 recession. Let that resonate for a moment. One out of every five jobs lost to the pandemic has been in the food service sector. According to the December labour force survey from Statistics Canada, at least 316,000 fewer people are employed in the food service sector right now than there were in February 2020.

It is a similar story in our aviation sector. We hear about more layoffs, more job losses and more regional route closures basically every other week. COVID-19 and the government responses to it have had devastating impacts on these industries and on the jobs they provide for Canadians. When these sectors and others are taken together, the national unemployment rate according to Statistics Canada was 9.4% as of February 5.

● (1700)

However, the unemployment in Canada's travel and tourism industry far exceeds this number. It currently sits at 18.6%, nearly double the national unemployment rate, which underscores just how hard hit Canada's travel and tourism industry has been.

Canada's Conservatives, as the official opposition, have been pleased to work with private-sector stakeholders to listen and advocate on their behalf as we learn to understand their challenges going through the pandemic. That is why we have been pleased to work with the federal government on improving many of the emergency programs that were hastily launched without much consultation, understanding or consideration of the stakeholders they were intended to help. Through our good work and the federal government's co-operation, we have been able to improve emergency business programs such as the Canada emergency wage subsidy, the Canada emergency rent subsidy and the Canada emergency business account. While we are pleased with these improvements, our work is far from over.

These programs, and the newly created highly affected sectors credit availability program, are designed to be temporary, and their goal is to help businesses survive through the pandemic. They have little to do with the economic recovery that is needed on the other side. That is where Ms. Walden and Destination Canada will play a major role. A core mandate of the federal agency is to influence travel and tourism supply, and build demand for the benefit of locals, communities and visitors through leading research, aligning with public and private sectors and marketing Canada nationally and abroad. There is no doubt that Destination Canada will play a critical role in supporting tourism recovery from coast to coast to coast as early as this summer, or at least so I hope.

The Prime Minister has repeatedly stated that everyone who wants a vaccine will have one by September. For this to happen, we need our vaccine supply to increase significantly, very soon, so that progress can be made in vaccinating Canadians between now and that time. As of this speech, just over 1.5 million Canadians have been vaccinated in a country with a population of more 38 million.

My riding of Niagara Falls includes Canada's top leisure destination. Our local tourism industry is very much seasonal, and traditionally relies upon a busy and successful summer season to take those important small and medium-sized businesses through the slower shoulder months of the fall and winter. Losing the 2020 summer tourism season, through no fault of their own, has had a detrimental impact, and I cannot imagine the consequences for them of possibly losing a second consecutive summer season this year. If that happens, the fault will land squarely on the shoulders of the federal government for failing to secure enough vaccines for Canadians in a timely manner.

Destination Canada must be ready to assist the federal government as we move forward. The 2021 federal budget should outline a detailed plan and measures to achieve tourism recovery, and I look forward to reviewing these plans when they are released. Destination Canada will play a major role in informing the government of what is needed for tourism recovery in alignment with industry partners, and I sincerely hope to see measures that will support our Canadian travel and tourism industry, especially those who have been hardest hit.

I am also aware of the excellent tourism recovery plan that has been proposed by the Tourism Industry Association of Canada. What better place to start helping the industry than by listening directly to what the industry needs?

While I do not hold much confidence in this government under the absentee leadership of our Prime Minister, I do hold hope that Ms. Walden will bring leadership to Destination Canada at a time when it is so dearly needed. As such, I concur with the committee on its fourth report as presented to the House.

• (1705)

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

The tourism industry is very important in his riding, just as it is in many regions in Canada.

Routine Proceedings

I wonder if my colleague could talk to us about the impact the pandemic might have on the very small businesses that depend on the tourism industry and that do not necessarily have enough money in the bank to deal with missing a season. We are heading into a second tourism season that could be completely spoiled for these small businesses. It is worrisome because we may have beautiful attractions, but if we do not have all the resources to welcome visitors, then we will miss out on the return of the tourism industry.

I would like my colleague to talk about the importance of these small businesses that make all the difference between a lovely, fulfilling visit for tourists and a simple photograph of an extraordinary natural landscape, like the ones found in his region.

[English]

Mr. Tony Baldinelli: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is correct. If we approach the coming tourism season and then lose it again, it will be quite devastating, not only for our tourism community in Niagara Falls, but also for many others.

In my community alone there are 40,000 workers who have come to rely on the tourism sector for their livelihoods. Our two casinos, which are the largest tourism employers in Niagara, employ 4,000 individuals. They have been off since March. As the previous speaker and my colleague mentioned, people want to get back to work.

These industries and small businesses are looking for certainty. The Canadian Federation of Independent Businesses is indicating that 200,000 small businesses may fail because of COVID. That would be devastating news for the Canadian economy and for Canadian tourism in general.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, tourism is certainly an important industry in northwest B.C. I have talked to so many tourism operators who have been harmed by the pandemic and are looking at potentially another lost tourism season, as we have already heard. I am curious about his comments on looking for certainty, though, because there is so much that is not known about the future of the pandemic. So many factors are outside of our control.

Does the member not agree that our focus should be on supporting those businesses in the face of travel restrictions, rather than pushing for a reopening of the travel industry, which may be premature in the face of the new variants of the virus, which are so concerning to health experts?

Mr. Tony Baldinelli: Mr. Speaker, as my colleague mentioned earlier, there cannot be a full economic recovery without a health recovery, so that is vitally important. We talked to several stakeholder groups that are looking for certainty. I have spoken to outfitter organizations across the country that derive 90% of their memberships and business from American visitation. They are looking for certainty.

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What is the government plan with regard to opening the border? When would that eventually happen, and how will they be able to do it? Businesses need to start planning now. Without that certainty, they are on the verge of losing another season.

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Mr. Speaker, in my riding tourism is very important, but so too is the booking industry. We have companies that work on booking cruise ships and booking travel around the world. They are worried about losing their businesses and then having large corporations take over what all these small businesses are doing.

Does the hon. member have some comments about what he sees as solutions to this issue? How can we protect these small businesses from having their businesses swallowed up by multinational corporations going forward?

• (1710)

Mr. Tony Baldinelli: Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to stakeholder organizations across the country, including the Association Of Canadian Travel Agencies and independent travel agencies across the country. They are looking to the government for solutions as part of the airline assistance program.

Traditionally many of these small business operations, probably 80% to 85%, are run by female entrepreneurs. They are looking for assistance to ensure that the commissions they have generated and earned, quite rightly, are not clawed back as part of any refund program that the government puts in place as part of its airline bailout.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting, and somewhat frustrating and a little disappointing, to watch the Conservatives play their political games on the floor of the House of Commons. It is becoming more and more apparent that the Conservative Party of Canada is completely out of touch with what Canadians want their political leaders to be talking about and actually doing.

I do not say that lightly. I genuinely believe that the direction the current leadership of the Conservative party and its House leadership team are taking, as well as the discussions and debates on the floor, do a disservice to Canadians.

I will expand on why it is we have a report on travel and tourism. I listened very carefully to the former speaker and the member for Edmonton Centre, who brought forward the motion on this concurrence to talk about travel and tourism in Canada. There was nothing said by either member, nothing at all, that could not have been said during debate on Bill C-14, for example.

There was nothing implying the urgency of having that debate today. When the member for Edmonton Centre presented his arguments to debate this, he expressed concerns in regard to all the restrictions. However, I asked him point-blank whether he supports the current restrictions that have been put in place by the government. His response was that yes, he does support them.

Where is the need to actually bring forward this report at this time? If the members were saying that this is such an important industry, and we should be talking about it, I would agree. It is an important industry. It is a very important industry for all Canadians,

whether they are directly employed by it, indirectly employed by it or not even employed by it. Our tourism industry is of critical importance to our economy and to our society, in terms of how we ultimately evolve. However, if it were that important, they could have dealt with it when we were debating Bill C-14 earlier today.

They have opposition day motions, and they could do it at that time also. They could single out an industry and say that they are concerned about that industry and that they want to debate it all day, and ultimately it would come to a vote.

Members of the Conservative party have been filibustering and doing whatever they can to play a destructive force in regard to Bill C-14, where there has been a great deal of talk about tourism and the tourism industry. There has been a great deal of discussion about that. My colleague from Kingston and the Islands pointed out the number of days we have been sitting for Bill C-14 versus what we would actually spend on a budget debate. As well, the Conservatives have given absolutely no indication. I asked earlier today when the Conservatives would see fit to pass Bill C-14, and there is no indication.

Now, we get this report that is so urgent that the House of Commons needs to have hours of debate on it. The leader of the Conservative Party of Canada and members of Parliament from the Conservative caucus believe that it is so very important.

For those who might be following the debate, I do not believe that it has anything to do with the industry, nothing at all. I think the Conservatives have factored in and brought in this report because they want to continue to filibuster and prevent debates from taking place. Interestingly enough, they will then criticize the government for not having debate. They will ask why we are not debating Bill C-14 more and why we are not bring forward Bill C-19. This is not the first day on which we have tried to bring forward Bill C-19, which is a Canada Elections Act bill.

• (1715)

We look forward to getting that high sense of co-operation coming from all opposition members. They talk about the issue of vaccines in reference to this particular report, but vaccines apply to every aspect of our society, including issues being debated in many different forums.

What should we be debating today? We could have been debating this. Not necessarily the report, but why did members of the Conservative Party not talk about this more during the budget debate, or the mini budget debate, however one might want to refer to Bill C-14?

It has come to the extreme where the Minister of Finance, the Deputy Prime Minister of Canada, had to write a letter to the Conservative leader and say that Conservatives are dragging their feet on important legislation. That legislation will have a positive impact for our tourism industry. As members talk about the—

The Deputy Speaker: We have a point of order from the member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I am hearing a lot about Bill C-14 and Bill C-19. I am just wondering if the Speaker could remind the member of the matter of relevance?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, I rise on the same point of order. I heard the member specifically talking about how Bill C-14 addressed the issue of the tourism industry, so he has completely been on point. Although I do not believe I need to defend this particular member, as he does a great job of doing that himself, I thought I would throw that in for your consideration.

The Deputy Speaker: We can bring the matter to a close at this point.

I thank the hon. members for their interventions. Of course, it is important that members' speeches are pertinent to the subject before the House. I have been listening to the hon. parliamentary secretary. I did note that while what the hon. member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes indicated is true, in that there were, for example, references to other bills, the parliamentary secretary noted these were drawn in relation to comparisons to the subject matter at hand. In that case, I would not consider it to be impertinent to the subject before the House.

The hon. parliamentary secretary will carry on in the usual way, and we will keep paying attention to his abiding in the relevance.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, sometimes members of the Conservative Party feel a little uneasy when we get into the reality of why they play their games.

The Conservatives talk about the importance of the tourism and travel industry. That is why they brought it up. The reason we are debating this today is because apparently the Conservatives are concerned about that one industry. If they are concerned about that industry, Bill C-14 would go a long way to support it.

It is important for my colleagues across the way to understand the consequences of their most inappropriate behaviour when it comes to debate and the games on they play the floor of the House of Commons. They need to start shying away from some of the games and start focusing on what the government has been focused on since day one, and that is Canadians first and foremost.

On the government side, my colleagues and I get a little frustrated when we want to share with members the concerns we have for the many different industries in Canada. Today, this report focuses on travel and our tourism industry. We have been putting a lot of resources into that, hundreds of millions of dollars. We have not neglected this area.

I was talking about the aerospace industry just the other day. Our aerospace industry is so vitally important, and the amount of travel taking place today has significantly dropped. We all know that. It has an impact. I am concerned about the aerospace industry. I did not hear the members talking about the travel industry and the impact it is having on our aerospace industry. That should have also been tied in with this.

The reason I say that is when we look at it, what should we do? Should we do one industry at a time and debate that? This seems to be what the Conservatives want to do right now. Maybe we will

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forgo opposition days and some government days, and go through one industry at a time.

I am very concerned about the aerospace industry. Travel has gone down. I do not know to what degree the committee had that discussion about the aerospace industry and the impact on it.

I take great pride in the fact, and it has been said before, that an aircraft can be built in Quebec from the very start, from the nuts and bolts to a 100% completed aircraft. I am very proud of that fact.

Manitoba also has an aerospace industry. We all know Boeing is being affected by air travel. It is looking at ways in which we can support the travel industry. In fact, I met with some members of Unifor to talk about the aerospace industry and the impact that travel is having on it.

Manitoba has a wonderful aerospace industry, so do the provinces of Ontario and British Columbia. Those provinces probably have 98% of the entire aerospace industry in the country. Do not quote me on that, but I do not think I would be too far off. That is a direct link to travel.

I understand how important it is, but I do not think I would favour of having a day for every subject matter in regard to the coronavirus. There is not enough days in the next couple of months to cover them all.

● (1720)

Why would the Conservatives bring this up at this point? There is a government agenda. The government is moving forward. During the debate, both speakers were critical of the government because the Liberals did not get rapid tests out fast enough. Members will recall that the critic for health jumped up and down, yelling that the sky was falling and asking where the rapid tests were.

Over 20 million rapid tests have now been provided by the federal government and a very small percentage of them have actually been utilized. It sure sounded good back then when members of the Conservative Party tried to get people to lose confidence in the government. That seemed to be their priority, not the travellers.

To what degree did the committee look at that issue? We have over 20 million rapid tests and they have not been utilized anywhere near the degree they could be utilized. Has there been representation coming from the tourism industries, whether restaurateurs or travellers, in regard to it? Are the Conservatives trying to blame the provinces for not doing their jobs in terms of the circulation of rapid tests? Is that what the Conservatives are trying to say?

They raised the issue. I could not believe the ridicule and so-called outrage coming particularly from the critic of health for the Conservative Party. Of course, members, in talking about this motion, talked about the vaccine, and they were critical of the government about as well. They said that it was going to be the saviour.

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This government, through its process and procurements, has put Canada in a fantastic position. We committed weeks ago to six million vaccines by the end of March and well over 20 million by the time we get into June. We are on track to reach that. There have been some bumps here and there and some things we have had to overcome. Some of them are an act of God through a snowstorm to restructuring or retooling of a company overseas.

The Conservatives have one agenda and that agenda is not to provide the type of official opposition that I believe Canadians truly want them to be. What do members think Canadians would say with respect to the debate we are having today and the games being played on the floor of the House of Commons? It is very frustrating.

I would like to be talking about the travel industry and the tourism industry once Bill C-14 gets back from committee. We should allow Canadians, committees and parliamentarians of all political stripes to have that debate about this industry and other industries at the committee stage. We can look at ways to improve it.

The previous speaker made reference to us having some programs. That is right. From day one, this government has been focused on ensuring we were there for small businesses in a real way. Those small businesses, in good part, are doing that much better as a result of the programs we put in place, and he cited some of them. A Conservative member previously made reference to the emergency wage subsidy program. It is a fantastic program.

• (1725)

Late last year, the Prime Minister and I had a discussion via Zoom with members from the folk arts council, which puts on Folklorama in Winnipeg. Close to 200,000 people participate in that event. Members can google it if they like. It is a major tourist attraction for the province of Manitoba.

We had representatives from the folk arts and others were involved in that discussion. They talked about how grateful they were for the wage subsidy program. A couple even indicated that if it were not for the wage subsidy program, the folk arts council might have had to close its doors. Think of the impact that would have had on my province. This institution has been around for over 50 years. There are literally thousands of volunteers. There are 200,000 plus people who will visit the different pavilions. Historically, it has been such a wonderful organization that provides jobs and economic boosts, whether to hotels, artists, and the like. It is very important to our tourism industry. It benefited from the emergency wage subsidy program. Members can talk about tourism and that program under Bill C-14 if they so choose.

However, the Prime Minister also made reference to the emergency business account, another outstanding program. I do not know if he made reference to the emergency rent subsidy program. What about the business credit availability program? One could even talk about the regional relief and recovery funds. All these programs virtually started from nothing.

The Prime Minister and this government are focused on the pandemic and working with Canadians, provinces and territories wherever we can to protect these industries. We worked with some of the best civil servants in the world and because of that, we were

able to get these programs in place to protect the types of industries that are absolutely critical to our future. Because we were so successful at doing that, we are in a much better position to build back better. That applies to our travel industry. Our travel and tourism industry, like other industries we have, has benefited dramatically and positively from these programs.

We have admitted that we can do better, that there are opportunities to improve. That is one of the reasons for Bill C-14. The Conservatives continue to play this stupid game of filibustering, preventing the bill from going to committee, because they are not concerned. They might say they are, but saying it is different than doing it. It is time to have less talk and more action from the Conservative Party of Canada. We need a higher—

• (1730)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes is rising on another point of order.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Speaker, I was listening intently to the parliamentary secretary's comments, and he used a word I have used in this place, a word that the Chair occupant at the time described as "unparliamentary". I would never disagree with a Chair occupant, so when the parliamentary secretary referred to the Conservatives acting in a "stupid" way, he descended into unparliamentary language.

Speaker, before you rule and before the member for Kingston and the Islands engages in debate on my point of order, I would just say that the Chair occupant at the time shares the same party affiliation as the parliamentary secretary and the member who will now challenge this point of order.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: On that point of order, Mr. Speaker, I am going to agree with what my colleague from the Conservatives just said. No person should use the word "stupid" in this House. Indeed, my four-year-old reminds me of that every time I accidentally use that word. I would encourage you, Mr. Speaker, to encourage any member of this House not to use such a word.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank hon. members again for their thoughts on the point of order. Hon. members will know that words and expressions can sometimes be in the category of unparliamentary, particularly when they apply individually to other hon. members. In this particular case, I did not hear anything unparliamentary, so we are not going to rule in that case and we will carry on.

The hon. parliamentary secretary has about 20 seconds left in his comments, and then we will go to questions and comments.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, sometimes the time seems to go by awfully quickly.

I would love the opportunity to listen to members debate all sorts of issues in regard to the coronavirus and how we can work together. My challenge to the Conservatives is to step up to the plate, and let us do what we can in fighting the pandemic.

With that—

● (1735)

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments, the hon. member for Calgary Signal Hill.

Mr. Ron Liepert (Calgary Signal Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first I would like to thank the member for Edmonton Centre and the member for Niagara Falls for bringing forward this concurrence motion. It is becoming quite obvious that the only way we can get the current Liberal government to act on anything is if we bring it to the floor of the House and put it to a vote. We saw that this afternoon with the vote on the China situation.

What has got this parliamentary secretary so worked up is that he is afraid of another vote in which either his entire cabinet is going to abstain or disappear from the vote or he is going to have all of his colleagues vote in favour of another Conservative motion. I really think he is quite concerned about how he is going to manage this situation, and it just shows what terrible disarray the government finds itself in today.

The member for Winnipeg North made one comment that actually made sense, which was that if we took a full day to debate every situation that the government has failed to act on, we would never get through all of these debates because there are so many of them.

The parliamentary secretary is great at talking about science and data. On what basis did the government bring in the decision to quarantine at hotels when the public health folks—

The Deputy Speaker: We will have to leave it at that. We are well enough along, and there are a number of others who wish to pose questions.

We will go now to the hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the member should maybe ask his colleague from Edmonton Centre, to whom I had posed a question asking whether he supports the current restrictions that are in place. His response to me was yes, so I believe that the Conservative Party does support it. If I am wrong, the Conservatives should probably so indicate.

To answer his innuendo in terms of why I might feel frustrated at times, it is because I feel very passionate about doing what I can to combat and fight the pandemic. I see, as we all do, the impact it is having on Canadian society and I see how important it is that the government be at least allowed to do some of the things it needs to do, such as pass Bill C-14.

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I just want to point out that I found the hon. member's sky-is-falling mockery really disrespectful, particularly with the Liberals' non-vaccine rollout that is currently happening, and with people losing work and their homes at this point. We know this is true for the tourism industry, where workers have lost income and people do not even know what is going to happen with the EI benefit. This

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certainly impacts people who live in our neighbouring Winnipeg ridings.

Does the hon. member, particularly with the rates of poverty and the levels of income insecurity we share in our neighbouring ridings, support a guaranteed livable basic income to make sure that people in both of our ridings can not only make it through the pandemic but can go forward in a way that allows them to live in dignity?

● (1740)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, one of the things that I am very proud of is the way in which this government has dealt with the issue of poverty. I can cite two specific examples, and this predates the coronavirus. The Canada child benefit lifted literally hundreds of thousands of children out of poverty, and that includes hundreds, if not thousands, in the riding I represent, Winnipeg North. I would also cite the guaranteed annual income increase, which was a substantial increase for the poorest of our seniors. That policy in itself lifted tens of thousands of seniors out of poverty, including many from the riding of Winnipeg North.

I think we have a very good record in supporting people where they need to be supported, whether it was from day one or as we continue to support seniors, people with disabilities and so many more as we go through the pandemic.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to talk about women in the tourism sector. Of course, the debate on concurrence right now is specific to only one thing, and that is the level of competence of the new head of our tourism commission. Her name is Marsha Walden, and she was originally with the British Columbia tourism association, but it puts in mind the wonderful Charlotte Bell, who headed up the Tourism Industry Association of Canada and who so tragically died just months ago from a very rapid, aggressive cancer. She was quite young, so I just wanted to say how terribly sad I am to have lost Charlotte and how absolutely confident I am in today's debate, which is actually not about tourism.

The Conservatives have put us into a debate not about the tourism industry or the plight faced by tourism operators, but on one thing only: the qualifications and competence of Ms. Walden to perform in her job. I really have no question for the hon. parliamentary secretary, except to join in the lament that the business of this House is once again hijacked.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I would highlight one of the things the former leader of the Green party made reference to. When we talk about our hospitality industry or our tourism industry, I suspect we will find that a solid majority of it is female and an area that we need to spend more time and resources on. It is harder hit, and I like to think that our minister responsible for gender has done a good job at ensuring that gender lens is being applied to the upcoming federal budget.

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Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the debate, because I was hoping to be able to speak to Bill C-19, which was introduced in December and helps prepare for the potential election in the context of a pandemic. It is legislation that the Chief Electoral Officer had asked the House to consider. I listened intently to members who spoke and to the parliamentary secretary, and he began not only talking about the importance of the tourism sector, something that we all share with our colleagues from the Conservative party, but also offered some insight as to why the Conservative party may seek this procedural dilatory tactic to prevent the House from considering important legislation that would protect Canadians in a pandemic.

I am wondering if the parliamentary secretary might expand and share with us his views on why the opposition would seek to, as the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands has so properly said, delay the proper business of the House in considering legislation that would protect Canadians in the context of a pandemic.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, those who follow the House will know that this morning we were supposed to be debating Bill C-14. We were hopeful, after many days of debate, that it would be allowed to come to a vote. The Conservatives, of course, are dragging their feet on that.

We had another very important piece of legislation, and I know it is important for all Canadians. In fact, the minister who just posed the question and has done a great deal of work on it is saying that we should discuss this legislation and get it to committee. He wants to be able to work with all members of all sides of the House, in recognizing how important it is that this legislation be dealt with. However, much like with Bill C-14, the Conservatives would appear to want to continue to play these destructive games, which are not healthy for Canadians. I—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. We are just going to try to get one more question in here at the tail end of this 10-minute period.

The hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about the topic the previous speakers spoke about. We were supposed to be debating Bill C-19. With regard to an election in a pandemic, I was going to bring about 30 minutes of thoughtful comment. The only people who are a hurry to have an election are the Liberals. The majority of Canadians have said they do not want an election during a pandemic. The Liberals were in such a hurry that they introduced this legislation even before the committee that was considering the Chief Electoral Officer's report was finished. Colleagues can comfort themselves with that.

The reason they have to have debates like this is that the government is not listening to the travel and tourism industry. I have sat in the House and heard calls for help for the airline industry and calls to get plans in place so that the economy can reopen and restaurants can come back.

What specifically is the government going to do to enable this industry to quickly get back on its feet?

• (1745)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I cited a very clear example when I said that the Prime Minister met with the folk arts council. That is just one of apparently thousands of meetings that would have been taking place, no doubt, set up through the Prime Minister's Office. To try to give a false impression as if the government is not working and concerned about the tourism industry is just wrong.

In regard to Bill C-19, it is an important piece of legislation. The Government of Canada has never been focused on an election. Our focus is on Canadians first and foremost and has been since day one. That will continue to be the case. Elections Canada is recognized around the world as an independent organization and we have full confidence in it, but Bill C-19 will go a long way—

The Deputy Speaker: That will bring this segment to a close.

[Translation]

Resuming debate.

The hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by saying that I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, who is a great advocate of our SMEs in the tourism industry.

I could simply talk about the hard times that the tourism industry in Quebec is unfortunately facing right now. There is so much to say about what they have endured.

The federal government delayed in providing support for the industry, despite repeated requests from stakeholders in the tourism industry and the opposition parties. Employees, owners, organizers and artists, as well as all of the people who work in hospitality, food service, and arts and culture, have been particularly hard hit by the economic impact of COVID-19.

Take, for example, all of the events, both large and small, and all of the business and co-operative relationships that were adversely affected by cancellations and closures. Getting the tourism industry back on track in the next few years is going to be a major challenge.

If we are to meet that challenge, the federal government needs to stop creating one-size-fits-all programs, because they are not very successful. We need to acknowledge what is happening. The federal government needs to change its approach. Programs need to be well designed and tailored to the needs of the tourism industry in Montreal and in many small towns in the regions. The programs need to meet the needs of the industry. To make sure these programs are as effective as possible, why does the government not let industry stakeholders decide on the principles and mechanisms for these programs?

This is important in Quebec. The tourism industry—

The Deputy Speaker: I apologize to the hon. member for interrupting, but there seems to be a problem.

Could the hon. member repeat his question or resume his intervention?

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure what you mean.

Is there a problem with my microphone?

[English]

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: There is a problem with the interpretation. The French and English are coming through at the same volume. I am not sure if other people are hearing that, but it has been doing that for a little while.

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

I would like to know if the problem is fixed.

[English]

Is that fixed now?

[Translation]

I will ask the hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue to resume his intervention, so we can see if the interpretation is working properly.

The hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Mr. Speaker, interpretation is certainly a very important issue, as is tourism in Quebec.

The tourism industry is crucial to Quebec's regional economies. It employs over 400,000 workers and contributes \$15 billion to the Quebec economy. More than two-thirds of these businesses are located outside the greater Quebec City and Montreal areas, and most of them are very small businesses that are agile and innovative, but still fragile. This industry has been one of the hardest hit by the public health crisis, and it is still waiting for the government to show more empathy and a greater desire to collaborate, because times will be tough for several years to come.

To overcome this enormous challenge, the tourism industry will need the hard work and talent of everyone involved. That is why I prefer to talk about “tourism with a promising future”. It is also why I would like to talk to Marsha Walden, President and CEO of Destination Canada, the Canadian tourism commission, about solutions that people in the industry have shared with me in recent months. We need to make the most of this evening's debate by talking about solutions and how we can restructure the tourism ecosystem.

Before we increase the budget envelopes for the promotion of tourism, we should invest heavily in the restructuring of the tourism ecosystem. I will explain.

In the current public health context, travellers are looking for alternative tourism destinations because people do not want to go to major cities where there is a higher risk of COVID-19. That is understandable. Major cities are not popular because people want to enjoy themselves in the great outdoors. Therefore, the tourism industry must adapt its offerings and make smart investments even in smaller tourism areas.

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For example, in 2020, my region of Abitibi-Témiscamingue experienced a tourism boost despite the public health context, and it was a good year for tourism given the circumstances. Quebecers travelled more than seven hours from Montreal to visit the Abitibi-Témiscamingue region. In September, festival-goers stayed in Abitibi-Témiscamingue for the Emerging Music Festival, which I attended with my colleague from Berthier—Maskinongé, among others. The Abitibi-Témiscamingue International Film Festival was held in October.

In the midst of a health crisis, the people of Abitibi-Témiscamingue were able to put on two major events without any problems or any impact on the spread of the virus.

What is more, this winter, snowmobilers have been coming from all over to ride the extensive network of trails criss-crossing the immense territory of Abitibi-Témiscamingue. There are 3,600 kilometres of snowmobile trails, for those who are interested. My region is so large and attractive and has so many wide open spaces that it would take a visitor weeks to explore all of our snowmobile, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing trails and our vast expanses of frozen lakes in winter, just like it would take weeks for them to roam all the walking trails, the two national parks and the rivers in summer.

The tourism offerings need to be different. This year, potentially, and in the coming years, tourism in Abitibi-Témiscamingue will slowly pick up again, and people will come from all over to discover the region's tourism offerings. They will visit museums, wildlife refuges, wilderness areas, villages and outfitters. They will go to rodeos and truck rodeos and attend large outdoor concerts. The people of Abitibi-Témiscamingue are known for their enthusiasm, whether it is -30°C in January and February or 30°C in July and August.

In addition, Quebec is a true natural wonder, known for the beauty of its land and the St. Lawrence River. Quebecers and travellers from all over the world come to walk the streets of Old Quebec and experience the vibrancy of downtown Montreal. Visitors travel along the St. Lawrence River to go whale watching and visit the picturesque little villages along its shores, often known for their local products and microbreweries. Visitors travel through the vast wilderness of the boreal forest, stay at outfitters, take part in ice fishing tournaments or sled dog races, and the list goes on.

Quebec is a popular adventure tourism destination, so I hope we can enhance our tourism offerings. Why not invest heavily in regional structures that will put money in the right areas, specifically to meet local needs, based on each local reality?

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I appeal to the president and chief executive officer of the Canadian Tourism Commission in that regard. Tourism development officers help entrepreneurs, municipalities and organizations adapt and enhance their tourism offerings, which must be thoughtfully prepared. It is important to rebuild locally, since tourists will flock back to us in a few years. Preparations are in the works, and I hope Ms. Walden will provide the necessary financial resources, without conditions, to maximize the potential of the tourism industry in the regions.

● (1750)

When tourism in Quebec and the rest of Canada gets back to full strength in the coming years, I hope the federal government will have given the industry a jump-start and the means to rebuild. It is certainly no small task. Rebuilding is a tremendous challenge. For example, there needs to be support for agri-tourism, investment in structures for tourism to extend to the farms, directly at the farm, in facilities, among the animals, to host activities on site and taste products from the farm.

Why not try something new at public markets so that people can discover quality local products, much like the gourmet fair, the Foire gourmande de l'Abitibi-Témiscamingue et du Nord-Est ontarien, has done? Why not try something new to bring tourism to the mountains, forests and waterways, to ensure environmentally responsible protection of the natural environment? Why not try something new to have tourism help protect the heritage buildings of our tourist sites, such as the churches and our beautiful old Quebec and Canadian homes?

We must build a solid tourism ecosystem that will help people develop their talents, protect our heritage and make use of natural environments. We need to reimagine the tourism industry. Until this industry gets back on its feet, we need to be creative and think outside the box. The focus should be on the well-being of travellers and on providing effective support for these travellers and for the businesses and organizations in these tourism ecosystems.

We cannot leave travellers to fend for themselves. We should be giving them a memorable human experience. Let us make tourism a more humanistic way of life, for both travellers and workers. Let us make it more innovative, more environmentally friendly, and more attuned to the land, heritage and people who live there. If we are going to achieve this, we must reimagine tourism and transition from competition to collaboration. We need to review the necessary investments, not just in terms of budget amounts, but also in terms of how things are done. People should be able to work with others and not against others, to develop innovative, creative projects.

I would like to suggest some approaches. First, bigger budgets so that people on the ground, many of them passionate individuals who actually live in the areas that need a boost, can invest in specialized resources. The government should also help people who have built businesses pass the baton to other passionate individuals. We need to help the tourism industry adapt to this reality by creating new programs that give stakeholders something to build on, and that means investing in those programs. Young people who want to call these places home, embrace healthy lifestyles and provide an exceptional quality of life can leverage a region's assets to spur economic development.

Let us make sure that people working in the tourism industry are proud to help capitalize on what their region and its natural beauty have to offer. We need attractive ad and promotional video campaigns, but we also have to promote the people working in the industry. Investing in human talent is key to the success of our tourism businesses.

In closing, the tourism industry will remain in limbo for many more difficult months. It is going to experience a labour shortage. We have to be aware of that. The whole structure is broken, and the parts need to be rebuilt. If nothing changes, many competent workers will leave the tourism industry for other sectors.

● (1755)

[English]

Mr. Gerald Soroka (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Jasper and Jasper National Park are probably the most famous or most known for tourism in my riding. I am happy the member said tourism is suffering, because a previous speaker mentioned how many great things the sector is doing and I was thinking we were not in the same world. What I am hearing from my tourist operators and many small businesses is how badly they are suffering.

The member said that some of the programs are not working. Could he comment on where the Liberals have failed and where he thinks they could improve upon their programs?

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I heard the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands say that Ms. Bell has passed away, so I want to begin by offering my condolences to her family and loved ones. I believe she was the one who used the canary analogy at one of our meetings. The people in the tourism industry were the first to be affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and might be the last to recover.

How can we reverse that situation? We must first recognize the unique challenges facing that sector and, above all, we must leverage its human resources, the passionate individuals who will sell us tourism experiences. I was fortunate enough to visit the Jasper area once in my life and thought it was absolutely fantastic. I will definitely go back one day to discover all the beauty there is to see across our vast land.

● (1800)

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend my colleague from Abitibi—Témiscamingue for his excellent speech and for the passion he brings to his work.

Speaking of tourism, I am, of course, thinking of the many festivals and events that take place in my riding of Drummond. I am thinking in particular of my friends at the Village québécois d'antan with whom I had the pleasure of working for several years.

In the tourism and events industry, one thing is fundamental and that is predictability. In November, when the government tabled its fall economic statement, it spoke about a program to help the sectors that have been hit the hardest by the pandemic, which obviously includes tourism. However, it took nearly three months for that program to be implemented, which is not consistent with that principle of predictability that the people working in the tourism industry need.

According to my colleague, how can the government make up for lost time in order to help tourism organizations, like the Village québécois d'antan in Drummond, to have a better season than they currently expect to have since they have not received adequate support?

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Drummond for his question.

This summer, I got to go camping in his riding, as I was unable to stay at a local hotel. In any event, I gave a speech about Bill C-14, and I mentioned the challenges faced by the tourism industry, which the member for Winnipeg North will be happy to hear.

In our speeches on this bill, we spoke about the importance of this assistance, and I remember that my colleague from Drummond used the key word predictability. At many meetings, people told us that they needed to know what kind of support the government would provide to these businesses. They need assistance with fixed costs, some of which are not being considered by the federal government in its assistance measures. If the assistance is to be predictable, we must look at all fixed costs.

We must reinvest in the human resources who will be able to establish links between activities and tourism routes. My colleague mentioned the Village Québécois d'Antan, but we must also develop the villages themselves so they can offer a warm welcome to tourists visiting a region. The entire tourism industry must provide a sensational experience so tourists will want to visit again and tell their family members and friends about their experience, so they will come discover these regions as well.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his speech.

Which businesses in his riding are most affected by the pandemic? What does the government need to do to improve the situation?

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Mr. Speaker, I would be pleased to invite the hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton to my riding, which has 60 or so towns and villages. If we add the villages that merged with Rouyn-Noranda, that makes 84 communities that have their own elected members and representatives. Each of these territories has at least one regional event, festival or tourist attraction that sets it apart and draws in visitors.

For example, I am thinking about the Labyrinthe des insectes. Its owner has managed to keep his business afloat for eight years, but he is now at the point where he needs some cash flow to get to the next stage. However, he is having a hard time finding help through the current programs. He launched a crowdfunding campaign that is going well, but he has such big plans for the bugs that he should be entitled to seek support from the government, which has yet to respond.

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Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased, albeit with a strong sense of irony, to be taking part in this completely pointless debate that the governing Liberal Party of Canada has foisted upon the House.

It is unfathomable to me that the Liberal minority in this Parliament can force such a pointless debate that is of no interest to the people we represent, especially during this health crisis during which we are meant to be productive.

I have collegial relationships with a number of my Liberal colleagues, and they know that our verbal sparring and political interventions here in the House, in committee or in our respective ridings come from a place of trust and good faith.

With that said, I cannot emphasize enough how very disappointed I am to see that the government is moving so slowly on its piddly response plan that should have reassured Quebecers and Canadians. After all, the Prime Minister runs a G7 country, which ranks last in terms of vaccination, but is still a G7 country.

We take comfort in what we can, and everyone will readily agree. It was 44 years ago that the current Prime Minister's father made history by addressing the United States Congress for the very first time. Tomorrow, his son will meet with the new U.S. President. It goes without saying that keen observers will note the obvious and not-so-obvious differences from what will be said from the Canadian perspective. One had a vision; the other, a simple reaction. I could never be satisfied with either one. Here and around the world, since the start of his mediocre tenure as the head of government, the Prime Minister's personal work during the pandemic has been deemed to be fruitless, without constructive results, and, above all, to this point, not worthy of mention.

Routine Proceedings

The motion currently before the House, a dilatory tactic on the part of government members, speaks for itself. It demonstrates the government's philosophical disconnect in attempting to avoid basic issues that should be of serious concern in order to buy time for the Prime Minister. The Liberal Party's dilatory motion seeks to buy time. We believe that buying time is a petty thing to do, and it would be a good idea for members to remember that. That is what the government is doing and it is quite frankly unacceptable, insulting and unbelievable. In my opinion, it is completely ridiculous and juvenile for the government to take the House's precious time today to discuss a committee report on the new president and chief executive officer of the Canadian Tourism Commission. It is not hard to imagine the preposterous backroom wrangling that senior members of the Liberal Party have been doing over the past few days to slow down the work of the House. I am sure that other members are just as disappointed as I am. The entire strategy of a G7 government is likely based on a note hastily scrawled on the corner of a napkin, a government that is struggling to limit the shame felt by its own caucus regarding its vain attempts to dig out of a hole the economic forces it claims are its proudest ally.

To be honest, if I had an ally or a partner of the sort the Liberal government claims to be, I would quietly tell the Chair, given that nobody is listening anyway, that I would have gotten rid of such an ally with no compunction whatsoever. It seems true friends are not those one might instinctively think of. The tourism industry from coast to coast to coast deserves much more than the promises this government is dangling before it.

Given some of the cockamamie ideas we have been discussing, it is worth informing our colleagues from all government parties that the government is using them for blatantly partisan purposes, emphasis on "partisan".

The only thing in this entire futile debate that has made any impression on me at all is this stalling tactic that is orally and literally wasting the House's precious time, time that is all the more precious and crucial for the entire population, time that we should be spending debating much more important issues during this pandemic.

• (1805)

I would like to think that everyone shares my sympathy and concern for the awful times the businesses in the tourism industry are going through right now.

Many people know how much energy I have put into having as many meetings as possible with all the players in all sectors of this vast business community, regardless of their size within the industry, to ensure its survival. To see the Liberal Party of Canada stoop so low today and abandon them in such a vile and mean-spirited parliamentary procedure suggests that the Prime Minister's pretty words yesterday were nothing more than a prelude to an even worse rejection to come. For months now, day in and day out, the Liberal government has been promising better days for the entire tourism industry. Day in and day out, it keeps repeating that promise, although it never really delivers on it.

The Liberal Party, headed up by the Prime Minister and the Minister for Economic Development for the Regions of Quebec, kept on misleading the small business owners who make our regions the

most charming places to visit, before heading out into the broader world. However, the Liberals return to the House with a dilatory measure like the one before us, which is deeply offensive.

The appointment of Marsha Walden at the head of the Canadian Tourism Commission was duly approved by the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology. This powerful House of Commons committee had already exercised the necessary due diligence on reviewing Ms. Walden's candidacy and had approved her appointment. The motion for reference to the House of Commons tabled by the Liberals is as outrageous as it is despicable.

As proof, I submit all the despicable treatment meted out to the tourism industry from the outset of the pandemic. From the time the federal government declared a pandemic to the deployment of all the health measures in Quebec and elsewhere in Canada, the tourism industry was the first to be affected. Not only did all of its operations cease overnight, but this industry employs tens of thousands of people in Quebec and hundreds of thousands more across Canada, so it will be the last to recover. All members will agree with me that the House had better things to do today than to discuss the shenanigans of the people opposite, which just prove how amateurish this government is.

• (1810)

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member who represents the riding next to mine for the speech he gave, despite his immense frustration with what is currently happening in the House of Commons.

Like him, I have had conversations with people from the tourism industry over the past year. These past few weeks in particular, many of them have spoken about the need for some predictability.

One of the sector's major concerns will be the labour shortage. The tourism industry was already experiencing a labour shortage before 2020, and it has been aggravated by the fact that many people changed careers when the sector collapsed. Could my colleague tell me what came out of the conversations he had with representatives of the tourism sector in his riding?

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Jonas: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup for his comments and his question.

As my party's tourism critic, I have certainly spoken to provincial and regional stakeholders in Quebec. The labour shortage is a real problem. It was a problem before the pandemic, it is a problem now, and it could remain a problem if we do not find a solution.

I completely agree with my colleague's comment about predictability. The best example showing that the government is improvising is the program for highly affected sectors. This problem was first announced on November 30 in an economic update, but the government had certainly planned for it before November 30, since it had to prepare the economic update. The program was not implemented until February 1 of this year. That is two months, on top of a month or more of preparation. There will be no predictability so long as the government keeps jotting down program ideas and waiting three months to implement them. The tourism industry needs some long-term predictability and support, and that will take a lot more support measures.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, everything that is currently happening to the tourism industry also affects my riding. Here are a few examples. In Val-d'Or, there is the Spectacle-bénéfice Hardy Ringuette, a benefit that raises money for La Ressource pour personnes handicapées de l'Abitibi-Témiscamingue et du Nord-du-Québec. There is also the Festival d'humour de l'Abitibi-Témiscamingue, the Festival des contes et légendes Abitibi-Témiscamingue and the Festival de musique Trad Val-d'Or. In Chibougamau, there is Festival Folifrets, a snowmobiling festival.

Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou is a huge region, so it is important to talk about it. The tourism industry is dealing with a lot of cancellations and a loss of visibility and volunteers.

What about the money that comes from outside our borders, from other countries?

• (1815)

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

Support for organizations and the entire events industry, which is related to the tourism industry, is vital for all regions of Quebec. That industry promotes the cultural beauty of our entire Quebec nation. However, it needs support.

Last spring, the money that is usually used for international promotion and marketing through Destination Canada was transferred to tourism, through local stakeholders, namely, the Alliance de l'industrie touristique du Québec. Naturally, we hope to have that support in the long term, which would provide the necessary predictability to ensure that events will also take place next summer. That is what we are hoping.

[English]

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government has been preoccupied with trying to find someone to blame for everything, specifically the opposition parties. We now have in front of us a very important discussion about a very important industry. I am concerned with the hospitality industry in general, and of course tourism on top of that.

Would the hon. member agree the government should be looking for solutions rather than blaming others?

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[Translation]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, the tourism industry is vital to Quebec's regions, and it needs support and programs.

We know that the wage subsidy is vital to many organizations, many industries and various segments of the tourism industry. This industry has economic, cultural and social impacts on many regions of Quebec.

We have to do what needs to be done, of course. We hope the government will create programs that are far more structured and will provide more support to the tourism industry, because there are still lots of businesses that slip through the cracks in the federal government's existing system.

We hope the next budget will include the necessary funding to adequately support the tourism industry.

[English]

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, before I get started, on behalf of the federal NDP and as the critic for small business and tourism, I want to acknowledge a huge loss. I believe that all parliamentarians will agree that we lost a wonderful leader in the tourism sector: Charlotte Bell, who was the CEO of the Tourism Industry Association of Canada. She was an incredible champion for tourism businesses and the tourism sector across our country, and she helped grow this magnificent sector. We just lost Charlotte recently, and I want to extend our condolences to her family, to the team at the Tourism Industry Association of Canada and to all of its members. We will not forget Charlotte. She was an incredible asset, and we thank her for all of her contributions.

We are hearing stories in all 338 ridings across our country. Given that we have the longest coastline in the world, with three coasts, and we have incredible mountains, the scenery right across our country is magnificent, but every community has been impacted by COVID-19. The tourism and hospitality sector was a \$103 billion sector prior to COVID-19 arriving in our communities and around the globe. We have lost 521,000 jobs in the tourism and hospitality industry since the pandemic hit us. It is the hardest-hit sector and will likely be the last sector to recover. COVID-19 has had a huge impact on those businesses.

I come from the tourism-based community of Tofino on the west coast of Vancouver Island, and I know all too well the importance of tourism not just to the local economy, but also to our culture and to our infrastructure. We have great infrastructure in place that many people have benefited from that goes well beyond the tourism sector, including bus transportation. Without the tourism sector, all of the infrastructure is going to be difficult to manage, and I will talk about the threat to that infrastructure in a moment.

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I want to talk about the impact this has had particularly on tourism operators and those in the hospitality industry from coast to coast. Many have had to close their doors, not just once but twice or three times. They have had to weather myriad programs, and as we have seen the government continues to design programs that are hard to access.

We need the government to continue to work with opposition members, like the New Democrats, that have brought forward changes.

For example, we put pressure on the government to change the wage subsidy, which was initially going to be 10%, to 75%. However, we need the government to go further for these businesses and listen to the tourism and hospitality sector.

We also brought forward the idea of a commercial rent program. Of course, it was initially rolled out to be landlord-driven, which made it very difficult for many businesses to qualify as they could not meet the criteria that were set out. We were glad to see the Liberals fix that program in the fall, but we were extremely disappointed that they did not take the eligibility back to April when they realized that there was a flaw in the design of the program. The Liberals admitted it, yet still refused to go back to April 1, expecting those businesses in the hardest-hit sector to survive. Some of those businesses would not get the help that maybe their neighbours got because some landlords would not or could not apply, for whatever reason. We are glad to see it fixed now, but we would like to see the Liberals take it back to April 1, in fairness to those businesses and their competition, to help them get through this.

Many of these businesses closed their doors to protect public health from the middle of March on. These small businesses and tourism operators are the unsung heroes in our country. We do not talk enough about them and their employees. This is a sector that is going to need significant investment, and for a lot longer than other sectors, because it is the hardest hit.

● (1820)

Clearly we supported the government fixing its CEBA loan program, but that loan program only goes so far. There are still people who are not able to access any of these programs, such as start-ups, for example. We put forward solutions to the government to use measurements from March moving forward. It could look at receipts, like it finally did with the CEBA loan program, as a measurement for doling out funds to legitimate businesses, and have measurements in place so it could support them. However, it has not done that.

There is a start-up in the riding of my colleague, the member for Cowichan—Malahat—Langford. He has repeatedly brought the attention of the government to a veterans' brewery, V2V Black Hops Brewing company. Some veterans, who put their lives on the line, started a social enterprise to help other veterans suffering from PTSD. They opened at the beginning of March and have not been able to access any supports: not the wage subsidy, not the rent program and not the CEBA loan. They have been left completely high and dry. One would think, once the government saw that the company had paid its employees since last March and had closed its doors to protect public health, it would come to the company's rescue and help these incredible heroes. No. The government has left

them high and dry, just like a restaurant in Victoria that my colleague has been constantly bringing to the attention of government, and businesses in my riding that have been forgotten in Courtenay.

There has been a lack of support for really small micro-businesses, such as fish guides. Of the programs the government has rolled out, the wage subsidy does not work for them because they are self-employed and sole proprietors. They do not need the rent program, and most of them do not qualify for the CEBA loan because of the requirements in place. They need help. New Democrats were glad that the government extended CERB for those who had been impacted. We were very glad to see that, but the government needs to create different programs for different markets that have been left out, especially in the tourism and hospitality sectors. We want to make sure we help them.

Right now, there is a wild salmon crisis in British Columbia. There are plenty of opportunities to support the tourism sector, as well as to invest in restoration and enhancement, and to support sectors such as the aquaculture industry, which is having to diversify and build more resiliency. We are not seeing the support that is needed right now for areas that have both industry and tourism and need help. For example, we know that businesses in Port Alberni, where I live, were left out because the City leases them spaces for their restaurants, retail outlets and different businesses. They were left out because they lease from a small local government. That is unacceptable.

Why would they be left out because of that? They are paying rent and trying to keep their businesses going. They have employees and have families they need to feed. The government did not support them until late in the fall when it agreed, but then said it would not go back to the beginning of the spring as it did for everybody else.

I want to talk about the solutions for a moment, because the Tourism Industry Association of Canada has done an incredible job of bringing forward a recovery plan, as has the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada and many of the travel and transport sectors that we rely on and benefit from. Obviously all Canadians benefit from our air and aviation sector, but there is also the bus sector.

My colleagues in the NDP on Vancouver Island and I wrote a letter to the new Minister of Transport urging him to do something to save Wilson's bus lines. We cannot lose Wilson's bus lines. This is absolutely critical infrastructure for people, especially the most marginalized, on Vancouver Island. The company relies on tourism for the bulk of its income to keep afloat. Many people in the ridings benefit from it.

I think about people who live in remote first nations, like the Hesquiaht, the Ahousaht, the Yuu-cluth-aht or the Huu-ay-aht. All of these are Nuu-chah-nulth nations. I can speak to all of them in my riding that benefit from the tourism infrastructure that is in place, like the bus services to get to doctors' appointments or to connect with family members. Many of them struggling to get to a doctor rely on bus transportation, especially the elders. Some of them cannot drive. They might have vision or health issues and cannot get to appointments. There are people who have barriers and are living with disabilities who absolutely require support and service.

● (1825)

The government is telling businesses in the transportation sector to borrow more money. The government says it is going to collapse the sector because people are not going to come. Businesses are not able to do that anymore. They can only borrow so much. They need the Liberals to step up to the plate. The Liberals keep talking about supporting the transportation sector, but they have not done that.

I want to thank my colleague for Skeena—Bulkley Valley because he has been an incredible champion. On the Highway of Tears, he talked about the impact of losing Greyhound, as many communities have in northern Saskatchewan. My former colleague, Georgina Jolibois, raised this issue as well. It is absolutely critical that we create an essential bus network. There is now a coast-to-coast bus coalition advocating for the federal government to ensure that we have that connection right across our country. We have downloaded this to provincial governments, and it has now become piecemeal. It is unacceptable, especially for the most marginalized. We need to connect Canadians coast to coast, and we need to make sure that they get the support they need.

The 2021 tourism recovery plan that I talked about, from the Tourism Industry Association of Canada, is absolutely fabulous. It is very clear and straightforward. The association has identified its needs. It needs the government to respond with supports. We know that HASCAP is out the door, but we want to make sure that financial institutions are ready to receive HASCAP applications and move quickly. They need to be available on a per-property basis. My colleague for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie has been hounding me. He said that many businesses in his riding are not eligible because they have multiple locations and they are not getting the support they need. The government needs to change the flexibility of all its programs so that people with multiple businesses that are not at arm's length can actually get the support they need. They should not be penalized. It is going to cost jobs and livelihoods, and it is going to impact families.

The RRRF funding has been absolutely a disaster. Only 14% of those who have applied were able to get it. It has been a terrible rollout so far. The wage subsidy needs to be accessible to 90% of

those businesses until we are back to normal, and the wage subsidy also needs to be backdated and to use the measurement of 2019, but I also know businesses that were caught in the middle. A business in Tofino, for example, closed its resort in 2019 to do some renovations and some work. It is out of luck. When businesses close their doors and cannot get these really important funding needs, the CE-BA loan will get them through a day if they are lucky. It is critical that the Liberals amend these changes and support these folks.

Going back to the aviation sector and transportation sector, we need a plan. We need the Liberals to ensure that they are providing some relief to Nav Canada and the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority to get those services going and make sure they are funding them.

Again, I talked about the Indigenous Tourism Association. I had a frantic call from the CEO who was told that his budget had been trimmed from \$3 million a year. The ITA has been absolutely essential to growing the indigenous tourism sector, which is the fastest growing sector in Canada. The ITA provides critical support in getting loans out the door to over 800 indigenous businesses that it has personal connections with. This is also the most fragile business demographic in our country. The CEO was told the ITA was going to get cut from \$3 million to \$500,000. This is after all of the work that it has done. I hope the government is going to recognize in the budget the importance that the ITA has and is going to have in the recovery.

We have seen how the government has failed indigenous businesses when it comes to the wage subsidy, for example. A lot of indigenous-led businesses were ineligible at the beginning. We went to the wall to get the government to fix that eligibility for those businesses that were ineligible because of the design of their business. Again, we need the government to be flexible.

● (1830)

I have talked about some of the important pieces. Obviously, testing is critical to the tourism sector. We need the government to invest in rapid testing and to look at other countries around the world where we have seen success with rapid testing. We also need to look at incentives. We saw the Harper government get rid of a really important GST rebate that we gave to visitors. Indeed, we are the only industrialized country in the world that charges a tax on an export sector like tourism. It is absolutely critical that we look at this.

Routine Proceedings

I also want to talk about some really important sectors, like the events sector, which has not been receiving the support it needs. It is critical we look at ways to support that sector and get creative because a lot of the people working in it are not going to be employed until next year.

When it comes to the NDP and our approach to the tourism and small business sector, there are some critical needs that were in play before the sector hit this turmoil. We knew that businesses could not grow without affordable housing. If someone goes to any resort municipality in British Columbia or any tourism-based economy in Canada, they will say their biggest challenge is finding employees, and the reason they cannot find them is housing.

We have an opportunity not just to recover and build back better, as we hear from the government, but to build back better so that our sector grows, not just bring it back to where we were. We want to continue to grow. That is something the NDP wants to see. We want to see more non-market housing. In the 1970s and 1980s we saw our housing stock go 10% non-market housing to 3% today. Europe is at 30%. It is absolutely critical that we have that infrastructure.

Child care is absolutely critical. The Comox Valley Chamber of Commerce says that the number one need right now is affordable, universal and accessible child care. That is absolutely critical to the tourism sector, which is why it is so critical to the NDP that we invest in these important infrastructure pieces.

A dental and pharmacare plan is important, because we hear about insurance costs sky rocketing for the residential and commercial sectors, and also for dental and medical care. Small business people, especially in the tourism and hospitality industry, are so close to their staff. They care about them. They know that if they do not get those investments, their staff are more likely to miss work and more potentially more likely not even to be presentable to the public if they are missing teeth, and small business people are less likely to grow their occupations as a result. It is absolutely critical for us to invest in our employees, and that is what small business and the tourism sector want.

Of course, they want protection of the environment and want to see us grow back and build back better. I want to revert back, being that I am in coastal British Columbia, to say that we need to make sure that we save our wild salmon. Members have heard me speak repeatedly in the House about that. These are critical supports. We need investments in our ecology, and habitat protection and restoration. This is going to be critical to the recovery of British Columbia when it comes to the tourism sector and, as we know, it is a critical sector. In the \$105-billion sector that tourism represent in our country, B.C. has a huge share of the pie. Salmon is the cornerstone, not just of our tourism sector, but also of our food security, our economy and our culture.

There are other things that I could talk about. I could talk way longer than 20 minutes about the tourism industry and how critical it is that we support it, but we also see the big banks not playing a fair game. We heard from Dan Kelly and the Canadian Federation of Independent Business just over the weekend talking about merchant fees. The interchange fees are still way too high, especially for online business. We have all these online businesses that have

pivoted to being online and they are paying these absolutely outrageous rates. These fees need to be capped and need to be more in line with those in Europe. Right now in Europe, merchant fees are 0.5%. Here in Canada they are a voluntary 1.4%. That is not good enough.

We saw the Liberals bring forward a private members' bill in the last Parliament. For four years, that bill got moved I believe about 16 times. Clearly, the Liberals have the backs of the big banks and the credit card companies. They did not want to debate it. We need to cap merchant fees and be in line with Europe and Australia.

I want to thank everybody in the tourism industry. We need to make sure they are a priority. They are the hardest hit sector.

● (1835)

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member for Courtenay—Alberni knows how important tourism is, as I do here in the North Okanagan—Shuswap, and I want to talk about how long the government has been failing our tourism sector.

We are going on almost a year now since we started calling for vaccines, rapid testing and so on, so that we could keep our tourism sector open. I see it as a failure of the current government to address this, and now we are into a second wave with the threat of a third wave.

Does the member agree that vaccines and rapid testing are so important for our tourism sector to get back on its feet?

Mr. Gord Johns: Madam Speaker, absolutely, and I know tourism is such an important part of the economic makeup where he is in the Shuswap and Okanagan. I also thank my colleague for his constant advocacy for the wild Pacific salmon.

The member nailed it. When it comes to tourism businesses, we need tax credits first to help them get through the costs associated with testing. That is absolutely critical. As well, the government needs to provide financial support for rapid testing. That has to happen and we need to get vaccine into Canada. We see how far behind we are falling other nations, and it is absolutely critical we get that into place.

● (1840)

[Translation]

Mrs. Louise Charbonneau (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Courtenay—Alberni for his presentation. He talked about the events sector and the salmon crisis in his part of the country.

Quebec has an annual springtime event: sugar shacks. This is a very important part of Quebec's agri-tourism sector. Over half the members of the sugar shack operators' association have had to close their doors. The government seems to have forgotten this industry.

Does my colleague think these demands could be expanded to include these people, who are often forgotten but who are responsible for an event that is important to the country?

[English]

Mr. Gord Johns: Madam Speaker, these are the types of niche businesses, like festivals and events, for example, that are being left out. The wage subsidy is not going to get them through this; the CEBA loan certainly is not enough; and the rent program does not help them, and borrowing a bunch more money is not going to cut it. They are not going to be able to do that; they cannot absorb it. They need liquidity to ensure that those festivals and cultural events will be in place next year. Hopefully we will be back to normal next year.

The government needs to start looking at things and being more flexible. Right now the programs are so rigid and are leaving so many people out, and this is an excellent opportunity. I want to thank the member for that question, and let us hope that the government makes the right choice and creates more flexibility and does better outreach to sectors like the sugar bush sector and the folks in it.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague, the member for Courtenay—Alberni, for his tireless advocacy. In his speech, he so articulately laid out the incredible impact of this pandemic on tourism operators. When I think of northwest B.C., I think of the steelhead guiding lodges in the Bulkley Valley, Haida Gwaii and the tour operators there, the cabin rentals and other small businesses that have been so dramatically hit by this crisis.

Does my hon. colleague think that the current programs created by the government can be adjusted to meet the needs of these small tourism operators, or do we need a new set of programs specifically tailored to the needs of that unique sector?

Mr. Gord Johns: Madam Speaker, that is a fabulous question. I think about the HASCAP program, for example, which is not designed like the CEBA loan.

With the CEBA loan, obviously, applicants get the \$60,000 loan and only have to repay \$40,000. If they pay back the rest, they get \$20,000 towards the losses they have incurred. We need that in the HASCAP program and the bigger programs, otherwise these lodges and businesses are just not going to be able to survive. They cannot take on more and more debt. It is just not achievable. Moreover, a lot of these programs are not going to help businesses. The wage subsidy is not going to help an owner whose lodge is empty. The rent program is not going to help them if their lodge is floating on the water.

There are huge gaps. The member is absolutely right that we have to develop a better framework and look at those sectors that are the hardest hit, and that is the tourism and hospitality sector. We are all feeling it, as members of Parliament. I have seen each and every person who cares so much about the restaurants and the busi-

nesses in their ridings bringing forward these asks and requests of the government to be more flexible. We are just not seeing that. It is highly disappointing. This is a critical sector.

• (1845)

Mr. Ron Liepert (Calgary Signal Hill, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am not sure how the member covered all of that in 20 minutes. He covered a lot of ground around the programs and who has been missed.

I want to ask the member if he would not concur with the fact that at the end of the day, the tourism industry, and a lot of these small businesses, do not want government handouts. They want to get back to business and doing what they do, which they could if we had had a better program in place for vaccines and that sort of thing, with the possibility that the border could be opened this summer.

Both Alberta and British Columbia rely heavily on U.S. tourism. I would like the member to comment a little on that.

Mr. Gord Johns: Madam Speaker, that is a good question.

My colleague and many colleagues from across political parties have been part of the effort to work with the United States, as members of the Canada-United States Inter-Parliamentary Group. He and I would be part of the group from the Pacific Northwest.

We do not have a lot of integration. We need more integration. Obviously, ensuring that vaccines are here in Canada would make a difference. We also need to be working together more collectively on a regional basis. We are not doing that.

Right now, the number one priority has to be getting vaccines to the provinces, and getting them out the door so we can return to normal as fast as we can. Then we can work collectively as a region with our biggest trading partner and our biggest partner when it comes to tourism, the United States, so that we can open the border and get people moving and back to our tourist destinations.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am so grateful that our critic for small business and tourism was able to get that speech in, because he did cover a great deal.

What I have heard a lot as the critic for status of women and from my local community is that the government has left behind those within that aviation sector and the tourism sector, and especially the women who are doing the bookings for travel. They have taken a huge hit.

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What has the government done to help them or not? Could the member cover that? Also, with regard to the aviation sector, quite a lot of flights have been cut at the London. What has not been done and what should be done to help those workers as well?

Mr. Gord Johns: Madam Speaker, that is a great question, and I want to thank my colleague, because she has been talking a lot about this issue, and especially about how women are being impacted.

We talked about the importance of child care and the importance of that as part of a “she-covetry”. We talked about those travel agents, and I am really glad she brought up travel agents, because the government keeps talking about helping out with a transportation recovery plan. One thing we do know is that the big hits are going to be on the travel agents.

Right now they are having to repay airlines and big corporations tons of money that they just do not have. They have taken bookings, and a lot of the people in the travel agent sector are female. That is clearly evident from the numbers. They have been asking to be part of a transportation recovery plan, and it needs to happen sooner rather than later.

The whole transportation sector is hanging on by a thread, and it is absolutely essential that we do not leave anyone out, especially travel agents and especially the aviation sector. We need to create a national aviation strategy, as other countries have done. We need to protect infrastructure for women more than men, especially for those who are using the buses. After the Highway of Tears, we have seen what happens when we lose that transportation.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleagues from Edmonton Centre and Niagara Falls for their speeches earlier, as we use the tabling of this report highlighting the appointment of Marsha Walden to Destination Canada as an opportunity to talk about tourism in this country. I also wish to inform the House that I will be sharing my time with the member for Banff—Airdrie.

There is no question that the industry has been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has been ongoing for a year now. Our external borders remain closed to foreign visitors who may want to come and discover all the splendour of our beautiful country. No one knows when they will be able to reopen.

Travel decreased dramatically in 2020, while 2019 had been a record year. There was some hope that by increasing testing and vaccination capacity, certain degree of recovery could be expected by the summer of 2021, but when the Prime Minister admitted that the vast majority of Canadians would not be vaccinated until September 2021, that dream was shattered for many people.

It is a national disgrace that we are a G7 country that is ranked 58th in the world in terms of vaccinations. We even had to turn to the COVAX fund for third world countries because the government put all its eggs in one basket at the start of the pandemic, falsely believing that the Chinese company CanSino would come to the rescue. Consequently, we are lagging behind and find ourselves at

the bottom of the list for orders for other vaccines which, as we can see in Israel, work very well.

Today we learned that even with the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines that are finally being delivered this week, after weeks of delay, only 8% of the Canadian population will be vaccinated by the end of March, or one month from now. This means that festivals that were cancelled from last summer onwards will not be held again this year.

This is tragic and devastating news for the events industry. The Government of Canada did create a wage subsidy, as did many other countries, and we supported this measure, but the wage subsidy program is set to expire at the end of June. What will happen then? People want predictability. That is what we hear most in our talks with the tourism industry.

I know that it is not easy to predict a reopening date when governments are making day-to-day decisions based on the infection and hospitalization rates in our communities. That is why we are so focused on vaccination. Even with borders reopened, we know that very few people will want to come if there is a risk they will get sick, because if they contract COVID-19 while on vacation, public health officials will order them to quarantine immediately for 10 days when they receive a positive test result. That is difficult to do when travelling. As we saw last spring, it was not easy to repatriate all of the Canadians who were abroad.

Meanwhile, a lot of businesses are in survival mode. They are largely dependent on programs like the emergency wage benefit, the Canada emergency rent subsidy and the Canada emergency business account.

Will the government extend the programs indefinitely? That is a good question. This year's deficit will be around \$400 billion, or maybe even more. How much will it be next year because of the government's inaction? Can we get an answer? It is not certain.

The sad reality that came out of our discussions with the hospitality sector is that the wage subsidy is still not 100% effective. The program was put in place to maintain an employment relationship between workers and their employers in the hope that they would return to work quickly after the first lockdown, but that is not at all what happened.

With the pandemic, there was a major labour shortage in our regions, especially in the regions in Quebec. Many regions like mine and even those east of mine in the Gaspé had a hard time finding workers. Instead of twiddling their thumbs, some decided to switch careers to another sector. Some might say that is a good thing. After all, there are no bad jobs in this country. As our esteemed former finance minister Jim Flaherty used to say, the only bad job is not having a job. We wonder what the government plans to do post-COVID to better match up future workers with the tourism sector, because there is a real fear that if we keep the sector closed for too long, the people will leave. That is already happening.

I was speaking with people in tourism just today. It will be extremely difficult to replace all the employees.

• (1850)

Earlier, one of my colleagues was saying that more than 500,000 people have lost their jobs in the tourism sector and that the vast majority will not return. The future is looking extremely difficult.

In addition, the unemployment rate is still very high. Efforts will have to be made to match available workers to available jobs. Last week, Radio-Canada reported that the number of long-term unemployed workers doubled over the past year. Does the government have any plan for getting new workers into a sector that many people are likely to have left following 18 to 24 months of inactivity? I look forward to hearing what my colleagues have to say about that.

Today, I got a letter from Frédérique Guignard, a young single mom in her 30s who was in the process of taking over her family's travel agency. In her letter, she requested my help with the catastrophic situation faced by charter tour operators, whom she described as the forgotten members of the tourism industry since the pandemic hit. She explained that, because of the extended border closure and the cancellation of cultural, sports and educational travel, charter buses have stood idle for nearly a year now. She said that, over the past year, her business has lost 93% of its revenue, which amounts to \$700,000.

If I were a businessman and my company was reporting losses of \$700,000 this year, I would be very worried about my future. Ms. Guignard is therefore quite right to be worried about hers.

Charter tour operators carry groups formed in advance, organized mainly by wholesale travel agencies, tour operators and domestic travel agencies that book charter coach services directly or indirectly. These carriers therefore play an important role in the mobility of tourists who come to visit our beautiful province, similar to air and rail transportation.

Ms. Guignard wants to share with the House the results of a study conducted by these carriers who are well aware that bus travel will not resume any time soon. Charter tour operators were not able to take advantage of the tourist boom of the summer of 2020. As it stands now, they do not see how 2021 will be any better. This crisis is expected to last until 2022 in the travel industry. A wait that long could destroy Ms. Guignard's business, which, she said, she will no longer be able to support in terms of its organizational structure and capital costs, as they require a great deal of funding considering that a fleet of coaches represents a liability of \$600,000 to \$700,000 per unit. That is to say nothing of the cost of skilled labour, since Ms. Guignard had to lay off half of her staff.

I understand that the government implemented programs, programs that we supported. However, Ms. Guignard is not able to continue to operate her business because she has lost 93% of her revenue.

Many industry stakeholders are in the same boat. I have had discussions with people who work in the events industry, which includes festivals, as my colleague from Abitibi—Témiscamingue reminded us earlier. He spoke about Val-d'Or and sugar shacks, many

of which are currently at risk and think they may have to close in the coming weeks. That is extremely worrisome.

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My colleague spoke earlier about flexibility. The government needs to adapt to the realities of an industry as unique as the tourism industry, which reflects the vitality of all of our regions. From Vancouver to the Gaspé or the Lower St. Lawrence, where I live, the tourism industry is an extremely important aspect of the economy. I think that we need to find ways to support it in the long term and to provide it with some predictability because it will get going again by 2022 at the latest and the government needs to be there to help it do that.

• (1855)

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

There is also a border crossing in Sarnia—Lambton. We miss the tourists who generally come for the holidays and celebrations. Many businesses, such as duty-free shops, are not in a good position to succeed.

What businesses have been hardest hit by the pandemic in my colleague's riding?

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her excellent question.

In fact, many sectors in my riding have been affected. Obviously the pandemic has really hit the tourism sector. I think that is the reality. For its part, the manufacturing industry is doing relatively well right now. We are even seeing a shortage of employees in some manufacturing sectors in my riding.

To add to my colleague's question, I would like to come back to something I forgot to mention earlier.

As soon as people within Canada start to get vaccinated, what can we do to allow them to resume their tourist activities? Could we, through the help of a passport or some other means, identify them as having been vaccinated to allow them to travel from region to region?

Different countries in Europe have already adopted this approach. We could bring in something like that. We could at least think about it in the next few weeks so that this summer people can have this passport I mentioned that would identify them as having been vaccinated. Then they would be able to travel between provinces.

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• (1900)

[English]

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Madam Speaker, to open the economy and save the industries we need two things: vaccination and rapid testing. Those are two important elements to be able to put things into perspective. For the future, internal tourism is a big industry also and we have to pay attention to it as well. Therefore, in the opinion of my colleague, what can be done, what were the government's failures and how can we rebuild the tourism economy quickly?

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard G  n  reux: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague.

At the start of the pandemic last spring, the government turned to CanSino to produce vaccines. This unfortunately did not go well, and we found ourselves without a solution in August. The government then signed contracts for vaccines, but five of the seven companies with which it signed contracts still do not have an approved vaccine. As a result, today, we are at the back of the pack globally. This is unbelievable. People are talking to me about this every day.

The government's failure over the past few months will have a definite impact on the tourism industry.

[English]

Ms. Nelly Shin (Port Moody—Coquitlam, CPC): Madam Speaker, for my riding, British Columbia at large and the west coast especially, tourism is a very huge part of the economy. I really appreciate that the member mentioned the need for rapid tests and vaccines, because they would definitely open up industries like sport fishing and attract many tourists from the U.S., with improved border restrictions.

How are we going to help the tourism industry businesses get back on track if we do not have rapid testing and do not have vaccines coming quickly? What is the best recommendation the member can offer to help them?

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard G  n  reux: Madam Speaker, at present, the watchword truly is vaccination.

The government must pick up the pace and stop blaming the provinces, given that the problem does not originate with the provinces, but rather with the federal government, which is not providing the vaccines.

I believe that the government has once again failed in its duty to ensure that it has enough vaccines, which is why we are in a tough spot again today.

[English]

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Madam Speaker, because the topic at hand, of course, relates to our very important tourism industry, I would be remiss if I did not speak to another very recent appointment in the tourism industry. It is that of the new president and CEO of the Tourism Industry Association of Canada, or TIAC, Beth Potter. Beth has done a lot of great work over the years with the tourism industry in Ontario, and I know that her great work will carry over in her advocacy for the industry fed-

erally. We welcome her to that post and look forward to working with her to help the tourism industry in its recovery from both COVID and the lack of government response we have seen to the very heavy devastation this industry has faced as a result of the pandemic and some of the measures that have been put in place for it.

Obviously, we are here today to talk about the order in council appointment of Marsha Walden to the role of president and CEO of the Canadian Tourism Commission, or Destination Canada as it is known. I think the context would be a good starting point.

Destination Canada is the marketing arm of the federal government for tourism. It markets our industry internationally, for tourism bound to Canada. Since the spring of last year, borders have essentially been locked down, and now many of our airlines have been directed not to bring flights in from many destinations outside of Canada. It is going to be an incredible challenge for Destination Canada to fulfill its role. Some have argued there needs to be a pivoting of the organization in the short term to domestic markets, but I would argue that it is more important to have a plan from the Trudeau government on how this industry will recover.

The tourism and hospitality industry specifically has been—

• (1905)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I remind the member that he is not to mention the name of individuals, whether it is the Prime Minister or anybody else. I know he is well aware of this and that names slip out once in a while.

The hon. member.

Mr. Blake Richards: I apologize, Madam Speaker. If it slipped out, I did not even realize it. Sometimes, via Zoom, we do not feel quite like we are in the House of Commons in the same way, and perhaps it did slip out.

However, this Liberal government has really ignored the fact that the tourism and hospitality industry had been the first hit and the hardest hit, and that it will probably be the last to recover. Prior to the pandemic, this was a \$102-billion-a-year industry that supported one in 11 jobs in Canada. Since the pandemic struck in February of last year, the industry is at a net loss of over half a million jobs. That is an incredibly significant number, and those job losses disproportionately affect women, youth, visible minorities, new Canadians and indigenous peoples. This is a significant consequence of what is going on.

The Destination Canada's study that was recently put out indicates that if the borders remain closed until October of this year, and there is every expectation of that as the government is now talking about September as being the earliest that people will be vaccinated to any large degree, the recovery of tourism to its 2019 levels would not be expected until 2026. So there is a long road to recovery if we remain on the path we are on.

This industry is critically important for Canada, for Alberta and certainly to my riding of Banff—Airdrie. I will speak specifically to some of the statistics for Alberta.

Generally, as the 2018 stats point out, there were nearly 70,000 jobs in tourism, about a \$6.5-billion contribution to our GDP and \$8.2 billion in tourism expenditures, which brings in a lot of tax revenue as well. In my riding of Banff—Airdrie, it is of critical importance to communities like Banff, Canmore, Lake Louise and others. This is not only their main economic driver. It is almost the only economic driver in these communities.

I would argue, and I am sure many would agree, that this is the most beautiful riding in Canada. We have well over 1,000 businesses and about 16,000 jobs that are directly or indirectly related to tourism and hospitality, which is from the 2016 stats, so those numbers are probably higher more recently. However, this industry is going to have an incredible path forward in recovery. Domestic travel, as I mentioned, is going to be a crucial step in that recovery when it is safe and possible to do so. We will also need a plan to fill that revenue gap that comes from international travel and a way to help it recover.

I will read from a letter I recently received from a constituent who understands this. This is from Steve Pampel, who lives in Banff. He wrote, “Health and safety measures are critical to help rebuild the industry and to keep Canadians safe. Tourism businesses have complied with all the public health regulations and are committed to continuing compliance as the pandemic evolves.”

His letter continues, “We are asking for help to be able to plan and to be ready when Canadians are able to safely travel again. It is imperative that the tourism sector receives specific supports due to the unique nature of our jobs and businesses. We cannot wait for mass vaccinations for the government to invest in recovery measures. We need to plan for recovery now so that when the time is right and it is safe to do so, Canada's tourism sector can be ready to safely welcome Canadian and eventually international visitors.”

Steve is essentially bang on. This is the very message that I have been conveying since the very beginning of this pandemic. Obviously, there was a need to ensure that we helped many businesses through this, and I will talk a little about how some of those programs failed for this industry.

● (1910)

I first want to touch on this. It is absolutely critical for this industry, when the time comes to welcome visitors again, whether it be from other provinces or international visitors, to have some lead time to plan and prepare for that time. It is not just as simple as flipping a switch and letting people travel, like it can be with some businesses.

For barber shops, for example, when they are able to reopen, if they were able to survive through the lockdowns, people can just come in. People will probably be lined up for weeks, waiting to get their hair cut, like we saw after the first wave of COVID. For retail businesses, if they are able to survive, the guy down the street can go into a store and buy a pair of shoes or whatever it might be.

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It does not work the same way with tourism. People plan ahead for vacations. People plan ahead for meetings and conventions, for festivals and events. These things do not happen overnight. They do not just open back up. There has to be a plan in place to prepare for these things.

The government needs to give some certainty to these businesses as to what the conditions are that will allow those reopenings, allow businesses to get going again, so they can welcome visitors and have the time to prepare to do that safely and effectively. That is absolutely job number one.

There have been some real failures in some of the programming. A lot of the seasonal businesses, the seasonal nature of them, are not covered. There has been this need for a dialogue with the industry and to listen to the industry.

I will point out that the government promised almost a year ago, 334 days ago in fact, that there would be specific actions taken for this industry. This industry has seen nothing. It is incredibly disappointed in the Liberal government. The all-party tourism caucus, which is Liberal-led, has not met since November 2019.

We, as Conservatives, have picked up the slack with our tourism recovery committee. We have heard from a whole host of people in this industry. They need solutions and they need them now, so they see a recovery and a plan from the government to help the industry recover and to put those half a million Canadians back to work.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the opposition whip is part of the House leadership team that sent the troops in to burn as much time as they possibly could in the House so they could avoid talking about the bill that would actually help Canadians, a bill that is the fall economic statement, that already has had seven days worth of debate in the House.

Given the fact that the opposition whip has taken the floor, I thought I might be able to ask him a question. Could he possibly enlighten the House as to when the Conservative Party will stop basically filibustering the fall economic statement, which has been debated for seven days already? A normal budget bill is only debated for five days? Could he let us know when he thinks he might be able to allow the House to vote on that?

● (1915)

Mr. Blake Richards: Madam Speaker, I am incredibly saddened by the politicization that we just heard from the Liberal member.

It is incredibly frustrating to hear this when we are talking about a critically important industry in our country. The fact is that half a million Canadians are out of work as a result of the inaction of his government, yet he says that the debate is not important today. What does he tell those 500,000 Canadians whose jobs are hanging in the balance while his government does nothing?

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The politicization of this, somehow characterizing it as something that is not important saddens me. The tourism industry is critically important to our country and those workers deserve to know what the plan is for the economic recovery of that industry.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, our colleague from Courtenay—Alberni made the point that among the many aspects of the tourism sector that are falling through the cracks the coach bus lines are particularly of concern. He mentioned Wilson's, which is one of the key parts of our ecosystem for ground transportation in B.C. I would note that there is TRAXX Coachlines in Alberta. Pacific Western is based in Alberta.

I wonder if my hon. colleague would agree that this is part of the sector that needs immediate support so it is in place and functioning when we begin to recover our economy.

Mr. Blake Richards: Madam Speaker, there are certainly a lot of examples. In 10 minutes, it is very difficult to give all of them. There is obviously the airline sector, busing, travel agents, tour companies, restaurants and hotels. One could go on and on naming the parts of the industry that are suffering, and they all need to be part of the recovery.

However, the only way they can have that opportunity is for, first of all, the government to get its act together in terms of getting vaccinations into the arms of Canadians and giving some kind of an indication to this industry, and the people who are or want to be employed in it, that a recovery plan is in place. They need to know what the criteria are that will allow those things to happen so they can start to plan and prepare now. Whether it will be this fall or next year, whatever the case might be, they need to have a long lead time to be prepared to properly reopen and get the recovery plan in place.

The government needs to get its act together to help bus companies, airlines, travel agents, restaurants and hotels. These people deserve answers from the government.

Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would ask the member what he has heard from some of the assessments and interviews he has done. If we do not have a recovery plan, what could be the worst case scenario until the tourism industry recovers? How many years or months would it take to recover?

Mr. Blake Richards: Madam Speaker, that is a great question. I mentioned the year 2026 as the year, if we were to see things reopening in October of this year, when we might see that. Having said that, it is already going to be two full summer seasons lost for the tourism industry. That is two full years, which basically means three years for many of these places, without any revenue at all in some cases and very little revenue in others.

There is a need to show this industry that there is a plan to get vaccinations into the arms of Canadians and that there is a plan in place for recovery of this industry. Right now, we are seeing none of that from the government.

[Translation]

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to rise to speak today. I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable.

[English]

It is a great pleasure to join the debate this evening and discuss the importance of the tourism industry and the associated industries of the tourism industry. There is no question that my riding of Perth—Wellington is famous for many aspects of the tourism industry. We cannot think of the City of Stratford without instantly thinking of Shakespeare and the Stratford Festival. The Stratford Festival is world renowned for Shakespearean plays, but it is also renowned for its other plays as well, including its musicals. Musicals that it has put on in the last couple years have certainly seen Canadian talent on display, which has enriched our cultural theme in Stratford and across our country.

However, the Stratford Festival is not the only arts and culture aspect of our great riding. There is also Drayton Entertainment. The Drayton Festival Theatre in the township of Mapleton is one of seven theatres now associated with Drayton Entertainment. This theatre started out as a small aspect of public life and the community has now grown to more than \$60 million in economic activity for this one small theatre.

In Stratford, we have Stratford Summer Music. It was the brainchild of John Miller who saw the need to bring music to Stratford that perfectly complements the existing arts and culture aspects of the community. That is not all. We are lucky in Perth—Wellington to have countless museums that are preserving and enriching the lives of our community. The Stratford Perth Museum had an exceptional year the year before last, with so many exceptional exhibits, including an exhibit on one of Stratford's better-known sons, Justin Bieber. That exhibit was partially the brainchild of the former government House leader, the former member for York—Simcoe, Peter Van Loan, who toured the facility while he was shadow minister for Canadian Heritage and made that suggestion to the museum curator.

We also have the St. Marys Museum which has done so much to enrich the lives and preserve the heritage of Stonetown. Currently it has an exceptional program online where it is recreating old photos from the town of St. Marys with modern residents of St. Marys, which is getting a great following online.

The Palmerston Railway Museum is preserving the rich railway history and heritage of the Town of Palmerston. While the Wellington County Museum is just outside my riding in the riding of Wellington—Halton Hills, it is doing an exceptional job preserving the great history of our community.

I would be remiss if I did not mention the Fryfogel Tavern and Arboretum. The Fryfogel Tavern is the oldest surviving building in Perth County. In fact, its first resident, the one for which Fryfogel is named, was a tax collector. The reason that building never paid taxes is that he was clever enough at the time to never finish the front porch of the building; thereby the building was never assessed for municipal taxes.

These different things are core to the rich tourism industry in Perth—Wellington. In Stratford alone, tourism accounts for nearly 13% of the workforce, and that does not take into account the related industries, whether they be the retail industry, including our downtown merchants in Stratford and across Perth—Wellington.

As the chief opposition whip mentioned, half a million people are now out of work in this industry. Imagine: half a million families are without a paycheque because of this terrible pandemic that is affecting the lives of so many Canadians. What the industry is looking for is not a silver bullet, but for a degree of predictability. They are looking for some certainty long-term. No one, and I repeat, no one wants to see borders reopened before it is safe to do so. What the industry is looking for is some acknowledgement of when and what factors are needed to allow that border to reopen.

• (1920)

How many Canadians need to be vaccinated before the government will reopen the borders? What key criteria is it looking for to allow that to happen? I ask because so many businesses in my riding, and I am sure in ridings across the country, are hanging by a thread right now.

I spoke to one business owner who sent me an email that said, “We are presently paying on a line of credit at a rate of 6%, and the interest is more than what we are receiving in revenue.” That is the reality of so many of these small businesses in Perth—Wellington and across the country.

One of the challenges we have seen with small businesses, especially new ones, is that they just do not qualify for the support programs that have been put in place. They are too new. They had the bad fortune of opening just prior to the pandemic or, in some cases, during the pandemic, and as such, they do not qualify.

I do want to give credit to the local Community Futures development corporations that service Perth and Wellington counties. They have gone above and beyond the call of duty to try to help the small businesses that have been left out of other government programs.

I know I may not have a lot of time left, but I want to highlight one success story I have seen recently in my riding. It is called Broken Rail Brewing and it is in the town of St. Marys, the stone town.

This was a business that really struggled but has made the best of a bad situation. It is another business that had the misfortune of opening during a pandemic, but here is the great thing: The town of St. Marys worked with the business to make it happen. I would hazard a guess that this particular brewery may be one of the few breweries in the country that is in a national historic site. It is located in the old St. Marys Junction Railway Station, which once housed the employment of one Thomas Edison, who would have been fired from his employment for nearly causing a massive rail accident in the community when he fell asleep while doing his job. The business has taken this old building and given it new life as a brewery. That is the exceptional small business entrepreneurial spirit that we need to be highlighting in our communities.

To get to the point where we can reinvigorate our tourism industry, we need certainty and support from the government. It has failed to in this regard when it comes to this pandemic. We need to

know when vaccines will be in the arms of Canadians and we need to know what percentage of Canadians will be vaccinated before we can reopen the economy.

It has been an honour and a privilege to join the debate this evening. I look forward to questions from my hon. colleagues.

I want to quote another email I received from a small business owner, who said, “On March 15, I was forced to close the doors of my successful small business that I had spent nearly the last decade growing from the ground up and forced to lay off loyal employees, many whom have been with us from the start. This was without a doubt the hardest decision I have had to make, but I knew it was for the greater good to protect the safety of my community.”

That is what these small businesses are doing. They are doing what is best for the community, but it is not what is best for their bottom line. They are struggling and they are looking for that light at the end of the tunnel. For so many of these businesses, that light at the end of the tunnel is the vaccine, but we have seen the vaccine rollout bungled, botched and delayed, while we see our friends and colleagues around the world, whether in Israel, the United Kingdom or the United States, getting the vaccines far more quickly than what we are seeing here in Canada. These small businesses are disappointed, to say the least. It just gives further confirmation of the challenges they are facing going forward.

No one wants more debt, but what we continually hear from the Liberal government is more debt, more debt availability for small businesses. No one is denying that credit availability is important, but when someone has suffered through so many months of downturn, the last thing they want to do is take on more debt.

• (1925)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen’s Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I wonder if the member can explain to me and to Canadians how the Conservative Party can justify playing the games it is playing on the floor of the House of Commons. While its members say they care about the travel and hospitality industries, they continue to drag their feet on passing Bill C-14. The bill does exactly what the industry needs in part, yet the Conservatives have refused to allow it to go to committee to date.

Mr. John Nater: Madam Speaker, I would point out a few points to the hon. member for Winnipeg North, who is a seasoned member of the House.

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First, I would say that concurrence motions are absolutely essential to vibrant House of Commons debate. These are opportunities for members of the opposition primarily to take the floor and debate the issues that are important to the people of their ridings and the people of Canada, and the tourism and hospitality industry is absolutely essential to the livelihoods of so many Canadians. Half a million Canadians are out of work in the tourism industry because of this pandemic, so I believe, and I think my hon. colleagues on our side of the House absolutely believe, it essential that this debate occur.

I would point out as well that when the member talks about Bill C-14, 28 Liberal members have thus far debated that bill. Is the member saying that only Liberals can debate government legislation in the House of Commons and that the members of this opposition should not be in a position to debate government legislation and should simply rubber stamp the government's agenda, rather than doing our duty as parliamentarians? I think that is unfortunate.

• (1930)

Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, I must say I was taken aback earlier in the day, when the member for Winnipeg North basically felt we were just stalling debate when talking about tourism. I phoned, about an hour ago, a fellow who sent me an email a year ago. He said he was of one million Canadians who had lost their jobs because of COVID and that he had been in the profession for many years and does not like having to rely on EI during this crisis. I asked how things are going.

I was wondering if the member would be able to comment on that, because the constituent said that things were really bad and that they were dire for him. He is tired of the posturing, the ignoring of the industry and thousands and thousands being swept aside. It is a cornerstone industry in Vancouver and across the country. Right now he is having to rely on part-time minimum-wage work, and he is 60 years old. It is really tough for him and for hundreds of thousands of those in the hospitality industry. I wonder if the member could comment on what I said here.

Mr. John Nater: Madam Speaker, that is the reality of what we see right now in Canada: half a million Canadians without jobs. If we could circle a date on the calendar when it was the absolute worst time for this pandemic to have hit, it would have been March 2020. Most of these industries were coming off a tough winter, which is normal for the tourism industry. They do not make money during the winter months, but they look forward to the spring and the summer, when they are able to make money once again. As the pandemic hit, we saw the economy shut down, and they lost the entire 2020 tourism season. Unfortunately, they had to rely on government programs to survive, although it was fortunate the programs were there. These business owners and the individuals who work in the industry do not want to have to rely on government; they want to rely on their own hard work, ingenuity and entrepreneurship to get back working in the economy.

Unfortunately, for so many of these small businesses, they do not see that light at the end of the tunnel. They lost the 2020 tourism season, and they fear they are going to lose the 2021 tourism season as well. I should note that I said that 28 Liberals had spoken to Bill

C-14 when it is actually 22. I want to make sure that is clear for the record.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, nobody is debating the importance of the tourism sector. What I and the parliamentary secretary have brought up on a number of occasions is the fact that what we are debating right now is a concurrence motion, which we are all most likely going to vote in favour of. What the member and the Conservatives are neglecting to do is talk about a bill that would actually bring the measures to people, Bill C-14.

Why will he not talk about that? Why will he not vote on it?

Mr. John Nater: Madam Speaker, it is unfortunate that the member for Kingston and the Islands is so against the opposition having the opportunity to raise issues in the House of Commons. I will point out once again that the government does not control the agenda of the House of Commons. It belongs to all parliamentarians, and this is an opportunity for opposition members of Parliament to raise issues that are important to their ridings and to the people of Canada, including the half-million Canadians currently out of work in the tourism industry because of the devastating impact of COVID-19.

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Resuming debate. I must inform the member that he has only around six minutes remaining for his speech.

The hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, I could ask for the unanimous consent of the House to continue my speech, but I will not do so, because I know the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands would not agree to that.

I would like to commend my hon. colleague from Perth—Wellington who just gave a remarkable speech about how important tourism is in his region. He talked about the Stratford music festival, which is known across the country and around the world. I had the opportunity to travel to the riding of Perth—Wellington with my colleague and visit an agricultural fair. It certainly was one of the largest agricultural shows I have ever had a chance to visit.

Although it is essentially a business, that exhibition is also a tourist destination. Everyone who travels to this exhibition spends money in my colleague's riding. These visitors will travel around and explore my colleague's riding. I would like to sincerely thank my colleague for giving me the opportunity to visit his riding and, especially, for introducing me to such nice people. The tourism industry is about beautiful scenery, but it is also about people, engaged people who believe very strongly in the potential of their region and the potential of their events.

Most people do not do that for the money. Rather, they are exceptionally passionate about what they do. Unfortunately, it is this same passion that is currently making them suffer, not because they do not want to comply with the health measures or because they do not think it is important to stop their events to prevent the public from being affected by the pandemic, but because these people cannot offer their products or showcase their region, their events and their festivals to the public. That is why they are suffering.

In my riding there are events that I absolutely want to name. Obviously, some people are paid, but there are also many volunteers. For example, there is the Festival Promutuel de la relève de Thetford Mines. I represent the riding of Mégantic—L'Érable, where many of the festivals have a connection to the maple tree, *l'érable* in French. For example, there is the Plessisville Festival de l'érable, the Festival des Sucres in Saint-Pierre-Baptiste, the Rockfest and the Inverness Festival du Bœuf. It is our mini-stampede. That all happens back home in our neck of the woods. All these people are asking for is to be able to resume their activities as soon as possible. When will they be able to that? They can do that as soon as everyone is vaccinated.

There is no other solution. We need vaccines for everyone. The Liberal government is taking so long to supply enough vaccines to everyone that the majority of the population will not be vaccinated until September. What are the Défi de la Gosford, the Carnaval Ti-Cube, artisan festivals, summer sporting events, country and western festivals, local theatres, summer theatres, theatres like Les bâtisseurs de montagnes, fairs, beer, food and cultural festivals and the Maison du granit going to do this summer? They will not be able to do much of anything, because the majority of the population will not have been vaccinated in time. However, this could have been done. Saint-Robert en fête, the Fêtes du Lac William, the Relay For Life, fishing derbys and concerts by various artists could have happened if the government had been able to vaccinate the majority of the population.

Canada is ranked 58th in the world for vaccination rate. That is unacceptable. Some countries are vaccinating more people in one day than Canada has vaccinated since the beginning of the pandemic. That means that, unfortunately, companies like Autobus Vausco, which runs charter buses, cannot operate. This company has big, very expensive buses rusting away in garages. The owners do not know how they are going to get them back up and running, because this equipment is supposed to be kept in constant operation out on the road.

That is the problem right now. The tourism industry's problem is not that people cannot operate their businesses. Rather, it is that the reason they cannot do so is that the members on the other side of the House decided to put all their eggs in one basket by signing just one agreement with a company run by the Chinese communist regime.

Today, we have seen what is happening in China. The Minister of Foreign Affairs told the House that he was voting on behalf of the entire government, but he abstained from voting on our motion to condemn the Uighur genocide.

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• (1935)

He of course apologized afterwards, but he was sending a message. He meant that members of the House would be voting the complete opposite, but that the government would abstain.

Thus, what members say in this place is of little importance. That is unacceptable.

However, it is easier to understand when we think of the Prime Minister's admiration for China's communist regime. We all know he appreciates the Chinese Communist Party's soft dictatorship. He expressed it publicly. It is therefore not surprising that today he is refusing to condemn the genocide.

This all began with the stubborn determination to sign an agreement with CanSino. Unfortunately, we have fallen behind. We now know that most Canadians will not be vaccinated before September, and that is in the best possible scenario, if everything that is going on and everything the Prime Minister is saying is true.

I have my doubts because, up to this point, the Prime Minister has missed many deadlines, not just on this file, but on many files.

In closing, I would like to talk about sugar shacks. Maple syrup season is coming, and sugar shacks are where people go to make maple syrup, eat eggs and pancakes, enjoy a meal and have a great time. Unfortunately, sugar shack season has been compromised.

Fortunately, the people who work in sugar shacks have pivoted and are going to offer sugar shack meals to go. I invite everyone to support them because that is what they need. We will see how the public responds, but these people have worked hard to offer people a solution. I congratulate them. I approve of and applaud this innovation.

Long live Mégantic—L'Érable, long live maple syrup, and long live springtime sugar shacks.

• (1940)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): It is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith the question necessary to dispose of the motion now before the House.

[*English*]

Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The question is on the motion.

[*Translation*]

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 ask them to now rise and indicate it to the Chair.

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, after this very healthy debate on this very important topic, I believe that if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent to pass this motion unanimously.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Is that agreed?

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Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*Translation*]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise once again to speak in the House, this time on an issue that is just as important as the maple, the tree after which the riding of Mégantic—L'Érable is named. I am talking about the French language.

Some time ago, I had the opportunity to ask a question in the House regarding the difficulties public servants were experiencing working in French at that time during the pandemic. This problem still exists today. We were somewhat hopeful at the time, because the minister had promised us, in the absence of a new Official Languages Act, a white paper before Christmas or not long after.

Finally, after five years of consultations and promises, what we got was a discussion paper. The Liberals had years to take action, but instead decided to table a document full of good intentions. We still do not have a target date for when legislation might be introduced, although it could perhaps come later this year based on what we learned today.

The Liberals will not admit it, but we know that they want to trigger an election as soon as possible, which means this discussion paper is actually a document they will use during the election campaign to make more promises on the backs of Quebecers and especially francophone Canadians. The Liberals will be able to say that a bill will be introduced based on this discussion paper and that everything will change. Unfortunately, it cannot happen that way.

We would have expected the minister to show some responsibility toward francophones in Quebec, federal public servants and Quebec businesses that are not subject to the Charter of the French Language, Bill 101. We expected the minister to introduce a bill that we could have debated properly here in the House.

Instead, the minister once again chose to let things slide. She chose not to propose anything new to support francophone minority educational institutions that are struggling. She also failed to propose anything regarding the creation of an official languages administrative tribunal that could help minorities assert their rights more effectively, even though this was unanimously requested by stakeholders. She did not propose anything for minority groups either, nor anything to ensure that French, not English, would be recognized as the official language that is in jeopardy in Canada.

We certainly expected much more than this.

The Conservatives presented a plan to Quebec's francophones. The leader of the official opposition clearly indicated his intention to introduce a new Official Languages Act within the first 100 days of a Conservative government. This new act will facilitate faster

negotiations with the Government of Quebec so that it can extend Bill 101 coverage to federally regulated businesses operating in Quebec. This act will centralize its implementation and enforcement powers under the Treasury Board, which means officials will be accountable to a central agency.

We need concrete action. We know that we must take action, and the next Conservative government will do just that. We will not just listen to the Minister of Official Languages talk and do absolutely nothing.

● (1945)

Mrs. Élisabeth Brière (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to reply to the important question posed by my colleague from Mégantic—L'Érable.

The government understands that our two official languages are at the heart of who we are as Canadians. Our two official languages, along with the indigenous languages, are what makes Canada such a unique place. The government believes that the time has come to take stock of the language situation in Canada, consider how the official languages have evolved over the past 50 years, and take action to address the challenges faced by the two languages.

The reforms announced Friday by the Minister of Official Languages form the cornerstone of our plans to modernize the Official Languages Act. They respond to the heartfelt pleas from communities to ensure they have a future, while adding new measures to increase bilingualism rates in Canada and protect the French language across the country, including in Quebec.

Allow me to talk about some of the reforms the minister announced that we will be implementing. We will improve access to French immersion programs across Canada, to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to learn and speak French. We will support the vitality of minority-language institutions in key sectors, such as immigration, education, culture and government. We will protect and promote the use of French across Canada, including in Quebec, by recognizing new rights with respect to language of work and service. These rights will apply to federally regulated private businesses established in Quebec and in other regions of the country where there is a strong francophone presence.

We want the public service to set an example, and we want to strengthen bilingualism within the Government of Canada through measures such as appointing bilingual judges to the Supreme Court and improving the support offered to federal public servants for learning their second language.

During a pandemic, of course, some challenges are inevitable. We have taken all necessary steps to do our due diligence. We have ensured that our official language communities have access to health information in their official language. In addition, we are emphasizing the importance of communicating with the public in the official language of their choice. We will continue to remind our colleagues of this.

This is more than a language issue. In a pandemic, it is a matter of safety. In spite of these challenges, our government understands that now is the time to act. We have an ambitious plan to protect and promote the French language and fulfill our obligations under the Official Languages Act. We are committed to modernizing the act to tackle the challenges of the 21st century and meet the needs of all Canadians.

• (1950)

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, once again, those are fine words. However, this is a discussion paper, not a bill that parliamentarians can debate. I repeat that this is a discussion paper that may lead to a bill, but we do not know when. Is that the action the Liberals are talking about? It is not working.

My colleague listed the measures that were adopted. I will now list the things that have not worked. Over the past several months, the list of the Liberal government's failures on official languages has been growing. There was the WE Charity scandal; text alerts sent in English only in the midst of a pandemic; the report on former governor general Julie Payette that was tabled in English only, something that I spoke out about in the House, but, unfortunately, we still do not have a French version; and federal public servants who are uncomfortable speaking French at work. What is more, the minister has not implemented any of the recommendations from the report of the Commissioner of Official Languages. That is the reality.

It is all well and good for the government to say that it is going to change everything, but if the government does not take any practical measures or introduce a bill, then nothing is going to change. The reality is that the Liberal government does not take French Canadians seriously.

Mrs. Élisabeth Brière: Madam Speaker, I remind my hon. colleague of the Conservatives' legacy on official languages. They made cuts to the court challenges program and appointed unilingual anglophone judges to the Supreme Court. A Conservative colleague recently said that French was taking up too much space in her party. Before my colleague accuses us of not doing anything, I suggest that he take a look at what is going on in his own party.

We just presented an ambitious, unprecedented plan that outlines some significant measures we will take. It is now up to a committee, whose members will be appointed in the coming days, to implement the measures we presented on Friday. We want to take swift action to protect our official language communities.

During the pandemic—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. There is just one minute allowed for the response.

The hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to take the adjournment proceedings this evening to review a question and to hopefully get a better answer than the one I received back on November 30, 2020.

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At that time, of course, being in calendar year 2020, the question of extreme importance and urgency was whether the government was going to fulfill a commitment that the Government of Canada made during the negotiations at COP 15 in Paris. That commitment was to improve and enhance what is called an NDC in the Paris language, a nationally determined contribution, generally referred to as a target. We committed in Paris that in calendar year 2020 we would improve our target and do so again every five years thereafter.

When I asked the minister what the plans were to improve our target in 2020, I was disappointed that he did not answer directly, but the answer is now very clear. The time has passed. We are in 2021. We have not changed our target. We have not met the commitment we made.

In conversations with people around the minister's office, it was reported to me that the department did not think that commitment was legally binding and other countries have not done it either. I find both of those responses appalling. It is a commitment that we made. It can be found in paragraph 24 of the COP 21 decision document, in which every country with a 2030 deadline for their first NDC was to improve their target in 2020. As to the idea that other countries have not done it, 69 of them have. Of course, it is only the countries that have 2030 deadlines.

Here we are in 2021 with a target that is completely out of step with all of our G7 partners and most of the industrialized world. We have one of the weakest targets in the world and the weakest of an industrialized country, except perhaps Saudi Arabia. We now have an opportunity to improve our record. I want to shift gears here to the potential for getting things right.

We are desperately close to being completely out of time in terms of carbon budgeting to avoid going above 1.5° Celsius global average temperature increase. This is in fact the target that is in the Paris Agreement, which is a legally binding document. This increase must not be exceeded, but on almost every review of where we are on the science, it is almost impossible to hold to 1.5°. There is a window on holding to our target. It will have closed, and permanently, well before 2030.

We now have the opportunity to improve our target and do our fair share, which would be at least twice what we have now committed to do, and that opportunity is coming up now because President Biden has established a climate leaders summit to take place on Earth Day, April 22, obviously, I am sure, by Zoom.

That is when Canada is really going to have to step up and say that we are prepared to reduce our emissions by 60% below 2005 levels by 2030, and set in place a first milestone year under Bill C-12 of reductions that are firm by 2025, of at least 15%. That would be the beginning of a clear commitment to the kind of action we said we would undertake when we signed the Paris Agreement.

Adjournment Proceedings

• (1955)

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages (Western Economic Diversification Canada) and to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change (Canada Water Agency), Lib.): Madam Speaker, as the Government of Canada continues to protect and support Canadians through the COVID-19 pandemic, it is also important that the country look to the future. We can build back from the pandemic in a way that addresses climate change and delivers a strong, inclusive economy.

That is why on December 11, 2020, the Government of Canada announced “A Healthy Environment and a Healthy Economy”, Canada’s strengthened climate plan. It is a plan to achieve both our environmental and our economic goals. It is a credible plan to exceed our 2030 greenhouse gas emissions target and it is a cornerstone of the government’s commitment to create over one million jobs, restoring employment to pre-pandemic levels.

Canada’s strengthened climate plan includes 64 new and strengthened measures and \$15 billion in new investments, bringing the government’s total committed funding for climate change and clean growth to about \$100 billion since 2017.

The plan’s five pillars are these: making the places Canadian live and gather more affordable by cutting energy waste; making clean, affordable transportation and power available in every community; continuing to ensure pollution is not free and that households get more money back; building Canada’s green and clean industrial advantage; and embracing the power of nature to support healthier families and more resilient communities.

Implementing Canada’s strengthened climate plan will enable Canada to exceed its current 2030 GHG target, but we will not stop there. We are committed to bringing forward an updated 2030 target this year, and while Canada’s strengthened climate plan is focused primarily on additional steps that the federal government is taking, the Government of Canada is committed to working with provinces, territories and indigenous peoples to advance shared priorities that will further lower emissions, including on a regional and bilateral basis.

The Government of Canada welcomes the return of the United States to the Paris Agreement. Canada and the U.S. agree that the climate crisis requires increased and bold ambition, as well as coordinated action in the lead-up to the COP26 climate conference in November of 2021. Canada looks forward to co-operating with the U.S. on the global stage and in a bilateral context on numerous opportunities, including methane emissions, zero-emission vehicles, clean energy transmission and attaining net-zero emissions. Canada welcomes the U.S. plans to host a climate leaders summit on Earth Day, April 22, as the hon. member mentioned, to build momentum toward COP26.

With respect to the hon. member’s point that Canada was required to improve its target within the 2020 calendar year, I would like to clarify that under the Paris Agreement, this requirement only applies to countries with 2025 targets. Canada and countless other countries set a 2030 target. Nevertheless, we intend to meet and exceed our Paris Agreement commitments and bring forward a new, more ambitious 2030 target this year.

I would like to thank the hon. member for her commitment to increasing climate action. She knows that I am a great admirer of her long-standing interest and advocacy on this issue, and I look forward to working with her and all House members to tackle climate change, which knows no borders.

• (2000)

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, I congratulate my friend from Winnipeg South on the appointment to double duty, as he is now the parliamentary secretary for environment and climate change. However, I am afraid that whoever advised him that paragraph 24 only referred to countries with a 2025 end year was incorrect. I recommend they go back and read it. Here is the problem: We do not have a target that is remotely near what we committed to in Paris. We committed to hold 1.5°C. We are now on track for 3°C to 5°C.

I hate to say this in a 30-second statement, but it could not be more serious. The scientists of the world are advising that we are coming very near the point where we will not be able to rescue human civilization from our own actions. This is not a time to be coasting and self-congratulating.

Right now, the Prime Minister of this country is about to look very bad in comparison with Biden. We coasted looking good compared with Trump. Right now is the time for Canada to actually start taking the climate emergency seriously.

Mr. Terry Duguid: Madam Speaker, I want to assure the hon. member that Canada remains committed to increasing our climate ambition.

On November 19, 2020, our government tabled the Canadian net-zero emissions accountability act, which, if passed, would legally bind the government to a process to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050. It would make our 2030 target legally binding and set five-year emission reduction targets until 2050 to improve accountability and transparency. I look forward to working with all parties to pass this important legislation and strengthen our 2030 target.

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Mrs. Tamara Jansen (Cloverdale—Langley City, CPC): Madam Speaker, the parliamentary secretary said, back in late November, that “the issue of sensitivity toward persons with disabilities is central for all parliamentarians in the House.” I could not agree more. He also stated that the Liberals “are crafting a piece of legislation that ensures the autonomy, dignity and competence of individuals.” I wish that were the truth.

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What has been crafted is a bill that declares that some lives are not worth living. In fact, Bill C-7 has shocked and terrified those in the disability community. Why has a policy generated so much fear among so many vulnerable citizens?

First and foremost, it is because they understand the inherent discrimination in this bill. To state that people who are bedridden or are dependent on others for hygiene or feeding have lost their dignity is a marginalizing and ableist myth. This is the perspective of the “worried well,” such as my hon. colleague and his friends at Dying With Dignity. Dignity is never lost, but it can be either affirmed or denied.

Speaking of myths, let us deal with the idea that Bill C-7 is not discriminatory. The fact is Canadian disability organizations, mental health organizations, indigenous organizations and the U.N. all say that Bill C-7 is discriminatory. This bill singles out vulnerable Canadians and offers them physician-assisted death without offering adequate disability supports or treatment to help them live full lives free of the suffering caused by poor health care, poverty and stigma. It singles out persons with disabilities who are not terminally ill as fit for suicide completion. This will become a choice of desperation, not autonomy.

Let us understand what discrimination really is. It is pretending that all Canadians are equal in all ways. The obvious reality here is that some of us face profound life challenges. We need laws that protect the disadvantaged. A law that offers death to one group, and support and treatment to all others is the paradigm of discrimination.

This law proclaims that a disabled Canadian should consider death instead of recovery. Vulnerable patients need protection from politicians and doctors who want to make it easier for them to die, while simultaneously denying access to appropriate health care supports. This is true discrimination.

The second myth that needs to be countered is the idea that Bill C-7 must be passed right away, because suffering Canadians need relief through MAID as fast as possible. Let us face it: if this were true, then it is also true that adequate palliative care, disability supports, and mental health care must be available as fast as possible, because it is the absence of these that makes people suffer so much that they want to die rather than live.

If it were not for the COVID pandemic, Parliament Hill would see the largest protest of disabled Canadians ever assembled. If it were not for poverty and marginalization and the fact that most Canadians are unaware of the shocking push for state-sanctioned suicide, those protestors would be joined by millions more.

I have listened to the wealthy and healthy politicians opine on what they would wish for if it were them in such a terrible position. They say, with a straight face, that we must hurry to act to stop this horrible suffering, not because they are suddenly seeing what has always been in front of their eyes, but because of the realization that it could be them some day.

This bill would ensure that disabled Canadians would be treated as second-class citizens. I beg the parliamentary secretary, for the love of God, will he join me in voting firmly against this Frankenstein bill?

• (2005)

[Translation]

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, medical assistance in dying is a complex and difficult issue. It calls on us to reflect on some fundamental interests and values, such as the protection and support of our most vulnerable. We need to reflect on the meaning and inherent value of life, and we need to consider how to balance an individual's right to make important decisions for themselves with the responsibilities we all have to others.

[English]

Many aspects of Bill C-7 generate opposing views. We have just heard some of them from my hon. colleague from the official opposition. The witnesses who appeared before the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights took different views on proposed amendments, such as the exclusion of persons whose sole medical condition is a mental illness and the proposal to allow for the waiver of final consent, to name just a couple. This is to be expected on an issue as complicated as this one. It is also a reflection of the vibrancy of our public discourse in the health care sector and of our civil society.

The potential impact of the bill on persons with disabilities is another issue that has received significant attention, and that is entirely appropriate. It is clear that national disability rights organizations do not support the core aspect of Bill C-7, which is the removal of the eligibility criterion of death that is reasonably foreseeable. Their view is that medical assistance in dying must be limited to persons at the end of life. They call the end-of-life criterion the great equalizer: Everyone will one day reach that stage. At the same time, ineligibility is also equitable: Everyone who is not at the end of life, in their view, is protected by the criminal law prohibition against people helping others to end life.

The removal of the end-of-life requirement raised the grave worry that persons with disabilities would be steered towards medically assisted death by subtle medical and societal pressures and that disabled individuals would choose medical assistance in dying not because their disability was causing them unbearable suffering but because the care they needed was not forthcoming, as was highlighted by the member opposite.

There was also the worry that the proposed amendment discriminates against persons with disabilities by singling them out as a category of persons who could obtain medical assistance in dying on the basis of their suffering.

Adjournment Proceedings

I think what is important is to be reflective and responsive to the positions of these very important organizations and the thousands of Canadians they represent. At the same time, we need to be responsive to the views and wishes of other persons with disabilities and other serious illnesses who take a different view.

I would remind the member opposite and this chamber that in the actual Truchon decision, Monsieur Truchon and Madam Gladu were themselves persons with disabilities. They felt that their autonomy, their independence, and indeed their rights to equality under the charter were discriminated against by virtue of not being able to avail themselves of medical assistance in dying because of the requirement of needing to be at the end of life. The court in that case found in their favour, finding that the previous regime was itself discriminatory against persons with disabilities. That is the court's determination. That is what we were responding to here.

Clearly, there are many others in that camp as well, including the Senate sponsor of the bill and including a former Conservative cabinet minister, Mr. Steven Fletcher, who has echoed the exact same concern: that the rights of autonomy and dignity of all people, including all people with disabilities, must be respected and entrenched in whatever legislation is coming forward. Compassion requires that we consider their views as well.

I agree that disability groups in this country raised extremely grave and serious concerns. We must turn our attention to ways we can address them. In my view and the view of the government, there are ways to address those concerns that do not have the effect of denying others the medical service that they feel is right for them. Yes, we must do more to support persons with disabilities in this country to ensure that they have equitable access to all forms of excellent medical care, such as what was listed by the member opposite, and including things like proper housing and the different kinds of supports that they need to thrive.

● (2010)

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: Madam Speaker, one might think that poverty groups, disability groups and indigenous peoples could count on progressive politicians to hear and stand with them in soli-

arity, helping to amplify their noble voices against the shocking wall of disregard. Sadly, they are on the other side, trying to protect themselves from the Liberal government.

With the passing of the bill, their battle for respect as valuable contributors to the fabric of a healthy and inclusive society will be severely damaged. Rather than death to escape a painful death, it has become death to escape a painful life.

Mr. Arif Virani: Madam Speaker, in responding to the member opposite, I would simply point out that even following the Senate's study of this very important bill, we have seen a further widening of different views with respect to the aspect of persons with disabilities, including those with mental illness. The Senate is proposing amendments that would, in fact, enlarge what we feel is already a carefully tailored bill. Clearly there is a vast diversity of opinion here.

[*Translation*]

It expands eligibility for medical assistance in dying to persons experiencing intolerable suffering who are not at the end of life. It will also respect every person's individual choices on an issue of the utmost importance.

This bill also includes the safeguards that require a physician to give expert advice, an assessment period, the review of the cause of the suffering and all possible treatment options. I am convinced that only those who truly want to access medical assistance in dying will do so. Although I fully acknowledge the concerns of advocacy groups for persons with disabilities, I believe that we can permit—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I apologize to the hon. member for interrupting. I tried to give him a little more time, but we are over the allotted time.

The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 8:13 p.m.)

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