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Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, April 14, 2021

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayer

● (1405)

[English]

The Speaker: It being Wednesday, we will now have the singing of the national anthem led by the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

[Members sang the national anthem]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

BIRTHDAY CONGRATULATIONS

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Anne was born on April 14, 1921, in Portland, Ontario, on a farm that remains in her family today. As a student in a one-room school house, she proudly earned good grades and school prizes. She places an importance on education, clearly, as her three daughters and one of her granddaughters are education professionals.

A dedicated pre-war and post-war DND employee, Anne married François Gagnon of the RCAF. She is a proud mother of three daughters, “Nanny” to her grandchildren and “Gigi” to her great grandchildren.

A woman of many hobbies, Anne sewed fashionable outfits for her daughters, granddaughters and their Barbie dolls. She enjoys painting; watching political news; she favours the colour red; and watching golf, and Tiger Woods is her favourite, more enjoyable while sipping a manhattan. Anne lives by the motto, “It’s only a number. You’re as old as you feel.”

I wish Anne a happy 100th birthday. May she have many more to come.

DONALD SOBEY

Mr. Andy Fillmore (Halifax, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last month, Canada lost a businessman, philanthropist, arts patron, family man and Nova Scotian, the likes of which we may not see again.

Today, I invite members in the House to join me in paying tribute to the life of Donald Creighton Rae Sobeys.

Starting in the basement of his family’s grocery store in New Glasgow, Nova Scotia, Donald went on to become president, and later chairman, of Sobeys’ parent company, Empire. Donald will also be remembered for his commitment to post-secondary education, delivering a variety of significant scholarships, as well as his passion for the arts, best expressed through his creation of the Sobeys Art Award, which is today the pre-eminent prize for contemporary Canadian art.

Donald was a fiercely proud Nova Scotian who believed in the promise of our province and its people. In 2014, he was appointed to the Order of Canada, and yet he taught us all that we are never too important to be nice to people. Donald Sobeys lived a full life of purpose and charity.

I invite all members and all Canadians to join me in offering our sincere condolences to his family and loved ones.

WESTERN HOCKEY LEAGUE

Mr. Michael Kram (Regina—Wascana, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to highlight the co-operation between the Western Hockey League and the Government of Saskatchewan in designating Regina the hub city for the east division of the league.

Sports at all levels have suffered during the pandemic, but the use of the hub city model has proven to be an effective approach to keeping athletes on the ice, while maintaining strict health and safety protocols.

On February 20, teams from Saskatchewan and Manitoba arrived in Regina to begin their quarantine period. A 24-game season began on March 12. Players, coaches and staff are required to undergo weekly PCR tests, daily symptom checks and masks are required at all times, except when on the ice. These measures have allowed hockey fans in western Canada to enjoy the season, while maintaining the health and safety of the players and the community.

I welcome the teams of the WHL east division to Regina.

*Statements by Members**[Translation]***MULTI-SERVICE CENTRE IN BLAINVILLE**

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Maison de la persévérance will be opening its doors in Blainville, and that is great news for young people in the ridings of Thérèse-De Blainville and Rivière-des-Mille-Îles.

Three organizations in the RCM of Thérèse-De Blainville, the Centre Oméga, the École de l'être and the Association PANDA, have spent the last three years working on this project.

They decided to pool their resources to better meet the needs of young people and create an innovative and inclusive multi-service hub. The Maison de la persévérance will enable families to access complementary services that support whole child development and help kids stay in school and engage in their community.

Congratulations to the organizations and stakeholders, the City of Blainville, and everyone who worked together to bring this major project to fruition.

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ONTARIO YOUTH

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week, I had the pleasure to speak to two virtual classes that are part of the virtual school learning program or P.A.V.É., a civics and citizenship class and an exploring career options class.

I would like to thank Ms. Fraser, a teacher from the public school board of eastern Ontario, for inviting me to talk to over 50 15-year-old students. We talked about things like the work that MPs do, community involvement and the challenges related to the health crisis. I also had the privilege of answering questions from the students, who were very attentive and professional. Our youth are very dedicated.

I am proud of these young people and thank them for welcoming me. I wish them great success and hope that they find careers they are passionate about. They are not only the leaders of tomorrow, but also the leaders of today.

* * *

• (1410)

*[English]***THE ECONOMY**

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my constituents are sick of COVID-19. They want to hear a plan from the government to get us out of this pandemic and to move us toward recovery.

Getting out of the pandemic means making vaccines available to Canadians and ramping up testing. Restrictive lockdown measures that Canadians now face result in the failure of the government to deliver in these vital areas.

I believe that a brighter future is just around the corner. Canadians want an end to the pandemic and they want a recovery plan, a plan that recognizes the value and dignity of all work in all sectors of the economy and in all regions of the country. The Conservatives

have presented an ambitious optimistic recovery plan to secure jobs by recovering one million jobs lost during the pandemic, create a strategic stockpile of essential products, secure accountability, secure mental health and secure Canada's economy by balancing the budget over the next decade.

Canadians are ready for a government that is focused on hope for recovery instead on justifying failure, a government that believes our best days are ahead, a government that once again believes that better is possible.

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APRIL CELEBRATIONS

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, April is a month when many faiths and cultural communities are celebrating important holidays.

The Grace United Church and other churches celebrated Easter. Gauri Shankar Mandir and other Mandirs celebrated Navratri. Tamil communities celebrate Puthandu today. Nepali celebrated the new year. Guru Nanak Langar and Sewa food bank delivered food to those in need as a way to celebrate Vaisakhi and demonstrate their selfless service. Taha Musalla, Masjid Mubarak and other mosques are safely observing Ramadan.

Throughout Brampton, culture and faith organizations are continuing to serve Bramptonians and find new ways, virtual ways, to connect with the community. Many Canadians are getting support from culture and faith organizations. I want to thank them and all front-line workers for the support they are providing in Brampton South and across Canada.

Throughout the COVID pandemic, we are fully reminded that diversity is our strength.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PINK

Hon. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is International Day of Pink when we renew our commitment to diversity and inclusion. Today and always, we stand in solidarity with the LGBTQ2+ community in Canada and everywhere.

Fourteen years ago, students at a high school in Nova Scotia saw their classmate bullied for wearing a pink shirt. The next day, students wore pink shirts to support their classmate, an act that resonated around the world. All of us can learn from their example by coming together and standing up so that everyone can be their authentic self.

For all those who feel alone, anxious or hurt, they are not alone. They are loved and supported. Today, we say yes to compassion, empathy and standing up for one another. We say no to bullying and hurtful words that leave long-lasting and emotional scars.

Today and always, let us lift each other up and ensure everyone belongs.

* * *

FIRST RESPONDERS

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, recently, I met with the witness of a tragic hit-and-run accident. For a passing-by motorist to find a young woman severely injured lying in the gutter next to a wintry highway, it was a deeply traumatic experience. However, as this witness reminded me, this is the reality of our first responders every single day.

This pandemic has been hard on everyone, but even more so for those on our front lines who face new risks on top of horrible tragedies and accidents. In British Columbia, where we have a significant increase in opioid deaths, it is also our first responders who are the first on the scene.

As parliamentarians will know, often in the spring in this place, we visit, in person, with representatives of many of our first responders. This year, we will not have that opportunity.

I would ask all members of this place to join me in sincerely thanking our first responders for the critically important work they do every day on our behalf.

* * *

● (1415)

[Translation]

MICHELINE LEMIEUX

Mr. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 2021 has been a tough year for my community so far. We have lost several tremendous citizens.

Today, I want to express my great sorrow at the loss of Micheline Lemieux, who died in her sleep on March 21 at the age of 70.

Everyone knew her. She was always travelling around Old Aylmer on her bike. Her community involvement was legendary. She was involved in the Aylmer Heritage Association, Option Femmes Emploi, as a founding member, the Association des professionnels, Industriels et commerçants du secteur Aylmer, or API-CA, the Symmes Inn Museum, L'Imagier Art Centre and the Boucher Forest Foundation, just to name a few. My community is stronger thanks to her efforts.

We extend our deepest condolences to her family. I am very grateful to them for lending us Micheline. She leaves behind a very real, solid and enduring legacy. We will miss her very much.

Rest in peace, dear Micheline.

* * *

[English]

LABORERS' INTERNATIONAL UNION OF NORTH AMERICA

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to recognize the 118th anniversary of the Laborers' International Union of North America. From its start in 1903 as a

Statements by Members

construction union, its members can now be found working in all sectors of the economy. In its proud history, LiUNA has played an important role in building strong communities. They help ensure working men and women enjoy the benefits of a growing economy and give workers the security of knowing that no matter what challenges they face, they are never alone.

Recently, LiUNA stood up for the thousands of union workers whose jobs were lost with the cancellation of the Keystone XL pipeline. It is working tirelessly to defend the thousands of family-supporting union jobs now at risk with the possible shut down of Line 5.

I send my congratulations to LiUNA and the over 100,000 workers and retirees they represent in Canada for 118 years of standing up for working Canadians and wish them a happy anniversary.

* * *

BLOOD DONATION

Mr. Eric Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it has been five months since I confronted the health minister in the House of Commons about the government's broken promise to end the blood ban.

For far too long, gay, bisexual and trans men in this country have had to live with stigma because of the policies of Canadian Blood Services and Héma-Québec. The Prime Minister, the health minister and everybody on the government side committed six years ago to eliminate this. The commitment was not to study it, not to review it, not to talk about it more, but to actually act.

Yesterday, I launched a video of my personal story of how, about 17 years ago, I went to donate blood and could not, simply because I was gay. I encourage Canadians across the country to visit endthe-bloodban.ca. The time for talk, word salads and virtue signalling is over. It is time to end the discriminatory blood ban in this country once and for all.

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[Translation]

LAURENTIAN UNIVERSITY

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as part of the CCAA proceedings, Laurentian University is cancelling the only midwifery education program that trains students in French and serves northern Ontario.

Oral Questions

In a region that has trouble finding doctors, midwives help fill that void, ensuring that pregnant women get better primary care for childbirth and so much more.

[English]

These courses also benefit indigenous students, many of whom return to provide midwife services in their home communities.

As we work through the pandemic to protect health care workers and hospital resources, cancelling programs that help women safely give birth at home makes little sense. This decision will cost the public more when fewer midwives will be available for the north, and across Ontario, and more doctors will be needed to deliver babies.

The CCAA was never intended for public institutions. These cuts to health care courses limit opportunities in the north for indigenous, francophone and racialized students, and reduce access to services women rely on. We must act now.

[Translation]

ISHTAI FAMILY

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, 10 years of war in Syria have resulted in 400,000 dead, more than six million refugees, tens of thousands of detained or missing prisoners and 12 million people facing starvation.

This humanitarian disaster has given rise to a groundswell of solidarity in Quebec. In my riding, the people of the municipality of L'Assomption came together to help a Syrian family. They welcomed the Ishtai family and provided them with concrete support throughout their integration process.

It is hard for me to describe how I felt when, on February 29, 2020, Basel, Alafif, Ziaa, Bizan and Suzie opened the door at the home where they now live. There they all were, in front of me, smiling, when in 2017, these Syrian refugees were crammed into a tiny apartment in Lebanon, where they had papered the walls with phrases in French, dreaming of the day they would come and settle in Quebec.

I want to thank them for enriching Quebec with their presence. I thank them for choosing to live in French and for wanting to help us build our country.

● (1420)

[English]

COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, over the last 13 months, Canadians have significantly overhauled their lives in order to accommodate government-imposed restrictions. The Liberal government dangled hope in front of them, telling Canadians that if they followed the rules, stayed at home, closed their businesses and remained socially distanced, then things would go back to normal very soon. Thirteen months later, and there is still no plan. Hope is starting to wane. Lockdowns have resulted in busi-

nesses permanently closing. Loved ones have been lost. Hope is waning.

We need a prime minister who seeks a solution for what is at stake here. We need a prime minister who sees people, not government, as the answer because it is Canadians who are ultimately the problem solvers, the solution makers and the wealth generators, the ones who will get us out of this current state.

As a part of the Conservative recovery plan, we are committed to unleashing the power of the workforce and recovering the one million jobs that have been lost during this pandemic. As Conservatives, we will implement a strategy to restore this country to the powerhouse nation that it was always meant to be and can be. We will secure the future for Canadians.

ORGAN AND TISSUE DONATION

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this April I am raising awareness for Be a Donor Month. When one becomes a tissue and organ donor, one can change somebody's life forever by giving them an opportunity for a better and healthier life. One organ donor has the potential to save eight lives, and since 2003, over 20,000 Ontarians have received a life-saving transplant. Unfortunately, while great progress has been made, there are still 1,600 Ontarians waiting for a transplant, including 24 patients in my riding of Brampton North.

I am proud to be a registered organ donor. I want to thank organizations such as Amar Karma, which raises awareness on organ donation in the South Asian community, and the Trillium Gift of Life Network, which delivers and coordinates organ donations. Every single one of us, aged 16 and older, regardless of medical conditions, can sign up to be an organ donor at beadonor.ca.

I encourage each and every person to take two minutes to register today and help save someone's life tomorrow.

The Speaker: Before we go to Oral Questions, I would like to remind hon. members that S.O. 31s are to be 60 seconds. I did not cut anybody off, and I really do not want to do so because I know how important these messages are. I remind members to keep them to 60 seconds.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

HEALTH

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, CNN, Forbes magazine and The Atlantic have all covered the government's disastrous vaccine rollout just in the last week. The severe third wave Canadians are experiencing right now is the direct result of the months it has taken for Canada to secure vaccines.

Is the Prime Minister satisfied that his vaccine rollout has now become an international embarrassment?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we make it through this third wave, we are going to have to continue to hold on even longer, even as vaccines are arriving in record numbers into Canada.

We have delivered 11.7 million vaccines to provinces and territories, and 20% of Canadians have received at least their first dose. We are now actually third in the G20 in terms of the percentage of Canadians who have received the vaccine.

This is promising, but we know there is much more to do. That is why we are working day and night to ensure the delivery of more doses even quicker.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, over 300,000 doses of the Moderna vaccine that were supposed to be delivered to Ontario last week have still not arrived. Maybe they still just have to hold on, as the Prime Minister told them.

Mass vaccination clinics are now closing as a result of his failure to deliver. Schools are closing across the country. How much worse is the third wave going to have to get before the Prime Minister realizes he has failed Canadians?

● (1425)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every single week we receive a million doses of Pfizer, which will rise to two million doses a week in the month of June, and more doses hopefully coming even sooner than that.

Moderna continues to deliver millions of doses as well. There have been challenges with the Moderna procurement system, which have caused a few days of delay here and there, but we are keeping provinces apprised every single step of the way of the delivery timelines, the expectations and any challenges with it. The co-operation with the provinces has been significant throughout.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands has a point of order.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, those of us in virtual Parliament were unable to hear the Prime Minister's response because one of the hon. members was accidentally off mute.

The Speaker: We will start right from the beginning and let the hon. Leader of the Opposition ask his question again and let the Prime Minister answer again.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, 300,000 doses of the Moderna vaccine that the government promised Ontario last week have not been delivered. The Prime Minister said that from time to time deliveries have not come. He is also months behind the developed world. Mass vaccination clinics are closing in Ontario. Schools are closing in Ontario. The severity of the third wave in Canada lies at the feet of the current Prime Minister. When will he admit he has failed Canadians?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we see that whenever the Leader of the Opposition has a chance, he goes to disinformation and misleading Canadians. We are not months behind the developed world; on the contrary, we are now third in the G20 when it comes to delivering vaccines to Canadians.

We will continue to ensure that vaccines flow. We will continue to keep our partners in the provinces and territories apprised of delivery schedules, of delivery delays, like we do see, of a few days here and there, with Moderna. We will continue to deliver Pfizer on time, and all the other vaccines as quickly as we possibly can. When we get them, we send them to the provinces immediately.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, "This is the worst moment of the pandemic thus far," are the words of the president of the University Health Network in Toronto.

The Prime Minister's big lift is the big letdown. It is months later than other countries. Other countries are reopening. We are going back into lockdown and it is going to be the worst because we are months behind, courtesy of the Prime Minister.

How does the Prime Minister expect Canadians and provinces to fight COVID-19 when he is months behind on getting us the vaccines?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the Leader of the Opposition bringing up the challenges facing Ontario right now. I can assure him that we are working and reaching out to Ontario to help through this period of crisis it is going through. I have heard the calls from doctors in Ontario, health networks and concerned residents in highly challenged areas who are not getting the support they need. The federal government, as we always are, will be there to support the province as it delivers for vulnerable Canadians.

[Translation]

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, CNN and several international media outlets have covered this government's inadequate vaccine rollout this week. The third wave Canadians are experiencing right now is the direct result of the months it has taken for Canada to secure vaccines.

Why will the Prime Minister not admit that his vaccine rollout is an embarrassment?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we promised to deliver six million vaccines by the end of March, and we delivered far more than that. Several weeks later, we have delivered nearly 12 million doses, and that number keeps going up. We are now third among developed countries, in the G20, in terms of Canadians who have received the vaccine.

We will continue to do more. We are working day and night to ensure the delivery of more doses even quicker, because I know that this is how we will get through this together.

Oral Questions

● (1430)

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are experiencing the worst delays yet in getting the vaccine. Canadians are worried about their health. The Prime Minister is asking us to be patient, but the United States is starting to reopen and we are still in lockdown.

Was the Prime Minister's failure to act quickly the cause of this more serious third wave?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, no, we are all working together to fight this third wave, and I want to acknowledge the efforts of many of the provinces to deliver the vaccines quickly as soon as they arrive. We will continue to be there to help with the millions of doses that are arriving in the coming weeks. We will continue to be there to help Canadians get through this. We still have to stay the course for a bit with the restrictions because this third wave is very serious, and I encourage everyone to follow the advice of public health officials and get vaccinated as soon as possible.

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AIR TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, to properly manage the challenges facing air transportation, the government may have to be pointed in the right direction. It clearly confused assistance for the industry with a sweet deal for Air Canada friends. The agreement does not guarantee service in Quebec's regional capitals and is funding the competition, benefiting a company with a terrible record.

Are we to understand that regional carriers will only get some of this money if they follow Air Canada's rules or is Air Canada being funded by the federal government to continue to bring down small regional airlines?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that it is very important to protect workers in the airline industry and, indeed, airlines and competition within Canada.

We will continue to ensure that remote regions are well served. We will ensure that clients of Air Canada, for example, and those of all other airlines receive refunds. We will also provide assistance for the aerospace industry.

We know how important it is to move forward and to prepare for a strong comeback after this pandemic. That is exactly what we are doing.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about refunds. The deal is so skewed in Air Canada's favour that it looks like it was negotiated between Air Canada and Air Canada.

For instance, in order to get ticket refunds, customers have to fill out a written request. The federal government is letting Air Canada require this written request, even though the airline already has all the information needed to issue a refund. The ulterior motive can only be to prevent some people from submitting requests, thereby saving taxpayers money.

Has the Prime Minister been duped by Air Canada, or are they in cahoots?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been there for travellers and airline workers from the beginning, and we will always be there for consumers, too.

We have received assurances that people will be refunded. We are also here to ensure that the airline continues to serve the regions and protect jobs.

This is good news for the Canadian airline industry, but it is especially good news for Canadians.

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HEALTH

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Prime Minister said that his government has been working on a plan to vaccinate Canadians since last summer.

We now have a record number of COVID-19 cases and a growing number of people in ICUs. We are clearly in an urgent COVID-19 crisis, and the third wave is hitting hard.

Will the Prime Minister admit that his plan is not working and that he has to change it?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that some parts of the country are having major problems with COVID-19 cases.

Other regions are doing better. The federal government will keep working to support hard-hit regions like Ontario, with help from the armed forces and the Red Cross, which are lending a hand in long-term care homes, with rapid testing resources, and with our ongoing efforts to obtain more vaccines faster so we can get through this crisis.

● (1435)

[English]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are in the middle of a third wave of COVID-19, which is hitting hard.

We recently learned that Scarborough hospital had to cancel 10,000 vaccination appointments in communities for people who are hard hit. These are the frontline workers, the often racialized, in communities where they cannot work from home. They have to go in to work.

These communities and these members now no longer have access to a vaccine, simply because there are not enough doses. The Liberal government has failed to secure enough doses. People are frustrated. Canadians are angry, and they want to know how the Prime Minister let things get so bad.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we recognize that things are getting very bad, particularly in Ontario. That is why we are continuing to be there to support the Ford government as it is working forward to try to vaccinate and support more people.

We know there are massive challenges. There is also an issue that we are continuing to work on, which is delivering more vaccines every single week to the provinces. We know that is the way we get through it. In the meantime, we will always be there to support provinces as they face the challenges this pandemic is bringing.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada is making headlines around the globe, but for all the wrong reasons.

Canada's handling of the pandemic has been a failure. Even the popular American news network CNN has reported on it. The only one who does not seem to realize this is the Prime Minister himself, who went as far as to say that CNN should have stuck to the facts.

Does the Prime Minister still think CNN is spreading fake news?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have made progress in delivering vaccines. In all, 11.3 million doses have been distributed right across the country. Canada is now third in the G20 in terms of getting vaccines to our citizens.

We know that there is still a lot more work to do. That is why we are working hard every day to secure more doses even faster. In the meantime, we will continue to do whatever it takes to support the provinces and territories, to support small businesses, and to help families get through this difficult third wave.

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the Prime Minister wants to talk about the facts, we will do just that.

Instead of working with the United States on a coordinated response to the pandemic, the Liberal government chose to co-operate with China. Canada has just surpassed the United States in case counts per million people. The provinces are shutting down for another extended period. The government has been in reactive mode from the outset.

Will the Prime Minister admit that his handling of the pandemic is a failure?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the so-called facts put forward by the member opposite are ridiculous.

From the start, we have been working with the United States to coordinate on the border and to have a harmonized approach to managing the pandemic. We will continue to work with our friends and allies. We recognize that this pandemic will not end anywhere until it ends everywhere. That is why we are also involved in international initiatives. We will always do whatever it takes to help Canadians get through this crisis.

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure if we live in the same reality, but the facts speak for themselves.

In all, 20% of Americans have received both doses of the vaccine, compared with 2% of Canadians. Media reports suggest large stocks of vaccines and a significant dependence on other countries. We were not prepared. Instead of taking action 13 months ago, the

government was asleep at the switch while other countries were getting organized. We want to collaborate with the government, but can the Prime Minister admit that he failed when it comes to vaccination?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is quite the opposite.

Early last summer, we negotiated with potential vaccine manufacturers in order to have the most diversified portfolio of almost any other country, so we could secure more potential doses for Canadians than any other country in the world.

At the same time, we have been working with these companies to deliver more and more doses. We now rank third in the G20, with more than 20% of the population having received at least one dose. We will continue to deliver for Canadians, and we will continue to get through this pandemic together.

● (1440)

[English]

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, British magazine *The Spectator* wrote this about our Prime Minister: "The premier best known for ethics scandals and blackface pictures...claims that the U.K. is facing a 'very serious third wave'...despite figures showing that the U.K. has currently the lowest case rates in Europe."

This is not the only misinformation the Prime Minister has spread. His government said border measures do more harm than good and that masks don't work.

With his track record, is the Prime Minister concerned that Canadians no longer trust the government with their health and safety?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, every step of the way we have worked with experts and scientists to ensure that these are first and foremost as we move through this pandemic. We have led the way on measures that have kept Canadians safe. We have been there to support provinces and territories as they have had to make difficult decisions on restrictions by supporting them with PPE and rapid tests, but also with measures that help small businesses, that help families, that help workers and that help us all get through this pandemic.

It is an extremely difficult time, but we are going to get through it together by continuing to work together.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that misinformation is really tough. It was the Liberal health minister, under the Prime Minister, who said that people should not wear masks and who was photographed without a mask in an airport.

Oral Questions

While other countries were planning a massive vaccination campaign, the Prime Minister spent last summer in a cloud of scandal after giving \$900 million to an outfit that paid his mother for speaking gigs.

When asked this week if he could have done anything better, the Prime Minister said “no”. Why will he not show some contrition while Canadians get infected by the variants?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is concerning but also symptomatic of the Conservative Party of Canada that they would pick someone to be their health critic who then gives a question listing a whole bunch of facts that are simply not correct.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, CNN's Jake Tapper just called that type of spin, “Tru-Anon”. I really hope that sticks.

Canadians deserve better. There are zoo animals being vaccinated in the United States while Quebec is reporting a wave of femicides because women are locked down with their abusers. The variants are spreading across the country. If we had had vaccines in January and February while the rest of the world was rolling them out, we would not be in this situation.

Does the Prime Minister really think that this is going to cut it, and that Canadians will keep allowing him to pass the buck while people get infected with variants and ICUs fill up?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have worked closely with provinces and territories across the country to manage the pandemic. Yes, there have been provinces that are harder hit than others. The member opposite's province is one notable challenge and has faced issues recently, but we have consistently been there to support those provinces, to help people with direct aid for families and to help small business owners to get our economy roaring back. We have continued to hit our milestones in terms of vaccines, and surpassed them, because we need to deliver for Canadians, which is exactly what we are doing.

[Translation]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, quarantines for temporary foreign workers are a fiasco. Having already abdicated all of its responsibilities toward farmers, the federal government hired Switch Health to manage the mandatory day-10 COVID-19 tests. As a result, francophone farmers are wasting days trying to get service from an anglophone company that cannot keep up with demand. Some workers are being forced to remain in quarantine for up to 25 days before they get their results.

The UPA and FERME Québec have solutions. Will the Prime Minister listen to them?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we will always support our farmers, whom we have relied on so heavily during the pandemic and at other times. We recognize that there are challenges regarding temporary workers, testing and vaccination. We will continue to work with Quebec and the relevant organizations to ensure that we overcome these challenges, and we

will always be there to keep supporting our farmers and the essential work that they do.

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on top of the company being unable to serve francophones, there are big delays in the process, which is costing farmers. The season is just beginning, with 500 to 600 temporary foreign workers, and Switch Health is already overwhelmed. Imagine what will happen when there are 14,000 workers. This same company will also be responsible for processing everyone entering the country and administering all of the tests.

Can the Prime Minister provide assurances that agricultural workers will not have to quarantine for longer than necessary because of administrative delays?

• (1445)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I share the hon. member's grave concerns.

We are working to ensure that our farmers get the help they need to carry out the essential work they are doing this year and every year. We will be there for our farmers as we have always been.

[English]

ETHICS

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, was the Prime Minister looking in the mirror when he said, “It’s hard not to feel disappointed in your government when every day there is a new scandal”? That is the MO of this Prime Minister. He breaks the law, he gets caught, he deflects and then he covers it up, time and again. Canadians deserve good, ethical governance, but that will not stop this Prime Minister from doing whatever it takes to save his own political skin.

When will this Prime Minister start putting the needs of Canadians ahead of his own?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while Conservatives focus on personal partisan attacks, we are focused on Canadians.

I made a straightforward promise to Canadians at the very beginning of this pandemic that we would have their backs for as long as it takes with as much as it takes, and that is exactly what we have done every step of the way. We continue to work hard, day and night, to get more vaccines into Canada. We are continuing to support small business owners and workers across the country, as well as families, seniors and young people. We know we need to get through this pandemic as quickly as possible and bring the economy roaring back. That is exactly what we are focused on, here on this side of the House.

Oral Questions

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): There we have it, Mr. Speaker. The Prime Minister has no intention of cleaning up his act. He is fine with being a global laughingstock and punching bag. He blocked investigations by law enforcement, by officers of Parliament and by parliamentary committees. Whether it is at the ethics committee or the defence committee, once the opposition starts asking tough questions he denies and deflects. When he does not get his way, he shuts down Parliament.

What will it take for this repeat offender to get the message that the laws apply to him?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Conservatives continue to focus on me, while we focus on Canadians. We are going to continue to be there to support Canadians through this pandemic with direct supports, with supports for businesses, with more vaccines, with more rapid tests and with more contact tracing. We are going to continue to focus on the things that matter to Canadians as we get through this pandemic and as we build back better for a greener, more prosperous and fairer Canada. That is exactly what we are focused on. The Conservatives can continue to play politics if they want.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, every day, Canadians are shocked by the Liberal government's creativity when it comes to helping out its buddies. As we saw with the WE scandal, when the time comes to return favours, the Prime Minister can be extremely generous.

Spending on management consultants has increased by \$6 billion over the last six years. Spending on legal fees, consultants and others has never been so high, and this is all coming out of Canadians' pockets. Could the Prime Minister tell us how much of this money has gone into the pockets of his friends?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a government, we have always relied on facts and science when fulfilling our mandate in the service of Canadians. We can see that this has worked over the last number of years.

Whether it is the millions of Canadians that we have lifted out of poverty, including 300,000 children, or the million jobs we have created through our work of the past five years, we are here to meet the expectations of Canadians and we rely on the guidance of experts. We will always listen to those who have ideas to share.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a leopard does not change its spots, and the Prime Minister will not answer the question.

An additional \$6 billion in consulting fees is a lot of money. This Prime Minister will stop at nothing. This was also apparent in the SNC-Lavalin scandal, when his buddies once again came out ahead. Meanwhile, the first woman minister of justice and attorney general of Canada found herself booted from cabinet. That is significant.

Was the WE Charity scandal merely the tip of the iceberg? Does the Prime Minister realize that the stink of the sponsorship scandal is beginning to hover over his Liberal government?

• (1450)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a shame that the Conservatives are so keen to make personal attacks and that they forget that the first woman justice minister was Kim Campbell, who was also the first woman prime minister of our country. It is sad that the Conservatives forget the past.

We will always be there to defend women and to recognize our country's historic events.

The Speaker: I would like to remind members that, when they ask a question, they should listen to the answer.

[English]

It is a good measure if we do not all speak together. I just wanted to remind everyone.

The hon. member for London—Fanshawe.

* * *

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Laurentian University is a valued community hub in Northern Ontario. It is Canada's sole university with a tri-cultural mandate to support French, English and indigenous communities. Deep cuts and layoffs were announced this week. These threaten francophone and indigenous education, courses on violence against women, in-demand bilingual midwifery training and world-class research. The government talks about supporting education, research, women and reconciliation, but when it comes to taking action it is absent.

Will the government help to save Laurentian University?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are deeply concerned and are following the situation at Laurentian University very closely. We are in direct contact with the province on this issue. Our thoughts are with all of those who have lost their jobs and all of the employees and students who are facing this difficult situation. We will continue to support post-secondary institutions because the futures of our two official languages depend on them. We are prepared to work with our colleagues in Ontario to achieve this, as education falls under their jurisdiction.

Oral Questions

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the lobbying registry shows that when the financial crisis hit Laurentian University, it lobbied the members for Sudbury and Nickel Belt numerous times and nothing was done. The Prime Minister used Laurentian University as a political backdrop when he visited Northern Ontario. Now this institution, which has provided education to generations of francophone, indigenous and working-class youth, is being torn apart and stripped through the use of the Bankruptcy Act, and the government is sitting on the sidelines.

Will the Prime Minister commit to working with us? What steps will he take to keep Laurentian University from being ripped apart?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, just as we stood up for the francophone university in Ontario a few years ago when there were concerns about its future, we will be there to defend and support Laurentian University as an important institution for Franco-Ontarians and, indeed, for all Canadians with our official languages. We have reached out to the Ontario government to hear what its plan is for how we are going to move forward. We are there to be partners on ensuring that this important institution does not falter. That is a priority for us. We will continue to work with the province on this issue.

* * *

[Translation]

ITALIAN CANADIANS

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada has over 1.6 million Canadians of Italian origin. Ours is one of the largest Italian diasporas in the world.

[English]

During the Second World War, hundreds of Italian Canadians were interned for the simple reason that they were of Italian heritage. Parents were taken away from their homes, leaving children without their fathers in many cases and families without a paycheque to put food on their table. Lives and careers, businesses and reputations were interrupted and ruined, and yet no one was held responsible. Italian Canadians have lived with these memories for many years and they deserve closure.

Can the Prime Minister provide an update on a formal apology on behalf of the Government of Canada to—

The Speaker: The right hon. Prime Minister.

[Translation]

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Alfred-Pellan for his question and his work with the community.

[English]

Canadians of Italian heritage whose immigrant stories are so familiar have earned the respect of a grateful nation, but Canadians of Italian heritage deal with ongoing discrimination related to mistakes made by our governments of the past that continue to affect them to this day. I am proud to stand up and say that our government will right these wrongs with a formal apology in the month of May 2021. We thank them for choosing Canada as a place to call home.

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the two Canadian female soldiers who filed sexual misconduct complaints against the chief of the defence staff were exceptionally courageous.

What we saw Monday from the Liberal Party and the Bloc Québécois was anything but courageous. At the defence committee, the Liberal Party and the Bloc Québécois colluded to shut down, cancel and extinguish a parliamentary committee that was studying this difficult issue. Maybe some people think that is okay, but the victims sure do not.

Why do the Bloc Québécois and the Liberal Party not want to get to the bottom of this issue?

● (1455)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is well aware that committees are independent and do important work. That is why the Minister of Defence participated in the Standing Committee on National Defence's study. He spent six hours with the committee for that study alone.

As we have said, our government will not tolerate any form of sexual misconduct. The time for patience is over. Now it is time to act.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, to take action, you need all of the facts and everyone who has something to say must be able to speak.

This is not the first time at the Liberal members and their buddies in the Bloc Québécois have joined forces to prevent parliamentarians from doing their jobs. Last year, the Bloc and the Liberal Party joined forces to prevent the Ethics Commissioner from testifying about his report, the "Trudeau II Report", on the SNC-Lavalin scandal. These parties are once again buddy-buddy to stop us from getting to the bottom of things.

What do the Bloc Québécois and the Liberal Party have to hide?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, committees are independent and make their decisions based on the important work that they do.

The Conservatives' frustrations always seem connected to partisanship and result in attacks. The Liberal committee members and other committee members want to be able to move forward. They want to see action, and that is exactly what the committee decided to do last week.

Some hon. member: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I remind members that if they wish to speak, they can get closer, as long as they stay two metres apart. That is allowed.

Oral Questions

It is not civil to yell from one side of the House to the other.

I simply wanted to remind members.

The hon. member for Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill.

[English]

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals, with support from the Bloc, have shut down the investigation into abuse of power and sexual misconduct at the highest levels in the Canadian Armed Forces. Key witnesses have not appeared, critical information has not been provided and we still do not know how a CDS could remain in his position for three years with unresolved allegations of sexual misconduct against him. The Prime Minister may not care, but this matters to Canadians.

Will the Prime Minister admit he has failed women in the military?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite well knows that committees are independent and they do important work. That is why the Minister of National Defence worked with the national defence committee on this matter extensively. He appeared for more than six hours on this study alone.

As we have stated, our government will not stand for any form of sexual misconduct. The time for patience is over; the time for action is now.

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, so the Prime Minister maintains there has been no wrongdoing by his government as the military failed to eradicate sexual misconduct in its ranks. After being made aware of the allegations against General Vance in 2018, the Clerk of the Privy Council gave the Prime Minister a plan to replace him before the last election. Instead, the Prime Minister chose to reward him and make him the longest-serving chief of the defence staff ever.

Will the Prime Minister admit that he failed women in the military?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, anyone who serves in the Canadian Armed Forces deserves a safe work environment and deserves to be able to have supports and resources when they come forward with serious allegations. We know there is still much work to do in reforming the culture at the Canadian Armed Forces.

We have taken significant steps over the past years, but it is clear that not enough has been done. We have more to do, and that is exactly what we are continuing to work on. We know we need to make significant improvements in many of our institutions, and that is something we are all working on together.

* * *

[Translation]

TAXATION

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it has been five years since the Panama papers came to light, and we know that Revenu Québec recovered \$21.2 million that was hidden in tax

havens. That is not a lot, but it is more than the federal government was able to recover for all of Canada.

That brings me to the single tax return. The Liberals are saying that they are against it because Revenu Québec would not be able to fight tax evasion abroad. Now that we know that Revenu Québec is already doing a better job of that than Ottawa is, will the Prime Minister support the single tax return and will he agree to transfer tax information from abroad to Quebec?

● (1500)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for many months now, the Canada Revenue Agency has been very present and has been meeting the expectations of Canadians, and particularly Quebecers, in a very direct, measurable and significant way with CERB and assistance for families and youth. We have seen how important it is to have a federal government that is present and engaged to support people in tough times. This is not the time to lose jobs in Quebec or to play sovereignty games. It is the time to work together, as we are doing now.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the National Assembly passed a unanimous motion. Quebec wants this, and we see the contempt of the Prime Minister for the will of the Quebec nation.

The Prime Minister is doing nothing about tax havens. It is embarrassing that Quebec has recovered more money than all of Canada thanks to the Panama papers and without access to foreign tax information. It is even more embarrassing when we compare Canada to other sovereign nations. Canada has recovered 15 times less money than the top countries such as the United Kingdom and five times less than Colombia. In times of ballooning deficits, what is the Prime Minister waiting for to take the fight against tax havens seriously?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the opposite is true. From the start of our first term, we have invested record amounts in the Canada Revenue Agency to fight tax evasion and avoidance. We have seen important changes and improvements in the system because it is important to ensure that everyone pays taxes. That principle has guided our government from the very beginning and will continue to guide us.

*Oral Questions**[English]***FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it has come to light that the government threatened to cancel future funding for the Halifax security forum if it awarded the John McCain Prize to Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen. The government's attempt to silence those critical of China is shameful and it plays right into China's desire to silence its critics abroad.

Will the Prime Minister admit this was a mistake and commit to continuing to fund the Halifax International Security Forum even if it awards the John McCain Prize to Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister has already addressed this issue, including at committee yesterday.

The government has supported and provided funding to the Halifax security forum throughout our time in office, and the minister has participated every year and will continue to.

On Taiwan, I have always supported Taiwan's meaningful participation in multilateral international forums, and Canada continues to have strong and growing trade and people-to-people relations with Taiwan.

* * *

*[Translation]***HEALTH**

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, determining the origin of the coronavirus is essential for preventing the next pandemic. However, we still do not know the exact origins of COVID-19, because Chinese leadership obstructed the investigation by the World Health Organization, the WHO.

Will the Prime Minister publicly acknowledge that the WHO caved to pressure from China, and will he work with our allies in calling for an overhaul of that organization?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada is committed to working with the WHO and international experts to get a better understanding of the origins of the pandemic.

We have some shared concerns regarding the recent WHO-convened study in China. We support a transparent and independent analysis of the origins of the pandemic.

We will continue to work with our partners and allies toward the development of an independent process for international evaluations of diseases of unknown origin in the future.

[English]

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Taiwan's handling of the pandemic has been one of the world's most successful. With a population of only 23 million, it has had only 1,000 coronavirus cases and 10 deaths. Next month, countries will be participating in WHO's annual meeting, but Taiwan has not been invited, even though it had observer status until 2017.

On Monday in the House, the foreign affairs minister referred to Taiwan as a country. In light of that position, does the government support Taiwan's participation at next month's meeting?

● (1505)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a government, we have always been consistent in supporting Taiwan's meaningful participation in international forums.

Taiwan's role as an observer in the World Health Assembly's meetings is in the interest of global health. We welcome the participation from the entire international community to work together to promote global health.

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*[Translation]***AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD**

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government pledged to protect and support our farmers and to provide full and fair compensation to supply-managed sectors for losses arising from recent free trade agreements.

In fact, the second compensation payment for dairy producers went out last week for a total of \$460 million. Yesterday, our government announced the details of new programs for Canada's 4,800 chicken, turkey and egg producers.

Would the Prime Minister tell us more about this great news for our egg and poultry producers?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell for his ongoing support for farmers.

Poultry and egg producers will be entitled to financial assistance that they can invest in their business. Under this \$630-million program, our government will contribute up to 70%, or up to 80% in the case of projects put forward by producers 35 years of age or under. Another \$61 million will be allocated to a market development program for turkey and chicken.

I want to thank all Canadian farmers, who have been so resilient throughout this pandemic.

[English]

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have another east coast lobster dispute. The fisheries minister has said that moderate livelihood lobster fishing by indigenous communities will follow existing DFO seasons, regulations and enforcement rules. However, the Liberal MP for Sydney—Victoria has said that this is wrong, that the minister's announcement is only for this year, an interim measure, and that first nations will be allowed to set their own seasons and rules.

Are Liberals mistaking voters for lobsters heading to the traps and the dinner tables?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, reconciliation is about recognizing rights that are not to be granted by governments but that are recognized as having been decided, in many cases, decades ago.

We are working closely both with commercial fishermen and with Mi'kmaq fishers to ensure that we are moving forward in a way that is both scientifically sustainable and respects the existing rights that Mi'kmaq have towards a moderate livelihood.

We know there is a path forward, and we look forward to continuing to work in constructive ways to resolve this challenge in the spirit of reconciliation and for a better future for everyone.

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in fact, no one is disputing those rights at all. What we are questioning here are the various stories we are getting from the government. I have discovered that the fisheries minister flip-flopped and admitted to CBC Radio that the Liberal government's lobster announcement for fishing is “the plan for this season, or for this year”. The lobster is out of the pot. This is not what maritime Liberal MPs are telling voters down east.

Would the PM like to confirm his government is not being straight with maritime fishing families?

• (1510)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every step of the way we have worked to respect people's rights, to respect people's livelihoods and to move forward in a way that ensures a strong and growing economy with opportunities for everyone, in the spirit of reconciliation. It is not an easy thing, but it is an important thing. That is why we are taking it seriously and working step by step to advance in a way that is acceptable to everyone. We will continue to do the right work the right way to move this country forward.

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government and the Prime Minister are not being clear with Canadians. It sounds like this is nothing but a pre-election campaign gimmick to protect Liberal candidates with a policy of deception to secure votes, and the fisheries minister's plan will change the day after the next election, if the government is re-elected.

Does voting Liberal down east mean a vote to allow separate indigenous lobster fisheries outside existing DFO seasons, regulations and enforcement rules? Can the Prime Minister confirm

Oral Questions

which message is correct: what the fisheries minister tells Ottawa, or what the fisheries minister is telling voters down east?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been clear every step of the way, both about ongoing negotiations and also about our values and our understanding of how important it is to move forward in true reconciliation and partnership with indigenous peoples, in ways that support families that have been fishing in that region for generations.

We know this is an extremely important issue. We are going to continue those discussions and negotiations in good faith to make sure that we find the right solution for everyone: indigenous fishers, commercial fishers and everyone who lives in the Atlantic provinces and, indeed, across the country.

* * *

JUSTICE

Ms. Helena Jaczek (Markham—Stouffville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in a time when women have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, the opposition wants to add to their burden by taking away their right to choose. Women's advocacy groups disagree with the extreme measures proposed in Bill C-233. This is not the time to debate women's rights; it is the time to uplift and support their economic recovery.

Will the Prime Minister recommit to this House that he will always stand up for a woman's right to choose?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Markham—Stouffville for her strong leadership.

Women and women alone have the right to make decisions about their own bodies. While the leader of the opposition is allowing an anti-abortion bill to be introduced, our government has defended and always will defend women's reproductive choice in Canada. We have taken action to protect this right including repealing outdated sections in the Criminal Code, investing in groups like Planned Parenthood and easing restrictions on Plan B to help increase its accessibility.

We will always defend women's rights, while Conservatives politicians try to restrict them.

*Oral Questions***AIR TRANSPORTATION**

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government has done nothing to stop the Nav Canada studies to close flight control towers at airports across the country, which would shut them down. Removing air traffic control services at airports would threaten public safety and eliminate jobs. The Liberals know I proposed a legislative fix, Bill C-278, which would give the government the power to save these airports. So far, two transport ministers have failed to act, putting Canadian lives and jobs at risk.

Now is the time to decide: no more excuses and no more hiding. Will the Prime Minister use the NDP's solution to protect these airports?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as Canadians have seen through this pandemic, our priority remains the safety and security of Canadians at all times. We are watching Nav Canada closely as it moves forward in its deliberations. We will ensure every step of the way that the safety, security, and prosperity of Canadians is not put at risk.

[Translation]

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

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Mr. Speaker, since the beginning of the pandemic, the Chair has repeatedly reminded members of the importance of respecting decorum and the dress code.

I think we broke a record today, because during question period, we saw a member in his birthday suit. Naked. It might be worth reminding members, especially the men, that a jacket and tie are mandatory, but so are a shirt, underwear and pants.

It is just a simple reminder. We could see that the member is in great shape, but I think members need to be reminded to be careful and check if their camera is on.

• (1515)

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Salaberry—Suroît for her observations. I did not see that, but while the member was speaking, I conferred with the technicians and they did indeed see something.

I would like to remind members to always be vigilant when they are near a camera and a microphone.

[English]

Is the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands rising on the same point of order?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a different point of order. During question period today, the Conservatives referred to the first female justice minister. They misquoted that. It was actually Kim Campbell. I recognize they probably do not know that because it was a different Conservative Party at a different time, but the first female justice minister was—

The Speaker: I want to thank the hon. member for that information, but it is starting to turn into debate at this point.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I believe that if you seek it you will find unanimous consent for the following motion.

I move that given (a) the risk to Canada's national security posed by Huawei, (b) the fact that China's national security laws require all companies to support, assist and co-operate with China's Communist Party intelligence work, (c) the fact that Canada's Five Eyes partners have already banned Huawei, and (d) the government's failure to respond to a motion passed in the House on November 20, 2020, calling on the government to ban Huawei, the House repeat its call on the government to ban Huawei from Canada's 5G network.

The Speaker: All those opposed to the hon. member's moving of the motion will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: I am afraid we do not have agreement on that.

There is another point of order. The hon. member for Wellington—Halton Hills.

* * *

HALIFAX INTERNATIONAL SECURITY FORUM

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations among the parties, and I believe that if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent of the House for the following motion. I move:

That this House (a) agree with the Statement of the Vice President of the Halifax International Security Forum that, with respect to the John McCain Prize for Leadership in Public Service, President Tsai Ing-wen of Taiwan "is a well-respected international leader, the first female president of Taiwan, and a strong global advocate for democracy.... she would certainly be an ideal fit for this award"; and (b) calls on the government to continue funding the Forum at current levels even if the John McCain award is presented to President Tsai Ing-wen.

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

It is agreed.

The House has heard the terms of the motion. All those opposed to the motion will please say nay. The motion is carried.

(Motion agreed to)

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

During debate at the late show last night, I mistakenly claimed that the member for Calgary Nose Hill signed a letter calling for an end to the lockdowns that are helping to protect our most vulnerable from COVID-19. I was wrong. It was a tweet in support of ending lockdowns, which was reported by the Western Standard as the MP for Calgary Nose Hill "joins Alberta UCP MLAs in blasting Kenney's third COVID lockdown".

I do apologize for the error and ask that the record be corrected.

The Speaker: I want to thank the hon. member for that clarification.

The hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable.

• (1520)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

During question period today, I did not mean any disrespect to the Hon. Kim Campbell, who was the first female minister of justice in Canada. I want the House to know that I am aware that Ms. Campbell held that position.

What I meant to say was that the Prime Minister booted the first indigenous female justice minister from cabinet. That is the precise wording I should have used.

The Speaker: That is a matter of debate, so we will leave it at that.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*Translation*]

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL FISCAL ARRANGEMENTS ACT

The Speaker: It being 3:20 p.m., pursuant to order made on Monday, January 25, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded divisions on the motions at report stage of Bill C-224.

Call in the members.

[*English*]

And the bells having rung:

The Speaker: The question is on Motion No. 1. The vote on this motion will also apply to Motions Nos. 2 to 4.

• (1535)

[*Translation*]

(The House divided on Motion No. 1, which was negatived on the following division:)

(*Division No. 89*)

YEAS

Members

Aboultiaf	Aitchison
Albas	Alleslev
Allison	Arnold
Atwin	Baldinelli
Barlow	Barrett
Barsalou-Duval	Beaulieu
Benzen	Bergen
Bergeron	Berthold
Bérubé	Bezan
Blanchet	Blanchette-Joncas
Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)	Block
Boudrias	Bragdon
Brassard	Brunelle-Duceppe
Calkins	Carrie
Chabot	Champoux
Charbonneau	Chiu
Chong	Cooper
Cumming	Dalton
Dancho	Davidson
DeBellefeuille	Deltell
d'Entremont	Desbiens

Desilets
Doherty
Dreeshen
Epp
Falk (Provencher)
Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock)
Fortin
Gaudreau
Genuis
Gladu
Gourde
Hallan
Hoback
Jeneroux
Kent
Kmieciak
Kurek
Lake
Lawrence
Lemire
Liepert
Lobb
MacKenzie
Marcil
May (Saanic—Gulf Islands)
McCauley (Edmonton West)
McLean
Melillo
Moore
Morrison
Nater
O'Toole
Paul-Hus
Perron
Poilievre
Redekopp
Rempel Garner
Rood
Sahota (Calgary Skyview)
Savard-Tremblay
Schmale
Shields
Shipley
Sloan
Stanton
Ste-Marie
Stubbs
Thériault
Tochor
Uppal
Vecchio
Viersen
Vis
Warkentin
Webber
Wong
Zimmer— 155

Private Members' Business

Diotte
Dowdall
Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)
Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)
Fast
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Gallant
Généreux
Gill
Godin
Gray
Harder
Jansen
Kelly
Kitchen
Kram
Kusie
Larouche
Lehoux
Lewis (Essex)
Lloyd
Lukiwski
Maguire
Martel
Mazier
McColeman
McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)
Michaud
Morantz
Motz
Normandin
Patzner
Pauzé
Plamondon
Rayes
Reid
Richards
Ruff
Saroya
Scheer
Seebach
Shin
Simard
Soroka
Steinley
Strahl
Sweet
Therrien
Trudel
Van Popta
Vidal
Vignola
Wagantall
Waugh
Williamson
Yurdiga

NAYS

Members

Alghabra
Anand
Angus
Arya
Bachrach
Bagnell
Baker
Beech
Bennett
Bibeau
Blaikie
Blaney (North Island—Powell River)
Amos
Anandasangaree
Arseneault
Ashton
Badawey
Bains
Battiste
Bendayan
Bessette
Bittle
Blair
Blois

Private Members' Business

Boulerice	Bratina
Brière	Cannings
Carr	Casey
Chagger	Champagne
Chen	Collins
Cormier	Dabrusin
Damoff	Davies
Dhaliwal	Dhillon
Dong	Drouin
Dubourg	Duclos
Duguid	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Duvall	Dzerowicz
Easter	Ehsassi
El-Khoury	Ellis
Erskine-Smith	Fergus
Fillmore	Finnigan
Fisher	Fonseca
Fortier	Fragiskatos
Fraser	Freeland
Fry	Garrison
Gazan	Gerretsen
Gould	Green
Guilbeault	Hajdu
Hardie	Harris
Holland	Housefather
Hughes	Hussen
Hutchings	Iacono
Ien	Jaczek
Johns	Joly
Jones	Jordan
Jowhari	Kelloway
Khalid	Khera
Koutrakis	Kusmierczyk
Kwan	Lalonde
Lambropoulos	Lametti
Lamoureux	Lattanzio
Lauzon	LeBlanc
Lebouthillier	Lefebvre
Lightbound	Long
Longfield	Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga)
MacAulay (Cardigan)	MacGregor
MacKinnon (Gatineau)	Maloney
Manly	Martinez Ferrada
Masse	Mathysen
May (Cambridge)	McCrimmon
McDonald	McGuinty
McKay	McKenna
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)	McLeod (Northwest Territories)
McPherson	Mendès
Mendicino	Miller
Monsef	Morrissey
Murray	Ng
O'Connell	Olipphant
O'Regan	Petitpas Taylor
Powlowski	Qaqqaq
Qualtrough	Ratansi
Regan	Robillard
Rodriguez	Rogers
Romanado	Sahota (Brampton North)
Saini	Sajjan
Saks	Samson
Sangha	Sarai
Scarpaleggia	Schiefke
Schulte	Serré
Sgro	Shanahan
Sheehan	Sidhu (Brampton East)
Sidhu (Brampton South)	Simms
Singh	Sorbara
Spengemann	Tabbara
Tassi	Trudeau
Turnbull	Van Bynen
van Koeverden	Vandal
Vandenbeld	Vaughan

Virani	Weiler
Wilkinson	Wilson-Raybould
Yip	Young
Zahid	Zann
Zuberi — 179	

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare Motion No. 1 defeated. I therefore declare Motions Nos. 2 to 4 defeated.

[English]

At this time, the question would ordinarily be put on the motion for concurrence at report stage of Bill C-224. However, as the House has just defeated the amendments to restore the bill, nothing remains of the bill except the number. The Chair is therefore obliged to exercise the authority provided by Standing Order 94(1) (a) to ensure the orderly conduct of Private Members' Business.

[Translation]

I therefore rule that the order for consideration at report stage of Bill C-224, an act to amend An Act to authorize the making of certain fiscal payments to provinces, and to authorize the entry into tax collection agreements with provinces, be discharged and that the bill be dropped from the Order Paper.

* * *

[English]

REDUCTION OF RECIDIVISM FRAMEWORK ACT

The House resumed from March 26 consideration of the motion that Bill C-228, An Act to establish a federal framework to reduce recidivism, as reported (with amendments) from the committee, be concurred in.

The Speaker: Pursuant to order made on Monday, January 25, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division of the motion to concur in Bill C-228 at report stage, under Private Members' Business.

● (1545)

[Translation]

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

(Division No. 90)

YEAS

Members

Abouttaif	Aitchison
Albas	Alghabra
Alleslev	Allison
Amos	Anand
Anandasangaree	Angus
Arnold	Arseneault
Arya	Ashton
Atwin	Bachrach
Badawey	Bagnell
Bains	Baker
Baldinelli	Barlow
Barrett	Battiste
Beech	Bendayan
Bennett	Benzen
Bergen	Berthold

Private Members' Business

Besette	Bezan	Maloney	Manly
Bibeau	Bittle	Martel	Martinez Ferrada
Blaikie	Blair	Masse	Mathysen
Blaney (North Island—Powell River)	Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)	May (Cambridge)	May (Saenich—Gulf Islands)
Block	Blois	Mazier	McCauley (Edmonton West)
Boulerice	Bragdon	McColeman	McCrimmon
Brassard	Bratina	McDonald	McGuinty
Brière	Calkins	McKay	McKenna
Cannings	Carr	McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)	McLean
Carrie	Casey	McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)	McLeod (Northwest Territories)
Chagger	Champagne	McPherson	Melillo
Chen	Chiu	Mendès	Mendicino
Chong	Collins	Miller	Monsef
Cooper	Cormier	Moore	Morantz
Cumming	Dabrusin	Morrison	Morrissey
Dalton	Damoff	Motz	Murray
Dancho	Davidson	Nater	Ng
Davies	Deltell	O'Connell	Oliphant
d'Entremont	Dhaliwal	O'Regan	O'Toole
Dhillon	Diotte	Patzer	Paul-Hus
Doherty	Dong	Petitpas Taylor	Poilievre
Dowdall	Dreeschen	Powlowski	Qaqqaq
Drouin	Dubourg	Qualtrough	Ratansi
Duclos	Duguid	Rayes	Redekopp
Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)	Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Regan	Reid
Duvall	Dzerowicz	Rempel Garner	Richards
Easter	Ehsassi	Robillard	Rodriguez
El-Khoury	Ellis	Rogers	Romanado
Epp	Erskine-Smith	Rood	Ruff
Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)	Falk (Provencher)	Sahota (Calgary Skyview)	Sahota (Brampton North)
Fast	Fergus	Saini	Sajjan
Fillmore	Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock)	Saks	Samson
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Finnigan	Sarai	Saroya
Fisher	Fonseca	Scarpaleggia	Scheer
Fortier	Fragiskatos	Schiefke	Schmale
Fraser	Freeland	Schulte	Seebach
Fry	Gallant	Serré	Sgro
Garrison	Gazan	Shanahan	Sheehan
Généreux	Genuis	Shields	Shin
Gerretsen	Gladu	Shipley	Sidhu (Brampton East)
Godin	Gould	Sidhu (Brampton South)	Simms
Gourde	Gray	Singh	Sloan
Green	Guilbeault	Sorbara	Soroka
Hajdu	Hallan	Spengemann	Stanton
Harder	Hardie	Steinley	Strahl
Harris	Hoback	Stubbs	Sweet
Holland	Housefather	Tabbara	Tassi
Hughes	Hussen	Tochor	Trudeau
Hutchings	Iacono	Turnbull	Uppal
Ien	Jaczek	Van Bynen	van Koeverden
Jansen	Jeneroux	Van Popta	Vandal
Johns	Joly	Vandenbeld	Vaughan
Jones	Jordan	Vecchio	Vidal
Jowhari	Kelloway	Viersen	Virani
Kelly	Kent	Vis	Wagantall
Khalid	Khera	Warkentin	Waugh
Kitchen	Kmiec	Webber	Weiler
Koutrakis	Kram	Wilkinson	Williamson
Kurek	Kusie	Wilson-Raybould	Wong
Kusmierczyk	Kwan	Yip	Young
Lake	Lalonde	Yurdiga	Zahid
Lambropoulos	Lametti	Zann	Zimmer
Lamoureux	Lattanzio	Zuberi — 301	
Lauzon	Lawrence		
LeBlanc	Lebouthillier		
Lefebvre	Lehoux		
Lewis (Essex)	Liepert		
Lightbound	Lloyd		
Lobb	Long	Barsalou-Duval	Beaulieu
Longfield	Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga)	Bergeron	Bérubé
Lukiwski	MacAulay (Cardigan)	Blanchet	Blanchette-Joncas
MacGregor	MacKenzie	Boudrias	Brunelle-Duceppe
MacKinnon (Gatineau)	Maguire	Chabot	Champoux
		Charbonneau	DeBellefeuille

NAYS

Members

Routine Proceedings

Desbiens
Fortin
Gill
Lemire
Michaud
Pauzé
Plamondon
Simard
Thériault
Trudel

Desilets
Gaudreau
Larouche
Marcil
Normandin
Perron
Savard-Tremblay
Ste-Marie
Therrien
Vignola — 32

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

When shall the bill be read the third time? At the next sitting of the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

[English]

POINTS OF ORDER

MEMBERS' PARTICIPATION IN ORAL QUESTIONS

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, as I indicated to you informally earlier today, I want to return to a point of order that we were discussing on February 23. It was on the question of not my original point around the right for independent members and members of non-recognized parties to pose questions on Wednesdays, but the more general problem of the distribution among many MPs and that the number has grown.

At the time, you said that you would take that matter under advisement, as the number of hon. members in the category of either independent or non-recognized members has, in fact, doubled within this Parliament. I certainly will not repeat the points I made earlier. I had citations going back to Speaker Macnaughton, Speaker Jerome, Speaker Gilbert Parent, Speaker John Fraser and so on, to the fact that we do have rights to ask questions in question period. It is a matter of the distribution. I been compiling some statistics, and I will be as brief as I can possibly be.

In the 41st Parliament, when Green MPs got their first seat in this place, it was one question a week at the beginning of the Parliament. We have gone from five members of Parliament in the category of independents or non-recognized parties. We had grown to 14 members. We went from one question a week to seven slots per week and we ended up with 0.86 questions per week as opposed to one.

In the 42nd Parliament, we started with 11 members in the category of independent or non-recognized parties. That number grew to 17 members over the lifetime of that Parliament. Again, the effect of that was to go for one question a week to each one of us having 0.82 questions per week. That happened because the Speaker and other parties added three questions to the slots available for members in our category.

In this 43rd Parliament, we started with four members and we had one question per week for each one of us. The number of members in the independent and non-recognized party category has doubled. It is now eight. No questions have been added to the available

slots. The result is that rather than where we started after the last election, with one question per week for each one of us, the three Green MPs and the hon. member for Vancouver Granville each of us at the beginning of this Parliament having one question per week, with the addition of four more independents, we now have 0.50 questions, in other words roughly half of what we ever had since the 41st Parliament.

I put it to you, Mr. Speaker, we had near agreement yesterday on unanimous consent. We have a lot of support in the House. There should be more questions available for the category of independent and non-recognized parties. I would be very grateful if you could look at these numbers and these statistics and see if it is not time to add more slots to the available times in question period for members who fall into our category.

● (1550)

The Speaker: I want to thank the hon. member for her intervention. We will take it under advisement and come back to the House with new information should it be required.

I just want to point something out on a technical matter. I found that when some ministers were answering questions and when some members asking questions, there was a bit of a choppiness in there. One thing I found with my computer, and this is me giving my experience, is sometimes when I have Skype and Zoom running at the same time, they interfere with each other. Members may want to see if Skype is running in the background and turn it off. It makes it so much easier for the interpreters and their colleagues in the chamber when they hear members speak.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

● (1555)

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Orders 104 and 114, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 14th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding the membership of committees of the House.

If the House gives its consent, I move that the report concurred in.

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

The House has heard the terms of the motion. All those opposed to the motion will please say nay.

Hearing no dissenting voice, I declare the motion carried.

(Motion agreed to)

PETITIONS

IMPAIRED DRIVING

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, March 21 to 27 was National Impaired Driving Prevention Week. As we encourage Canadians to drive responsibly and avoid distractions and impairment behind the wheel, we also take time to reflect on those we have tragically lost to impaired driving.

We have to demonstrate a zero-tolerance attitude for impaired, distracted and dangerous driving to ensure that all Canadians can use our streets safely. That is why I am very proud to table e-petition 3162, which has thousands of signatures, and calls for amendments to the Criminal Code to include harsher penalties on impaired, distracted and dangerous driving. For the families that have already suffered, and to prevent families from having to deal with this tremendous loss, the petitioners are calling for amendments to the Criminal Code.

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present e-petition 3034, which has been signed by 1,585 residents, most from the County of Simcoe. The petition concerns the SS *Keewatin*. Built in 1907 and the world's last remaining passenger steamship of the Edwardian era, it is of the same ilk as another famous vessel that members will know of: the RMS *Titanic*.

Keewatin is a beautifully restored museum ship in Port McNicoll along the south shore of Georgian Bay. This is the port from which she sailed between 1912 and 1965 as a CPR ship and gave passage to tens of thousands of residents and new Canadians making their way to Canada's west. *Keewatin* is a touchstone of our region's marine history, a major tourist attraction and a community treasure of national significance, but the petitioners point out that she is at risk of being moved away from Port McNicoll on a technicality.

The signatories are calling on the Government of Canada to work with the community and the friends of Keewatin foundation to ensure SS *Keewatin* remains in the port to which her history and service are most accounted and celebrated.

CONVERSION THERAPY

Mr. Jeremy Patzer (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition today from constituents who are concerned about Bill C-6 and are calling on the House of Commons to take the following actions: ban coercive, degrading practices designed to change a person's sexual orientation or gender identity; amend Bill C-6 to fix the definition of "conversion therapy", thus banning conversion therapy without banning voluntary counselling or criminalizing conversations; and allow parents to speak with their own children about sexuality and gender and set house rules about sex and relationships.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the people from across Canada who have signed this petition.

I too have a petition calling on the government to fix concerns around Bill C-6. Bill C-6 defines conversion therapy as:

...a practice, treatment or service designed to change a person's sexual orientation to heterosexual, to change a person's gender identity or gender expression to cisgender...

Routine Proceedings

Petitioners are concerned this expressly allows counselling or medical surgery to change a child's gender, but prohibits the child from seeking support to detransition to his or her birth gender. Bill C-6 would restrict the choices of LGBT Canadians concerning sexuality and gender by prohibiting access to any professional or spiritual support freely chosen to limit sexual behaviour or to detransition.

Therefore, the people who have signed this petition call on the House of Commons to ban coercive and degrading practices designed to change a person's sexual orientation or gender identity, fix Bill C-6 and fix the definition of conversion therapy, thus banning conversion therapy without banning voluntary counselling or criminalizing conversations.

• (1600)

MYANMAR

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is good to be here in person. I am tabling five petitions today.

The first petition is e-petition 3213 with respect to the very concerning situation in Burma.

Petitioners note the military coup that has taken place, the people who have been detained, the people who have been killed and the ongoing efforts of peaceful protestors to bring about true, proper democracy, as well as inclusion, pluralism and reconciliation among different ethnic communities.

Petitioners are calling on the government not to be silent about these issues and to take appropriate action, use the Special Economic Measures Act to sanction individuals who are involved in human rights abuses. They are calling for further study by Parliament, for clear condemnation of violence and for support from the Government of Canada for the various non-violent movements in Myanmar and Canada that are highlighting the issues around the military coup.

I thank all those who have signed, and various members of the various communities who have been very active in highlighting the situation there. I am sure all members stand with the people of Burma during these challenging times in their pursuit of democracy, justice and pluralism.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is on another important international human rights issue, which is the genocide of Uighurs and other Turkic Muslims in China.

Petitioners are calling on the government to recognize the genocide and put in place appropriate response measures that recognize our responsibility to protect an international law of measures, such as reforms to supply chain legislation and Magnitsky sanctions.

Routine Proceedings

ETHIOPIA

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the third petition highlights the situation in the Tigray region of Ethiopia. It is calling for action by the Government of Canada to support full humanitarian access, independent monitoring and international investigation into credible reports of war crimes and gross violations of human rights law.

Petitioners are also calling on the Government of Canada to engage directly with the Ethiopian and Eritrean governments on this conflict and to promote short, medium and long-term election monitoring.

CONVERSION THERAPY

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fourth petition, similar to others that have been tabled today, concerns Bill C-6. Petitioners would like to see a ban on conversion therapy. They would also like to see the government fix the definition and correct the errors in Bill C-6, so it clearly targets conversion therapy and is not an expansive definition that bans private conversations that would have nothing to do with conversion therapy, as it has been historically understood.

HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fifth and final petition I am tabling today is in support of Bill S-204, a bill in the other place that would make it a criminal offence for a person to be complicit in organ harvesting and trafficking by going abroad and receiving an organ that had been taken from a patient without that patient's consent. It also contains provisions by which a person could be deemed inadmissible to Canada if they were involved in organ harvesting and trafficking. Petitioners hope to see Bill S-204 passed by this Parliament.

CONVERSION THERAPY

Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I too would like to table a petition signed by Canadians concerned about the impact of Bill C-6 on the choices available to Canadians, including the LGBTQ community.

The petitioners join the voices of thousands of Canadians who are calling on the House to, one, ban coercive, degrading practices that are designed to change a person's sexual orientation or gender identity; two, ensure no laws discriminate against Canadians by limiting the services they can receive based on their sexual orientation or gender identity; three, allow parents to speak with their own children about sexuality and gender and to set house rules about sex and relationship; four, allow free and open conversation about sexuality and sexual behaviour; and finally, five, avoid criminalizing professional and religious counselling voluntarily requested and consented to by Canadians.

We, in this place, must respect the choices individuals might make when it comes to receiving spiritual counselling and professional support that is freely chosen. Ultimately, we need to fix the definition of conversion therapy in Bill C-6, and I encourage members to work together to get this right on behalf of all Canadians.

● (1605)

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present e-petition 3050, signed by constituents in Nanaimo—Ladysmith. The petitioners are concerned about climate change. They note the process of gas fracking releases methane into the atmosphere. Studies reveal that methane emissions from oil and gas operations in western Canada were almost twice as high as previously thought.

Methane is 80 times more potent as a greenhouse gas in the first 20 years after it is released into the atmosphere. Gas fracking has been linked to water and air contamination and increased risks of asthma, birth defects and cancer. There are gas fracking moratoriums and bans in many other jurisdictions in the world.

For these reasons, the petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to ban hydraulic gas fracking in Canada and accelerate our transition to renewable energy.

CONVERSION THERAPY

Mrs. Tamara Jansen (Cloverdale—Langley City, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to rise today to present a petition from people across the country who have serious concerns about Bill C-6. The petitioners recognize that the overarching definition of conversion therapy used in Bill C-6 will end up causing harm to some of the very people the bill intends to protect.

At the justice committee, members of the LGBTQ community have called the forms of counselling this bill will ban life-saving. They believe it is important to recognize that the definition used by the government in this bill is not used by any medical body anywhere on earth. The petitioners want to see harmful, degrading and coercive practices band.

Let us make sure we get this right by fixing the definition and avoid causing collateral harm to Canadians who would benefit from forms of counselling that may be unintentionally targeted by this bill.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I am presenting a petition on behalf of the paintball and airsoft industries in Canada, in particular Panther Paintball and Airsoft Sports Park in Surrey, B.C. This is a locally owned business that for years has provided employment and a safe place for paintball and airsoft enthusiasts to come and enjoy their favourite games and sports. The employees and participants are very concerned that the measures in Bill C-21 will put an end to this business, this industry and the livelihoods of so many participants across the country.

Airsoft and paintball offer Canadians an opportunity to get fresh air and exercise responsibly and in compliance with all social distancing guidelines. To protect all these great things, the petitioners call for the rejection of Bill C-21.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would ask you to call Motion No. P-2.

Motion No. P-2

That an order of the House do issue for a copy of all unredacted contracts, or purchase agreements, between the government and Pfizer regarding the procurement of the vaccine manufactured by Pfizer for immunization against the SARS-CoV2 virus, commonly known as COVID-19.

[Translation]

Hon. Mona Fortier (Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I ask that this motion for the production of papers be transferred for debate.

• (1610)

The Speaker: The motion is transferred for debate pursuant to Standing Order 97(1).

* * *

[English]

REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY DEBATE

LAURENTIAN UNIVERSITY

The Speaker: I wish to inform the House that I have received a notice of a request for an emergency debate. I invite the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay to rise and make a brief intervention.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today on Standing Order 52(2) to ask for an emergency debate regarding the crisis at Laurentian University. We are not just talking about shutting down a regional university. There are huge impacts that will affect us in the jurisdiction of federal obligations and responsibilities.

[Translation]

In my opinion, it is very important that Parliament address two issues. First, it must talk about the impact that this decision will have on the constitutional rights of Franco-Ontarian communities. I am thinking in particular of the cancellation of the French nursing and midwifery programs. That decision will hinder Franco-Ontarian communities from having access to health care services in their

Government Orders

language, and it undermines the very principle of official languages.

[English]

The other reason I am asking to bring this debate is because it is using the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act, which has never been used against a public institution. If we, as a federal Parliament, say it is okay to use the CCAA to destroy a university that has been there for 60 years, that precedent could be used against any other public institution. It is fine for private enterprise, but public institutions need to have a different standard for addressing financial difficulty.

I believe that puts this issue under the mandate of the federal government. We need to talk about what we are going to do to save Laurentian University, to preserve programs and to establish post-secondary education in a format that is accessible, particularly in rural regions and the far north, where youth outmigration is a huge issue. Laurentian has played a great role, so I am asking my colleagues from all parties to work on this.

I am asking you, Mr. Speaker, to call for this emergency debate tonight so we can get the issue of Laurentian University discussed at the federal level.

[Translation]

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay for his comments.

I am prepared to grant an emergency debate concerning Laurentian University.

[English]

This debate will be held later today at the ordinary hour of daily adjournment.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

ECONOMIC STATEMENT IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2020

The House resumed from April 13 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 third time and passed.

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I will take the opportunity to speak directly to the Canadian public.

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The last few months have been a unique time for us all. We are in a pandemic. In the last few days, the situation seems to have become more fraught, and some citizens have been protesting. Here in Canada, the right to protest is a legitimate right, and when a protest is held in a civilized manner, it is respectable. I urge the people who are protesting by causing mayhem, destroying public property, and attacking businesses and restaurants that are really having a hard time and are not responsible for the present situation, to protest in a civil fashion. I would like to ask the Canadian public to follow public health guidelines, not to give up and not to let their guard down. The vaccines are coming. Unfortunately, in Canada, they are very slow in coming, but they are coming. I am asking the Canadian public not to let their guard down, but to keep their spirits up for a few more weeks. Hopefully, it will only be weeks, and not months. As I said, in Canada, the vaccines are slow in coming, but they are coming. I think it is important to point that out.

The current government eagerly dangled the first vaccines in front of Canadians in December in an attempt to dazzle us. To evaluate the government's strategy, we need look no further than our plummeting global ranking. In December, with a few hundred thousand vaccines, we were ranked first or second. After that, it was radio silence. Sure, Canadians got a nice Christmas gift, but then we dropped to second, and now our ranking is plummeting. It was all smoke and mirrors, and we cannot forget that.

We need to look at how we have dropped in the global rankings. It is rather shameful for us, as Canadians, to be in this position. Canada is used to being a leader, but the current government is not showing much leadership here. Canada looks pretty pathetic with just 2% of Canadians having received both doses. By comparison, Great Britain ranks five spots ahead of us, with 11% of its citizens having received both doses. Worse yet, 25% of our neighbours in the United States have gotten both vaccinations, which is 12 times our rate. Our Prime Minister says that he has a good strategy, but we must have different definitions of "good".

What is the Prime Minister's plan to remedy the situation and protect Canadians? I do not know. I do not want to hear that this is because Canada does not manufacture vaccines. That is just an excuse. Look at Chile. It found ways to get vaccines. Chile has one of the highest vaccination rates after Israel and the United Arab Emirates.

Today, I am participating in the discussion on Bill C-14, an act to implement certain provisions of the economic statement tabled in Parliament on November 30, 2020 and other measures. This bill establishes the spending power set out in the fall economic statement, amends the Income Tax Act to top up the Canada child benefit, closes the loophole in the second version of the Liberals' legislation on commercial rent assistance, amends the Canada student grants and loans program and the Canada Student Financial Assistance Act to waive interest on student loans by 2021, amends the Food and Drugs Act to deal with shortages of therapeutic products, and amends the Borrowing Authority Act and the Financial Administration Act to increase the federal government's borrowing limits.

I want to focus on two things. The bill closes the loophole in the second version of the Liberals' legislation on commercial rent assistance, referring to the Canada emergency rent subsidy or CERS.

• (1615)

This is what the government says about the Canada emergency rent subsidy:

Canadian businesses, non-profit organizations, or charities who have seen a drop in revenue during the COVID-19 pandemic may be eligible for a subsidy to cover part of their commercial rent or property expenses, starting on September 27, 2020, until June 2021. This subsidy will provide payments directly to qualifying renters and property owners, without requiring the participation of landlords. If you are eligible for the base subsidy, you may also be eligible for lockdown support if your business location is significantly affected by a public health order for a week or more.

We know that businesses create jobs and bring in revenue for the federal government. They pay taxes and create wealth.

This program has its share of shortcomings. I said as much to the Minister of Finance and the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance. They both told me that they would resolve the problem. They have a prime opportunity to modify the program.

The program is there to help. In the spring, it was geared to landlords. Renters whose businesses were closed, who were victims, could get a subsidy: 25% from the federal government, 25% from the provincial government, 25% from the landlord and 25% from the renter.

I will give one example among many from my riding. I want to speak for all Canadian businesses that are victims of this rule, and I urge the government to rectify the situation.

The business that owned the closed property qualified for the subsidy. Now, even though the circumstances are the same and the business is the same, only the renter can apply for the CERS, not the property owner. In the example I am talking about, the renter is the son of one of the shareholders in the company that owns the building. Because his father is a shareholder, he is not entitled to the subsidy.

Everywhere we turn, we hear that the current Prime Minister's Liberal government is there to help all Canadians: seniors, youth, families and businesses. I just want to help the government get back on track.

This spring, there was a clause in the program concerning non-arm's length relationships stating that, if a property owner has a non-arm's length relationship with an otherwise eligible tenant, then the lease must be on fair market terms, the total gross rent payable under the lease cannot be higher than fair market rent, and the lease must not have been created or amended after April 1, 2020.

This clause is clear. It is in writing. We should use it. All we have to do is cut and paste to apply it to the new program of last September.

Do we really want to help businesses? The government has a strange way of showing it. However, it now has the opportunity to get back on track and fix the situation. If it does not do so in this bill, I hope it will do it in its budget next week. We are talking about young entrepreneurs who got help from their parents in the past and who need help today to grow their businesses. We all know that people need more help at the start of their careers than at the end.

Since we are short on time, I will proceed to the next point. The government is asking for a blank cheque. We have seen how the government controls spending: it does not, and it has no plan. We in the official opposition are prepared to take the necessary measures to help the government help honest Canadians. However, we do not want to give it a blank cheque.

We asked the government to split the bill, but so far it has not agreed to our request. I would ask the government to be reasonable and to find solutions to help our young entrepreneurs.

• (1620)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to address the member's comments toward the beginning of his speech. The Conservatives have an attitude of wanting to spread misinformation in regard to vaccines. I think it is deplorable, quite frankly, as it comes right from their leadership all the way down. I would ask the member to give his comments.

Let us go to the raw numbers. We know, for example, that Canada will have approximately 44 million doses of vaccines before the end of June. Can the member provide the House with any other country that will have more vaccine doses on a per capita basis than Canada?

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Godin: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my esteemed colleague, the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader. I will take the time he has used in his question.

Can he tell us what is going to happen in the future? The answer is very simple. No, he cannot. The current government continues to make promises and not keep them, as usual.

I would like my colleague to withdraw his comment because what I said is based on actual fact. Only 2% of Canadians have received both doses of the vaccine. As of yesterday, 11% of the population in Great Britain had received both doses, and that figure was 25% in the United States.

I invite my colleague to withdraw his comment.

• (1625)

Ms. Andr  anne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech, in which he mentioned the Canada emergency rent subsidy.

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What can he suggest for our farmers, who still do not have access to the program, since certain expenses are not deferrable so they are not eligible?

I would like to know what he would tell them, because for some farmers, it is a real problem that they are still not eligible for the program.

Mr. Jo  l Godin: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Shefford.

As I mentioned earlier, the government is always going around boasting that they help everybody: young people, seniors, businesses, families, farmers. They say, "No problem, we help everybody."

That is simply not true, and there are concrete examples. I invite my colleague to contact the Minister of Finance so that we can work together to convince the government. Our role as members of the opposition is to make sure the government comes up with solutions and honours its commitments.

[English]

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Madam Speaker, the member did not touch on this a lot, but he did mention students at the beginning of his speech. Certainly, this government has touted how much support it has provided for students. Unfortunately, this bill states that there is \$315 million being waived for a six-month moratorium on student interest, and yet, year after year, the government collects over \$600 million in profit on student loans.

I wonder if the member could comment on that and on what the government should be doing going forward for students.

[Translation]

Mr. Jo  l Godin: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from London—Fanshawe.

The opposition is made up of three different parties, and we have just identified three groups of Canadians that the government is neither serving nor helping. Other members mentioned students and farmers, and I talked about young business owners who are non-arm's length tenants.

This is a great opportunity for the current government to take meaningful action to honour its commitment to these groups, who are not receiving the help the Prime Minister said they would.

[English]

Mr. Marty Morantz (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague from Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier about part 7. Until 2020, the total cumulative debt of Canada was just over \$700 billion. The bill before us, which is essentially buried into a COVID relief bill, would increase that debt limit from roughly \$1.1 trillion to \$1.8 trillion.

Would my hon. colleague agree that something this substantive should be the subject of a separate bill and an entirely separate discussion?

*Government Orders**[Translation]*

Mr. Joël Godin: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley for his question.

Yes, we are asking that Bill C-14 be split in two. We agree with offering help to Canadians, but we do not agree with writing a blank cheque. At the beginning of the pandemic—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I am sorry, but the debate must resume.

The hon. member for Kelowna—Lake Country.

[English]

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak to Bill C-14. I think it is important to note the curious situation we find ourselves in today. Here we are, with the government putting this legislation on its agenda this week, debating the fall economic statement in the middle of April. In yet another example of Liberal mismanagement of important files, we are here debating legislation introduced last year, comprising a whole host of financial measures.

There are some good parts of this legislation, but there are measures that could have been implemented last year to help people. Now, it seems odd debating this when we have a budget set to be released in just five days. Similarly to how the Liberals have no plan for Canada's economic recovery, they had no plan to get Bill C-18, the Canada-U.K. trade continuity agreement, ratified within deadlines, and they also seem to have no plan for Canada's finances.

After years of pre-pandemic deficits since forming government in 2015, with little to show for it, now the federal debt will be well over \$1 trillion, and the Liberals are asking for substantive additional borrowing capacity in this bill, Bill C-14. The staggering asked increase of an additional \$700 billion would put our federal debt just a stone's throw away from the \$2-trillion mark. It took our country over 150 years to reach a trillion-dollar debt, yet the Liberals seemingly want to take us to nearly \$2 trillion in the blink of an eye.

Conservatives have supported programs to help Canadian businesses and not-for-profits that have been struggling under the current government's failure to procure PPE early in the pandemic, sustain jobs, procure vaccines, ramp up domestic vaccine production and put data-driven plans together for rapid testing and at-home testing, all activities many other developed countries did.

Why is the government tabling a bill that has some good measures in it to help many people, and then tagging on raising Canada's maximum borrowing limit by \$700 billion, a 56.8% increase? There is no reason, other than to play politics rather than getting real help to real people in a timely manner. The Liberals have not explained why they need to increase the total federal debt to \$1.83 trillion. Companies do not operate this way; not-for-profits do not operate this way; households do not operate this way. Why does the federal government feel it can operate this way?

Pre-pandemic, the government had years of needless borrowing and debt the Conservatives had warned against, debt that led to a

credit rating cut. Constituents I am hearing from in Kelowna—Lake Country are rightly worried about the challenges we are facing today under the COVID-19 pandemic. They are also terrified about the future we are leaving our children and grandchildren.

At every step of the way, the government has burdened our economy with taxes, investment-stifling regulations and red tape. It has refused to halt tax increases during the pandemic, including from escalator or automatic tax increases. To truly prosper, we must unlock the power of Canadian industry; remove barriers to innovation; remove interprovincial trade barriers; do everything we can to expand exports of agriculture, innovative technologies and manufacturing; and bring our resources to market around the world. This legislation would do none of that.

In November 2020, we learned that the federal deficit for that year alone was going to exceed \$380 billion. We already have over \$1 trillion in federal debt, and this legislation would allow the government to borrow up to \$1.78 trillion. The reality is that under the Liberal government our country has been on the decline. We have had the highest unemployment in the G7. We have had indicators pointing to a debt crisis, dismal vaccine per capita numbers and investment leaving the country. Women have been especially impacted, with over 100,000 women leaving the workforce since the onset of the pandemic.

It is one thing to fund pandemic response programs, and we are willing to do what it takes to support Canadians during this time of crisis. It is another thing entirely for us to be willing to support unchecked borrowing for unspecified initiatives.

The past two weeks have been constituency weeks, and I spent time focused on connecting with residents and local organizations in Kelowna—Lake Country. I hosted three community outreach virtual round table meetings with a focus on three areas: small business, tourism and housing.

● (1630)

My official opposition colleagues who are the shadow ministers for those files joined me to hear from locals on each of those very important topics. I would like to thank the member for Calgary Rocky Ridge, the member for Niagara Falls and the member for Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon.

Groups in attendance included Tourism Kelowna, Kelowna Hotel Motel Association, Association of Canadian Independent Travel Advisors, BC Restaurant and Food Services Association, Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association, Festivals Kelowna, Big White Ski Resort, BC Hotel Association, Downtown Kelowna Association, Community Futures Central Okanagan, Lake Country Chamber of Commerce, Central Okanagan Economic Development Commission, Uptown Rutland Business Association, Kelowna Chamber of Commerce, Association of Interior Realtors, UDI Okanagan, Western Canadian Shippers' Coalition, Canadian Home Builders' Association Central Okanagan, and Journey Home Society.

We received a substantive amount of insights, information and suggestions from what collectively represents well over 5,000 businesses of all sizes and from almost all sectors in Kelowna—Lake Country. There was a lot of consensus on the most important pressing issues that need to be addressed, and many solid recommendations.

Another issue I am hearing about from businesses is that they are advertising for jobs and no one is answering their ads. I was speaking to a construction company owner in Kelowna—Lake Country last week, who is advertising to pay considerably higher than what is the usual wage for the job. People are calling him and saying they will only come to work if they are paid under the table so that they can continue to collect the CRB. If not, they will just relax for a little while yet. He said these people know they will make more working, but they are prepared to stay on the programs as long as possible. How does that help the economy? How does that help that business owner, and how does it help those individuals, ultimately?

I spoke with another business owner, who laid off 30 employees last year, and as the economy reopens he does not feel these employees will be coming back. This is not just about creating jobs. At great effort and expense, he will likely now have to recruit, hire and train all new people. This is their reality.

In my riding of Kelowna—Lake Country, our airport, YLW, is municipally owned, so not only does it feel the effects of the travel reductions, but it was also unable to obtain some of the government support provided to non-municipally owned airports.

Entertainment venues are also under threat. In my community, beloved institutions like the Kelowna Actors Studio and all those who work in the performing arts are in serious jeopardy. The many local arts and cultural organizations have been shuttered for a year. Doing virtual fundraising and a few virtual performances is not sustainable. Musicians have been hit particularly hard. I was speaking to a resident this weekend who told me that two professional musicians he knows in Kelowna—Lake Country are losing their homes right now. Businesses and not-for-profits are looking for a plan for recovery, not a plan to remain shut indefinitely.

The Conservatives put forth a motion asking the government to put forth a plan to safely and gradually reopen our economy when the time to safely do so is right, and the Liberals voted it down. The bill we are debating today, Bill C-14, fails to do so as well. It is only through ensuring that we are fully utilizing all the tools available widely to test and vaccinate those who wish it, as well as putting forth a solid recovery plan where people in all sectors and in all

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parts of the economy and the country are ready to go back to work, that we will have a meaningful recovery plan.

If there is one thing that we have learned so far from the Liberals, it is that it is entirely possible to spend billions of dollars and still leave millions of Canadians behind. Conservatives are working tirelessly to promote a recovery that benefits all Canadians, a recovery that provides jobs and growth in every sector of our economy, in every part of the country, to secure jobs, secure vaccines and PPE, secure our economy, secure mental health and get us back to a road to recovery.

• (1635)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, Conservatives have been raising this issue over and over since we came back for the last reading of this bill, talking about the government wanting to increase and take on more debt, in excess of what is actually being proposed in this legislation. The reality is that all that is being requested is that the ceiling be extended, not to actually take on debt.

As a matter of fact, in order to take on additional debt, a different bill would have to be put forward explaining exactly what that was, so it is a false narrative that the Conservatives are trying to use to justify why they are not going to vote in favour of this, when they know full well that more spending cannot occur unless another bill comes forward outlining what that spending is.

Can the member at least inform the House whether she is aware that another bill would have to be put forward in order to justify and make a decision to spend more money?

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Madam Speaker, the member may not be aware that this issue was brought up and discussed at the finance committee. Questions were asked about the costing-out of the existing programs, which are part of this legislation, and where the difference was, and what that would be used for. During that committee meeting, no answers were provided as to what that would potentially be used for.

Therefore, to increase the debt ceiling to that amount with the hope and trust that things will be coming forth and it will be just fine is not overly transparent. It does not show accountability, it leaves a lot of uncertainty and it is certainly not the way to bring that type of legislation forward.

• (1640)

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Madam Speaker, I was at the Standing Committee on Finance, and I agree with the Conservative member's comments.

The government did a bad job of introducing this idea. Increasing the debt ceiling is a measure that has not been used before by the government in its legislation.

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In my opinion, the government should have taken the time to meet with each party to explain the idea behind the proposal and what needed to be done. However, I can tell the member that, in committee, the Parliamentary Budget Officer assured us that the debt ceiling could be raised, but that each expenditure would have to be voted on, and that the government could not incur expenses during an election campaign, even with sign-off from the person standing in for the Governor General of Canada.

I would like to hear my colleague's comments on that.

[English]

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Madam Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, the legislation was tabled quite some time ago. Of course, a lot has changed since then. A number of points in the legislation would have been helpful for people a long time ago. The legislation has dragged on. We have been continually making recommendations. We have seen from the very beginning—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We need to give an opportunity for one further question.

The hon. member for Hamilton Mountain.

Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Madam Speaker, a year ago, the government, after much pushing by the NDP, realized that seniors and people with disabilities needed financial help because of the higher costs they were facing. One year later, they are facing even higher costs. Food has skyrocketed as have the costs of rent, heat and hydro. Now we are into a third wave, and in Ontario we are in a complete lockdown. Does the member not agree that there has to be something in there, immediately, for our low-income seniors and people with disabilities until we find a permanent resolution?

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Madam Speaker, this goes back to the point of costs increasing for everyone. We have called for the government to halt all tax increases during this time. Tax increases make the costs go up for everyone. One of the most prominent ones is the increase of carbon tax, which we know just—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Northumberland—Peterborough South.

Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is my privilege today to rise virtually in the House of Commons to speak to Bill C-14, which enacts certain fiscal components of the fall fiscal update.

I want to begin by speaking about some of the advantages of the bill. Steps like raising the Canada child benefit are essential to maintaining gender equality during this pandemic. When lockdowns happened, it has been very difficult for women to find child care for their children. It is clear that the pandemic has disproportionately affected women.

There is no doubt the relief for student loans will help students. As our students graduate and struggle to find jobs, it is clear that they, too, have been deeply affected by the pandemic and by the high employment rates that have come with it.

We have also continued to call for changes to the rent subsidy program, some of which has been included in Bill C-14.

While the legislation does make some important changes, in many ways it also misses the mark. While a certain amount of spending and investment can be expected, and actually encouraged during these times, Bill C-14 would give the government unfettered power to put Canada in a precarious situation. It would give the government the power of borrowing without the appropriate accountability and oversight.

The fact of the matter is that the COVID pandemic is far from over. In fact, Canada just reached an ominous milestone. For the first time in the global pandemic, Canada has reported more new COVID-19 cases per capita than the United States of America. How is this possible? How is it that many countries across the world are beginning to reopen their economies, beginning a new normal, while we hit a third wave that seems to be even worse than the ones that preceded it?

The answer is simple. We do not have enough vaccines. The procurement efforts have been botched and have been a failure. It has come with a deadly cost to Canadians. Whereas our counterparts in the U.S., UK and Israel are beginning to reopen, across Canada, we are re-entering devastating lockdowns.

It is with great sadness that I speak about the devastating impact this has had on our people. Many Canadians, including those in my riding of Northumberland—Peterborough South, have been forced to shut down for the better part of a year. According to Stats Canada, 60% of businesses reported a drop in revenue between 2020 and 2019, with certain industries being affected harder than others.

My riding of Northumberland—Peterborough South is home to some of the most beautiful landscapes and some of the most charming small towns in all of Ontario. Because of this, many of my constituents rely heavily on the tourism sector to survive and thrive. The hospitality, tourism sector, unfortunately, has been one of the hardest hit in Canada.

New statistics are now suggesting that 50% of Canadians are on the brink of insolvency. As we face more lockdowns, many Canadians are barely holding on and are continuing to rely on federal stimulus, like the CERB and CRB.

Mark Rosen, chair of the Canadian Association of Insolvency and Restructuring Professionals, recently had this to say.

I am having trouble speaking, Madam Speaker, due to a member not having his mute on.

● (1645)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Could the hon. member for Simcoe—Grey please mute his microphone.

The hon. member may proceed.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Madam Speaker, what we cannot see in the insolvency data is how things will change as the taps are turned off, which brings about a very important point. The government's programs have created a bridge, but it needs to be a bridge to a better day. At the end of the day, the programs are a Band-Aid and they are not a substitute for prolonged, strong economic activities and economic opportunities. They will not be able to, in the long term, replace the lost income that people face over our government's inability to procure vaccines.

Our people need jobs. We need to bring work and economic opportunities back to Canadians. While the Conservatives have supported them and, indeed, they were necessary, the benefits have to be a bridge to something. They cannot be a bridge to nowhere. Our people should not have to choose between their health and insolvency. We need a safe plan to reopen our economy, a plan that includes vaccinating our population as soon as possible.

We also need to ensure this plan will not hurt Canadians for generations to come. As currently written, Bill C-14 is a \$600-billion blank cheque to allow the Canadian government to spend how it would like. With no accountability for the spending or oversight, this will undoubtedly hurt Canadians for years to come. Large budgets, deficits and debt are all serious issues, not only for our government but for all Canadians. Interest payments are a major consequence of that.

Governments must make interest payments on their debt similar to how households must pay interest on borrowing-related mortgages, vehicles and credit card spending. Revenue directed toward interest payments means that in the future there will be less money available for tax relief or government programs, such as health care, education and social services. In reality, to pay off these interest payments, the government will likely have to raise taxes, raise interest rates and cut spending on essential government programs. This will be a painful burden for Canadians as many are already so close to insolvency.

The government needs to detail its long-term plan for the economic recovery. As former U.S. treasury secretary Larry Summers has often said, growth not consumption must be a priority of expansionary fiscal policy. In fact, our own deputy finance minister Michael Sabia agreed that economic growth was absolutely critical to the future prosperity of our country.

The expansion of the economy will create much-needed economic opportunities for all. Most important, that growth will help those in an economically challenging position. The impact of growth, or lack thereof, can be illustrated in the last six years with what the Liberal government has done to our most vulnerable. During a period of record-low economic growth, Canadian billionaires have done all right, as my colleagues in the NDP have frequently and rightfully pointed out.

The impact of low economic growth is nearly always disproportionately felt by those in economically precarious positions, while billionaires and Liberal well-connected insiders have done okay. They often have the connections and the resources to pivot away from economic challenges. Meanwhile, Canadian workers are stuck shouldering the brunt of a shrinking economy as they lose their jobs, close their businesses and even lose their homes.

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The good news is that while a shrinking economy can create havoc, poverty and hardship, an expanding economy can equally create prosperity, wealth and, in some instances, even happiness. Nearly all economists on the left and the right agree that a growing economy is our best defence against unemployment and poverty. How do we achieve that? We need to create an environment where private actors are rewarded and recognized for effectively contributing their talents and their efforts to society through efficient markets. That may sound complicated, but it really is not. All that really means is that every Canadian going to work, whether a CEO, a sales professional, a clerk or a tradesperson, feels as though he or she is getting a fair shake.

Governments can play a positive role in achieving confidence in the economy. They can put in place the regulations to ensure that actors are competing in an ethical and sustainable manner. This is absolutely a critical role, and all strong economies require some level of regulation and taxation to ensure equity and justice. However, the Liberal government, nor any government in history, cannot create economic growth. They merely put in place the conditions required for growth.

It is the private sector, everyday Canadians, who power economic growth through relentless determination, endless innovation and infinite work ethic, as they strive to achieve their dreams to buy homes, to own a business, to send their children to university and to help achieve a stronger, more prosperous Canada for all.

• (1650)

While governments cannot create economic growth, they can destroy it. The reality is that overly expansive governments suck up the resources, the oxygen, of the free market economy from the private sector, depriving businesses and individuals of much-needed capital to fuel their economic activity. These same governments over-regulate and suffocate the energy and drive of small business and destroy the dreams of millions. They erode the rewards and recognition of work to the point where an individual's desire to work is reduced. The last 100 years of history are littered with governments that have destroyed their own economies through policies that expand government at the cost of their citizens. From the USSR to Cuba to Venezuela, we have seen poverty and destruction caused by overinflated government policies.

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Why, then, in this time of extreme economic insecurity, would the government ask for a permanent increase to the debt ceiling of \$600 billion, a debt that would ultimately be financed by Canadians? It is a burden that will diminish our prospects for a growing and prosperous economy by starving it of the resources Canadians need to start businesses and create jobs and by disincentivizing work. There will also be ever-increasing taxation. What Canadians need now is a rapidly expanding economy, not an ever-expanding debt.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have two quick questions for the member.

First, I noticed he chose his words very carefully when he was talking about the last measure of the bill. He said that it gives the government the power to borrow, and he did not reference the power to spend. Would he confirm that the government cannot spend?

Second, I noticed that when he was talking about vaccination rates among G7 countries, he conveniently cherry-picked the two that happen to be ahead of us, the U.S.A. and the United Kingdom. We are ahead of the rest, which are Italy, France, Germany, Australia and Japan. I wonder if the member can explain why he chose to cherry-pick those two particular countries?

• (1655)

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Madam Speaker, the fact is that when we look at completely vaccinated individuals, Canada actually ranks quite low. Obviously no one is fully vaccinated, inoculated or protected, to the extent that vaccines can do this, until they have received both doses, and Canada is well behind. When we look at other countries, such as the U.K. and the U.S., they are fully opening, as has been reported in the media by CNN's Jake Tapper. Canada is falling behind.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his speech.

I would like to raise two points. First, we are obviously all concerned about the debt. Second, my learned colleague from Joliette raised a specific point a little earlier, stating that each expenditure must be approved.

Is the member aware of this and does he believe it makes sense? I would like his opinion on that. I would also like to know what he thinks about the lack of support for the tourism and cultural industries and for small organizations that are really struggling. There are some in each of our ridings.

[English]

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Madam Speaker, I will start with the second part of the question. I certainly believe in supporting the arts. The Capitol Theatre and the many other arts institutions in Northumberland—Peterborough South certainly require support. The pandemic has been very difficult for them.

On the second part, I liken the member's point to the individual—

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Joliette is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Madam Speaker, the interpretation is not working.

[English]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Interpretation is working now.

The hon. member for Northumberland—Peterborough South.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Madam Speaker, the arts are incredibly important. The Capitol Theatre is in my riding, as are many other great arts institutions, and they have been hit so hard. We would agree that the pandemic has been very difficult on them.

As to the second part, I would like to use an analogy about individuals. If I took out a line of credit for half a million dollars, it would be an important household decision. I dare say that my spouse would not be too happy if I did not receive her approval before getting a \$500,000 line of credit, even though I had not identified how I would spend it.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Madam Speaker, my question is very much connected to the current third wave of the COVID crisis.

A third wave, as we know, is hitting Canadian workers hard, especially essential workers. We are hearing disturbing reports that ICUs are filling up with predominately essential workers, and many younger people as well. Obviously, this is coinciding with the devastating impacts of the variant cases.

For the NDP, it has been critical to fight for paid sick days. We recognize that they are a way to help save lives at this point. Obviously, we are very concerned that there is not widespread support for paid sick days for working people in our country.

Why do the Conservatives fail to stand up for workers when it comes to key measures like this one that could save lives now?

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her advocacy on behalf of workers.

The best possible way to help workers is to make sure that we get vaccines here in Canada, get jabs into arms and get Canadians safely back to work.

• (1700)

[Translation]

POINTS OF ORDER

ROYAL RECOMMENDATION REQUIREMENT FOR BILL C-265

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am rising on a point of order in response to the Speaker's statement of March 22 on the need for a royal recommendation for Bill C-265, an act to amend the Employment Insurance Act with regard to illness, injury or quarantine, introduced by the hon. member for Salaberry—Suroît.

We have already heard the arguments of the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands in this matter. During his remarks, he mentioned my efforts to amend Bill C-24 by proposing a similar amendment in committee. The committee chair ruled that the amendment required a royal recommendation. The Bloc Québécois member on the committee voted in favour of the royal recommendation, but I think that was an error in judgment.

The rule does not apply to this bill, because this is a different situation. The House of Commons twice asked to increase the number of weeks Canadians can receive EI sickness benefits from 15 to 50, once by a majority vote on an opposition motion, and once in a unanimous vote upholding the majority decision. Private members' bills rarely get such strong support from the House.

The government also committed to increasing the number of weeks Canadians can receive EI benefits. I think that this situation is unique in that there was unanimous support of the House of Commons. The Speaker should recognize this unique situation before ruling on the bill. The New Democrats believe that the bill should be implemented.

I simply wanted these considerations and this position on the record.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I would like to thank the hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona for his remarks. The Chair will consider the matter and come back with a ruling.

The hon. member for Edmonton-Centre has the floor.

[English]

* * *

ECONOMIC STATEMENT IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2020

The House resumed 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 third time and passed.

Mr. James Cumming (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise virtually in the House today to speak to Bill C-14, a second act respecting certain measures in response to COVID-19. Before I get into the specifics of the bill and economic recovery, we must all recognize that there is no feasible way that we as a country can make any kind of significant recovery efforts without addressing and conquering this health crisis.

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Small businesses will continue to flounder and shut their doors. New graduates who once looked toward the future with optimism will continue to send in job applications with no response. Single-parent households will continue to struggle, trying to make ends meet with the \$2,000 government cheques they receive that are meant to justify the fact that they cannot return to work and provide for their children.

I cannot believe I am saying this, but currently Canada ranks far below our international peers per capita for full vaccinations. Last week, Canada made headlines worldwide in the most embarrassing way when CNN reported that we were outpacing the U.S.A. for COVID infections. Canada is behind all kinds of countries in vaccinations. Canadians need to be using all the tools available to fight COVID-19. We need vaccines, we need rapid tests and we need the information to secure our future and rebuild our economy.

The Conservatives want to see the Liberals succeed in securing these tools for Canadians, especially the vaccines, but the Liberals have failed to secure made-in-Canada vaccines until the end of 2021. For the rest of 2021, Canada's vaccine rollout will be at the whims of foreign countries and companies.

It is clear the Liberal government was late in ramping up vaccine manufacturing. Canadians deserve better than this, but why did the Liberal government wait so long to act? Why did it decide to partner with China? We are so frustrated at the government's failure to secure vaccines and get them to Canadians. We cannot secure jobs and cannot secure our economy until Canadians are vaccinated.

The singular focus of the government at this point in time should not be on buyback programs or small infrastructure projects. It should be all hands on deck to procure vaccines that it failed to deliver to Canadians so we can get back to normal like the rest of the world is heading toward.

The U.S., the country right next door, recognized the importance of vaccines and therapeutics early on, investing \$20.5 billion for their development. Earlier this month, the U.S. moved the country's active travel advisory for Canada to very high. I appreciate the Liberals' current interest in this area, but it is unfortunate that it comes at such a late stage in the game. Supporting individuals and businesses in the way they currently are, while important, is not sustainable. We have to have strategies and a plan to protect those who are compromised and get the economy back on track.

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Bill C-14 was the government's attempt, during the fall economic statement, to put forward a plan for Canadians that would instill hope and confidence in this country's ability to recover. However, given how poorly the government's vaccine plan panned out, I fear that the economic recovery will yield results that are nearly as dismal.

Just as my Conservative colleagues voted in favour of providing assistance to Canadians early on in the pandemic, of course we will continue to recognize the need for assistance in these unprecedented times.

Bill C-14 has introduced some temporary and immediate support for low- and middle-income families who are entitled to the Canada child benefit. The bill would ease the burden of student debt to 1.4 million Canadians by eliminating the interest on repayment of the federal portion of Canada student loans and Canada apprentice loans for up to a year. It would also provide funding for part of the new safe long-term care fund to provide support to long-term facilities, which is critical and very important. There would be up to \$262 million for COVID initiatives, including testing, research for countermeasures, vaccine funding and developing border and travel measures. These are all worthy. The bill would also formally provide that an expense such as rent can qualify as an eligible expense under the Canada emergency rent subsidy when it comes due so businesses can access the subsidy before the expense is actually paid.

With the dramatic increase in the amount the bill dictates the government can borrow, which is more than \$700 billion and \$100 billion in discretionary spending, one would assume that this would carve out a path for Canadians to get back to work. However, as mentioned before, any attempt to recover will be thwarted unless we can get vaccines into Canadians' arms. Only then can we meaningfully talk about recovery.

• (1705)

Like my colleague, the member for Carleton, passionately reminds us, it is the dignity that comes with earning a paycheque and the freedom that comes with the ability to control one's own finances. At the moment, Canadians are experiencing joblessness worse than the G7 average. This gives me absolutely no confidence that offering another \$100 billion in discretionary spending would yield any type of meaningful result.

Although we experienced recent job growth, there is no doubt again that those jobs created would be lost again because of the shutdowns due to the COVID-19 variants. We need a plan to come out of COVID, create jobs and get our economy back on track. That cannot happen without people earning paycheques. We cannot permanently put our economy on the national credit card. Our jobs will provide Canadians with personal financial security. Jobs afford families good child care, housing, post-secondary schooling, nutrition and recreation. Jobs provide tax revenue, reduce government debt burden and protect our cherished social net.

Integral to our build-back, but equally important to sustain our country's growth, are two metrics that have been falling over the past few years: Canadian competitiveness and Canadian innovation. With a country of our size and sparsity of population, there is no way we can rely on just our internal economy to lead us to recovery.

Canada is going to need massive growth and exports to fuel any kind of recovery and provide the capacity to repay our enormous debt. Spending and infrastructure should be predominantly focused on those things that improve productivity, competitiveness and access to markets. Private sector innovation is what is going to lead us into the future and provide us with the technology we need to both shift to global sustainability and reinstate ourselves as a world economic leader.

In Bill C-14, there is no mention of the resource sector, which is Canada's number one export, nor does it recognize the importance of this sector for our recovery. The world wants and needs more of our natural resources and we should be thinking about how we can expand our market share instead of hastening its decline. With the abundance of natural resources we have been blessed with, we have been handed the keys to the castle. The least we could do is plan for a lessening of our dependence on foreign supply because we have it all right here.

We fell out of the top 10 ranking for the most competitive economies. We have fallen near the bottom of our peer group on innovation, ranking 17. In 2019, mineral fuels, including oil, accounted for 22% of our country's total exports, the number one exported product, and we have the third-largest reserves. We have enormous potential in minerals, agriculture, forestry, pulp and paper.

My colleague, the member for Abbotsford, offered eight specific recommendations to help drive the economy and get people back to work. Here are five more for free.

The government could fast-track decisions on the \$14-billion LNG gas project in Quebec, on top of another \$6 billion in similar projects waiting for sign-off across Canada.

The government could speed up approval for job-creating projects large and small. The OECD ranks Canada number 34 out of 35 OECD countries on the amount of time it takes to obtain a permit for a general construction project. All three levels of government must commit to provide the world's fastest permits for factories, shopping centres, parks, mines and more. Canada should be the place to build projects.

The government could ensure infrastructure is targeted toward productivity and competitiveness.

The government could unlock the innovation and technology sector, the quantity and quality of R and D, IP protection and strength, and immigration policies that attract talent, and make sure we support these industries that desperately need more people.

The government could repeal the tanker ban on the west coast, a project that had indigenous backing and would have opened up the Asian market.

At the end of the day, the government has an entire toolbox of tools at its disposal. It has a spending account in excess of \$700 billion. It has access to the most educated population on the planet. It has more land than it knows what to do with and resource potential beyond compare. It has absolutely everything it needs to get this country well on its way to recovery, just like other countries with much less have done. We can all bounce back if it so wishes. The question will be whether it wants Canadians to emerge from this pandemic reliant on their government and receiving cheques from the state each month or resilient, thanks to their government and the strategic steps it took, able to rebuild from this tragedy with a newfound sense of strength and pride in both themselves individually and the will of the country.

• (1710)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for the five free pieces of advice he gave toward the end. The second piece he gave was about building permits. That is odd. The last time I checked, building permits were issued by municipalities or regional governments, and they directly fall under the jurisdiction of the provincial government in terms of setting how they are going to be acquired. I know the member for Carleton has been raising this too, because apparently it is a really good sensationalized point to bring up in this House repeatedly.

I just want to make sure this member is aware that building permits are not issued by the federal government.

Mr. James Cumming: Madam Speaker, I am fully aware. I spent over 20 years of my life in the construction industry. I can tell members the federal government does take a role in providing regulations that could potentially delay the ability to get a permit. It is not just about the permits at a municipal level; it is about the federal government interacting in a jurisdiction with regulations that make it even more difficult to get anything done in this country.

• (1715)

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech.

When he addressed the question, he insisted on major projects and accelerated approval and financing. He mentioned the GNL Québec project.

I would like to hear what he has to say about Quebec's and the provinces' environmental sovereignty. Does he not think that it is important to respect the regional authorities for this type of approval?

[English]

Mr. James Cumming: Madam Speaker, I absolutely understand. I come from Alberta, and I understand what jurisdiction lies with the province and with the federal government. What the federal government should not do is impose additional regulations and additional burden on these projects to try to stop that investment coming back into the provinces. It is time that we got things built in this

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country again, and whether it be in Quebec, Alberta or the Maritimes, it is time that we encouraged investment into this country and allowed industry to start to build things again.

Mrs. Tamara Jansen (Cloverdale—Langley City, CPC): Madam Speaker, from what I can see, Bill C-14 is designed to allow the government to operate without a budget by giving itself huge new borrowing increases. The Liberals assure us they have our backs over and over ad nauseam, while every new COVID support program keeps rolling out with major flaws. So many programs gave much more money than necessary to those who did not need it, so much that the finance minister had to start calling her overpayments “preloaded stimulus”. When we look at part 7, which would increase the borrowing authority with an astronomical hike, the Liberals are asking us to just trust they will do a better job going forward.

I would like to ask the member why, for instance, the new HAS-CAP is such a failure at helping the highly affected sectors it was designed to help. The government had a year to make something that works, and yet highly affected sector businesses are being denied loans because they cannot provide a revenue projection when they are closed. Why does every program fail so badly?

Mr. James Cumming: Madam Speaker, it is a great question. Why did they fail? It is because of their design. They bring out these programs in rapid fashion, make an announcement and say the details are to follow. Once the details follow, the private sector says that it does not work for the need. It is time the government got serious about designing programs that actually will result in outcomes, and we see that with our high unemployment rate and high spending rate. We are not getting the outcomes we need and Canadians deserve, so it is time the government does a better job than what they have been doing to date.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to rise and speak to Bill C-14, a government bill that would implement various fiscal measures, including raising the debt limit. We are doing so, relatively on the eve of the next federal budget coming on Monday, April 19, the first federal budget in two years. As a result of the delays, we have had to endure waiting for what used to be annual event and is now highly anticipated.

With Bill C-14 as well as the upcoming budget in mind, I want to talk about our fiscal situation and make some proposals. Before that, I want to talk about this broad concept of resilience.

Resilience is the ability to recover from difficulties. A core responsibility of government is to try to build up resilience within our government, within our institutions and within our national capacity.

Resilience means thinking about the things that could go wrong and preparing for them, even if nobody is talking about them.

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Resilience is a critical job of government because it is something that could otherwise be undervalued. It can be undervalued by the private market. People do not always think about the various things that could go wrong and prepare for them. It is also something that can be undervalued particularly by government because it can be undervalued by the political market. That is, there is a risk maybe that governments' decisions to prepare for, or failure to prepare for, certain things that could go wrong are not top of mind for voters.

In the last election, I do not recall being asked by any voter if I thought the government was prepared for a global pandemic. I do not recall being asked by any voter if I thought the government was prepared for the possibility of a foreign invasion. I do not recall being asked by any voter if I thought the government was prepared for a cataclysmic natural disaster. That is natural.

Generally, as individuals, as consumers, as voters, we are not thinking about the possibility of grand disaster. We are more inclined to think about our immediate needs and our immediate challenges, but these are things that can happen as we have seen with COVID-19. It should bring home for all of us the fact that major, disastrous, global-scale events are things that can happen and the degree to which we think about them or prepare for them before they happen really matters in terms of our ability to engage those situations when they come up.

This should remind us of the importance of thinking about resilience and about whether we are ready to overcome major challenges that could come along. Therefore, it is easy and natural, coming out of a global pandemic, to think about being resilient in the face of another pandemic: What are the things we learned about dealing with public health pandemics so we are ready in case of another pandemic?

The broader lesson should be what can we do to prepare ourselves to respond to large-scale disasters. The next big challenge that comes at our country, unexpectedly, might not be a pandemic. It might be some other kind of challenge: a cataclysmic economic event, a cataclysmic natural disaster, something in terms of national security, etc. Thinking about resilience and developing a resilience mentality should be about, as governments and as parliamentarians, asking questions about our preparedness for disasters, those that are maybe undervalued in our typical day-to-day political discussions and by the private market. Developing a resilience mentality requires us not just to think about how we should have been ready for this crisis, but how we should prepare for future crises.

We know clearly that the job of government of preparing for disaster even if it is not on the public mind is something the government really failed to deliver on in terms of the COVID-19 pandemic. We did not have the required protective equipment. We did not have the manufacturing capacity required to respond to the immediate needs that came up. We did not have an early warning system that was operational. We had destroyed stockpiles. We were not prepared with the kind of social structures and systems that would have allowed us to react quickly. Right at the beginning, we should have had the PPE required, given people the right advice out of the gate on masking, put in place strong effective measures at the border right away and had a plan for tracing systems. All of these were thought of and enacted in other countries.

• (1720)

However, we did not have the structures and systems, or the necessary equipment, in place at the beginning. We had not built our systems to be resilient, in terms of health.

Recently, in the official opposition, we have talked a lot about being resilient in the face of possible security threats. We have a government that still has not made a decision with respect to Huawei. It said it would make a decision before the last election, and here we are, on the eve of what the government seems to want to be the next election. We will see. In any event, it has been years since the government's original self-imposed deadline for making a decision about Huawei.

We hear repeatedly, including from the member for Ottawa South, who chairs the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians and who is a member of the government, about concerns of foreign state-backed interference in Canada. We have heard from that important committee that we are not responding effectively. We are not prepared for it.

What about our fiscal resilience, in the context of the budget or in the context of Bill C-14? Are we ready for the kinds of problems that could be being created by the government's fiscal policy?

In the last year, we have spent more money than we ever have before. That goes without saying. However, we have actually borrowed more money, in real terms, in the last year than Canada did during World War II. In real terms, Canada borrowed less during all of World War II than we did in the last year. Of course, the COVID pandemic and the needs associated with it are very significant, but so were the Second World War and the needs associated with it for Canada, as well.

We have run up more debt in the last year. It is more than half of the total debt run up in all of Canada's history until this point. However, at the Liberal convention, were they debating how to get our public finances under control? Actually, they were talking about more spending. They were talking about putting in place a new universal basic income program, which is effectively more government spending, and expanding deficits on a permanent basis.

In the face of those conversations happening within the government, I think we have to ask how long this is going to last, and are we resilient? Are we prepared for the possibility of a serious fiscal problem? From time to time, countries that cannot control their spending experience runaway inflation. They experience various kinds of fiscal collapse.

The consequences of that for Canadians would be significant. We would put ourselves in a position where we could not get out of those problems, and could not just spend more money to address the challenges that people would face in that kind of situation.

Alas, what we have seen from the government is a “live for today and let tomorrow take care of itself” mentality on health, security and spending. It is thinking about today, not thinking about preparing ourselves for what might happen in the future.

As Conservatives, we have always believed in making the hard argument of thinking about the next generation, preparing for threats and challenges that we might not be able to see, taking a precautionary approach and ensuring that we are able to pass the goods of civilization on to the next generation. This is rather than undermining our position of public health, security and fiscal well-being, and leaving the next generation with a possible disaster.

We need to be thinking about resilience across a broad spectrum of issues, preparing for challenges and being ready to respond to those challenges.

I worry that sometimes in Canada, we have been victims of our success, in that we have gotten used to things going well. We have not always prepared for serious disasters because we do not have the same experiences of them here as maybe have happened in other parts of the world.

However, we have not achieved a level of prosperity, security or fiscal well-being by accident, and it will be not maintained without hard work. The path the government is putting us on right now is not one of resilience. It is one that puts our institutions and our national well-being in great danger. This is why we need to refocus our attention on the values of resilience and preparedness for the future.

• (1725)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member criticizes us for what we were talking about in our convention when we were talking about important social programs for Canadians. At his convention a week before, the Conservatives were discussing whether or not climate change was real, and 54% of them said it was not.

Let me jump to another thing. On the topic of resilience, the member talked about why the world did not know right at the beginning, on day one, that masks should be worn to fight the pandemic, as though he does not realize that this was an evolving threat that nobody had faced before. The World Health Organization did not even start saying that people should wear masks until June 5, 2020. My own community only started advising it about a week or two later.

Can the member explain to us, since he had all of this insight into what we should have been doing right on day one, why he did not come forward and share it with us?

• (1730)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, the member should look at my Twitter feed and Facebook feed. He will find posts from me in March of last year talking about why people should wear masks. Why was I saying those things in the House and elsewhere? It is because the countries that were successfully fighting the pandemic had been deploying masks for years. We had the SARS pandemic over 15 years before, and at that time the government created a stockpile of masks. Taiwan, Singapore and South Korea were giv-

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ing people advice and direction about masks. Mask-wearing was widespread, and they still have far lower rates today.

The World Health Organization was wrong, as was Dr. Tam, as was the CDC, but the data was out there. The member can check. There were people in the House who were saying to wear masks, but his government was saying not to, and it was harmful misinformation, because—

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

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his presentation on Bill C-14.

My colleague spoke at length about resilience. If there is one area that has been very resilient it is health care. Everyone who has worked hard to take care of COVID-19 victims has shown resilience. Therefore I say kudos to all those working in health care.

My colleague also spoke a lot about the importance of preparedness and being ready for the next crisis. Once again, that is exactly what people in the health care system in Quebec and in the provinces are asking for.

I would like my colleague to comment on that. This is happening after the Liberals and the Conservatives made cuts to the health transfers for the production of vaccines in Canada. It is important to reinvest so we can produce our own vaccines and to have stable and predictable increases in the health transfers of up to 35% of costs.

[English]

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, I want to first agree with my colleague that individuals within the health system have shown a great deal of resilience and courage in their response. My critique was with the government's level of preparedness for this situation. In particular, it was not building up the capacity in advance to support health workers in those efforts. In the early days especially, there were many concerns by people in the health system about having access to basic equipment and whether they would be able to access the equipment they needed to be safe while providing vital health services.

With respect to the member's question about transfers to the provinces, under Conservative governments, transfers to provinces went up significantly every year for health, and we can certainly have those debates about appropriate levels. However, it is not just about resources. There are certain things that were missed by this government, in terms of having plans in place and maintaining stockpiles, that would have been relatively less intense in requirements for resourcing if they had been done in advance. It is not just about resources. It is also about thinking ahead.

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his speech, for his concern and care for potential crises, and the need to plan for them to protect our children and make sure they are prepared.

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I would like to know why the member did not mention climate change at all as one of those potential crises and if he believes in climate change. Do we need to do something about it, such as banning fracking, not building any more pipelines and moving away from fossil fuels toward a clean energy economy?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, if I had a 20-minute speech, I would have had many more things to say.

I agree with the member that human-caused climate change is real. It is a problem, and it requires a response. As Winston Churchill said, "It is not enough to do our best. We must know what to do and then do our best," so I would quibble with some of the member's proposed solutions.

What we see from the left-of-centre parties in the House are often policies that would simply push industrial activity outside of the country and not actually respond to the global challenge of emissions. Our party's approach has always been to encourage a stronger environmental performance by supporting development that is cleaner and working to export that technology.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have two unanimous consent motions.

There have been discussions among the parties, and if you seek it, I believe you will find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, notwithstanding any standing order or usual practice of the House, on Thursday, April 15, 2021, Statements by Ministers, pursuant to Standing Order 33, shall be taken up at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions to permit a minister of the Crown to make a statement, a member from each recognized party and a member from the Green Party to be permitted to reply to the statement, the time taken for these statements shall be added to the time provided for Government Orders, and after each member has replied, or when no member rises to speak, whichever comes first, the following motion shall be deemed adopted on division: "That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty the Queen expressing the House's condolences following the passing of His Royal Highness, Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, and its hopes that the expression of the high esteem in which His Royal Highness was held may comfort Her Majesty and the members of the royal family in their bereavement";

and

That a message be sent to the Senate informing their Honours that this House passed the said address and requesting their Honours to unite with this House in the said address.

• (1735)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): All those opposed to the hon. member moving the motion will please say nay.

The House has heard the terms of the motion. All those opposed to the motion will please say nay.

(Motion agreed to)

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

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order, special order or usual practice of the House, during the debate tonight, pursuant to Standing Order 52, no quorum calls, dilatory motions or requests for unanimous consent shall be received by the Chair.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): All those opposed to the hon. member moving the motion will please say nay.

The House has heard the terms of the motion. All those opposed to the motion will please say nay.

(Motion agreed to)

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ECONOMIC STATEMENT IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2020

The House resumed 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 third time and passed.

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

Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): 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 would invite them to rise and indicate it to the Chair.

The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

[English]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I would request a recorded vote.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Pursuant to order made on Monday, January 25, the division stands deferred until Thursday, April 15, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, I believe if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent to see the clock at 5:56 p.m. so we can begin private members' hour.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): It being now 5:56 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

SEX-SELECTIVE ABORTION ACT

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC) moved that Bill C-233, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (sex-selective abortion), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

She said: Madam Speaker, one of my responsibilities I have greatly enjoyed and look forward to again is attending many of the trade shows throughout my riding of Yorkton—Melville. They are an incredible way to connect with hard-working Canadians. I always bring along petitions to ensure I am responding to the concerns of my constituents, everything from firearms to palliative care and also a petition on sex-selective abortion.

Every member of the House will know that Canadians are not shy in voicing their deeply-held opinions on matters of conscience. Like a majority of Canadians, many expressed to me how they firmly believed in continued access to abortion. However, as we talked, all were horrified to learn of the practice of sex-selective abortion in Canada, which is the deliberate termination of a pregnancy due solely to the sex of a child. Further, they were shocked to learn that Canada had no law against it. Needless to say, those who were at first very apprehensive were very quick to sign my petition.

Sex-selection abortion is wrong, it is a discriminatory practice on the basis of sex and it takes place in our country because we have no law against it. As members of Parliament, we have been sent here to represent the Canadians' concerns and their needs. That is why it is an honour and privilege to rise today to represent the 84% of Canadians who would like to see this Parliament enact a Criminal Code prohibition of sex-selective abortion.

I am speaking this evening on behalf of pro-choice and pro-life Canadians, religious and non-religious, those on the left, right and centre of the political spectrum; new Canadians, the young, the elderly and those in the medical profession across our country seeking support for a framework from the federal government to make sex selection in utero illegal. I am standing today in response to all seven Supreme Court justices who agreed that the state had some interest in protecting the fetus and expected a new law to be created to fill the gap left by their decision in the 1988 Morgentaler case.

The sex-selective abortion act would create protections for unborn baby girls whose lives are ended simply because they are girls. During the past quarter of a century alone, sex-selective abortion and post-natal sex selection has deprived over 100 million women and girls the opportunity to live, work and affect change through their unique abilities. These global trends are very disconcerting, however, they are not the focus of my bill.

Sex-selective abortion is a Canadian problem that requires a Canadian solution. Peer-reviewed studies from the Canadian Medical Association Journal point to a worrying trend in Canada. In fact, a ratio of 1.96 males to every female has been recorded among those who had previously given birth to two girls. Following one or two induced abortions, the ratio becomes even more alarming.

The absence of any law to protect preborn girls shouts to the world that valuing one sex over the other is permissible in Canada.

Private Members' Business

We are the only democratic country that has no law against it, the only one. The only other country that also fails in any way to protect preborn children from sex selection is North Korea, not good company for Canada. Our health care profession has shown concern about sex-selective abortion and discourages the practice.

In 2007, the executive of the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada stated that medical technologies for the sole purpose of gender identification in pregnancy should not be used to accommodate societal preferences and that the SOGC did not support termination of pregnancy on the basis of gender. The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario as well as British Columbia and Saskatchewan also echoed these concerns. However, medical bodies do not make laws. Canadians send parliamentarians to Ottawa to work on their behalf and to reflect Canadian human rights values at home and internationally.

It is in this spirit that I brought forward this proposed sex-selective abortion act. Over a year ago, I introduced Bill C-233 to amend the Criminal Code of Canada to make it an offence for a medical practitioner to perform an abortion, knowing that abortion was sought solely on the grounds of the child's sex. It would also require the federal Minister of Health, in consultation with provincial counterparts, to establish guidelines respecting information provided by a medical practitioner in relation to a request for an abortion from the medical practitioner to the individual asking for an abortion. Fittingly, the criminal sanctions in my bill for a medical practitioner who is found guilty mirrors those that are actually found in Canada's assisted dying laws.

I introduced Bill C-233 in response to Canada's lack of the legal framework to respond to the wishes of a clear majority of Canadians and to honour our core values.

● (1740)

Canada prides itself on our commitment to ending discrimination against any person on the basis of sex. Equality between men and women forms a crucial part of Canada's efforts to promote and protect human rights, as reflected in its laws and international commitments.

As long as we do not have a law, we continue affirming ending the lives of baby girls simply because they are baby girls. Canadians believe it is time for our country to join the rest of the world by implementing a strong legal framework prohibiting sex-selective abortions. If a baby girl is unwanted simply because she is a girl, I am pleased to say that the majority of Canadians believe abortion access has gone too far.

Private Members' Business

A new reality is rising in Canada. A very recent national poll found that a majority of Canadians would be more likely to support a political party if that party promised to legally restrict sex-selective abortion in its platform. Among the results, 52% of Canadians overall, 58% who voted Conservative in 2019, 51% who voted Liberal and 61% who voted for the Bloc would be moderately to much more likely to vote for a party that promised to restrict sex-selective abortion. This critical mass of Canadians is calling on political parties to stop playing politically with the lives of baby girls and legally restrict sex-selective abortions in Canada. There is unity across the country for Canada to assert itself on this fundamental human rights issue.

This poll result comes less than a year after the results of a 2019 DART & Maru/Blue poll conducted for the National Post, which found that 84% of Canadians believed it should be illegal to have an abortion if a family did not want the baby to be a certain sex.

These 2019 poll results reinforce that Canadians are united and no longer accept the myth that Canadians are polarized. They are not. They want this law.

In the same DART poll, it was determined that 62% of Canadians identified as pro-choice, while 13% identified as pro-life. With 84% of Canadians opposed to sex selection, it is clear that this issue has overarching public support.

I have been so truly humbled by the response of Canadians to this bill. Tens of thousands have signed petitions and family and youth are urging their MPs to support the bill in creative and unique ways. Citizens across the country have taken notice.

In its statement of endorsement, the Vedic Hindu Cultural Society Of British Columbia declared that Bill C-233 was a reasonable limit on abortion that would work to enhance Canada's human rights image. The United Sikhs is a UN-affiliated international non-profit, non-governmental, humanitarian relief, human development and advocacy organization. The Canadian chapter sent a letter of endorsement as well. It stated, "C-233 proposes a reasonable limit that would reflect Canada's respect for human rights at all stages of life. The practice [of] sex-selective abortion takes place in Canada and it is our duty to defend those whose lives would be ended simply because of their sex."

The Minister of Justice has also publicly declared, in response to petitions tabled by many members of the House, "The Government of Canada condemns all practices that are motivated by discriminatory views of women and girls, including sex selective practices." Countless Canadians are encouraged by that statement and wait with anticipation for how members of the Liberal Party will vote on this bill.

If the Prime Minister and his cabinet truly claim to be feminist and wish to condemn sex-selective practices, then their voting for Bill C-233 at second reading and sending it to committee is a reasonable expectation by their supporters. I encourage every member of the House to have the courage to exercise their rightful freedom to vote their own conscience, the way that we on this side of the floor have that freedom to do, and pass this bill.

Stopping short of a full commitment to ending sex-selective abortion in the second half of the Minister of Justice's petition re-

sponse, he attempts to wash his hands of any responsibility. It reads, "In Canada, the administration and funding of health care services is a provincial responsibility that falls under the purview of the provincial governments. As is the case for other medical procedures, the delivery of abortion services is determined by the policies of the provincial governments and the standards set by the medical profession itself." On delivery, it is very true.

● (1745)

Canadians, however, are very aware that there are many bills that we have worked on in the House together, such as Bill C-7 and Bill C-8, where the federal government chose intentionally to legislate on primarily provincial issues when it believed a charter interest was in play. With regard to discrimination on the basis of sex, the same applies.

The federal government has already recognized the inherent discrimination tied to sex selection. In 2004, a Liberal government created a precedent in law with regard to sex selection through the Assisted Human Reproduction Act. According to the act, no one may, "For the purpose of creating a human being, perform any procedure or provide, prescribe or administer any thing that would ensure or increase the probability that an embryo will be of a particular sex, or that would identify the sex of an in vitro embryo."

In an attempt to downplay the need for a law, I have heard the justification that choosing to abort a baby girl simply because she is a girl rarely takes place in Canada compared to countries like China and India. The number aborted is not a legitimate reason to not have a law, and currently research indicates that this number is approximately 2,000 per year in Canada.

Canadians have spoken loudly on other issues for women. When the Liberals tried to remove female genital mutilation from our citizen book, they spoke out loud and clear, and we have a law to highlight that value. Those who are fine with allowing sex-selective abortion in Canada also claim that the law would be useless because it would be impossible to enforce.

As members of Parliament, our role is not to enforce laws, but to create laws that reflect Canadians' values and respond to the concerns of Canadians. Through Bill C-14 and Bill C-7, the federal government crafted a response to a national mandate it received from vocal Canadians and the courts. Ultimately, the enforcement of assisted dying laws were delegated to the provinces and provincial medical bodies, as would be the case here.

Bill C-233's language clearly outlines a directive to the federal government to work with the provinces to determine effective communications on the framework that sex-selective abortion is illegal in Canada. Indeed, enforcement is an important consideration, but just as impaired driving laws have not removed all drunk driving from our roads, the sex selective abortion act would not put a hard stop to the practice all on its own. However, the bill enshrined in Canadian law will send a clear message about what our country stands for within our country and to the rest of the world, and also what it does not permit.

Canada must bring legislation in line with human rights obligations to prevent sex selection before birth. Bill C-233 is a necessary step in doing so.

It is an honour to rise alongside my colleague from Elgin—Middlesex—London today. We are traditionally from opposite sides of the abortion debate. However, we are both part of the 84% of Canadians who recognize that sex selection is not permissible in a society that advocates for equality of the sexes. Adopting appropriate legislation to end discrimination against any person based on sex is part of Canada's commitment to advancing human rights. My bill addresses inequality between sexes at the earliest stages of life.

This is a cause for which Canadians are united. While some oppose and some promote, we can all stand together, side by side, against sex-selective abortion, as we all have a moral obligation to stand against gender inequality. No issue important to Canadians should be vetoed from debate in this place by absolutist political narratives for political gain. It is past time to stand in the gap and do the right thing in defence of preborn girls.

Will elected members of Parliament from all political parties condemn this practice and make it clear to all that Canada values women and equality? Every female preborn child who is terminated because of her sex has paid the price with her life because our lack of laws say she does not matter. With the implementation of this bill, we will be telling the world that Canada has had a change of heart.

• (1750)

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, nobody would support sex-selective abortion. However, that is not what this bill is and the member knows it. Ninety per cent of abortions that take place in the country are within the first 12 weeks of the pregnancy when we cannot even determine sex. This is just another example of Conservatives who just recently got together to strategize on how to create backdoor anti-abortion legislation.

If the bill is truly only about banning sex-selective abortions, then why did her own leader come out saying that he did not support it and that he would vote against it? If it is truly not a backdoor way to remove women's rights, why does her own leader not support it?

• (1755)

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Madam Speaker, in my party, we have the freedom on private members' bills to bring forward whatever is important to us as individual members of Parliament, something that I do not think is available on the other side of the floor. We also

have the freedom to vote our conscience. I respect that choice in my leader, as he respects mine.

I would say this to the individual who is indicating that this is a back door to other abortion laws. As she knows, 84% of Canadians support this. That means 16% of Canadians do not. Of that 84%, the vast majority are individuals who are pro-choice. This is a bill Canadians want, right across this country. It is time we respect that call to protect baby girls in the womb.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, polls that are taken out of context are not useful.

The member said that 84% of Canadians are against sex-selective abortions. This is not a news flash, since no one supports sex-selective abortions. Does that mean that 84% of Canadians are in favour of chipping away at abortion rights and going as far as passing a law? Really?

She also said 52% of Canadians were in favour of abortion. It is odd, but the firm behind this poll is led by former members of the Conservative Party. Can we really trust these numbers?

Finally, she encourages Liberal members, who claim to be feminists, to vote for her bill. I, in turn, encourage Conservative members who claim to be feminists to vote against it because, frankly, it contravenes the principal and fundamental right of women to control their own bodies.

[English]

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Madam Speaker, the truth of the matter is that every one of those recommendations, as far as percentages of Canadians go, is accurate. The same poll the member is referring to also indicated that the majority of Canadians want to continue to have access to abortion. That is the truth. However, it also asked the question very specifically on certain issues, whether this narrow concern should be legal or illegal. Eighty-four per cent of Canadians indicated that a sex-selection abortion, where the abortion is taking place solely because of the desire for a certain sex of that child, should be illegal.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Madam Speaker, I too want to express my deep, heartfelt dismay at this debate today and support my colleagues who have raised amazing questions with respect to the member's statistics, which are wrong and misleading. I am truly upset by the fact that she is directly misleading her constituents, as she said at the beginning of her speech.

I would like to know this. Our Supreme Court struck down the abortion law in 1988 because it violated women's right to bodily security. Why does she not believe in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms?

Private Members' Business

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I hoped you would call the member to order. There are parliamentary conventions the member is aware of with respect to accusing people of something and—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I could go very far back to use the same thing on many other members in the House, so I am not going to intervene.

The hon. member for Yorkton—Melville.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Madam Speaker, I do not totally remember what the member's question was after all of that, but I will say this.

It is really important that we recognize that the Canadian Medical Association did major studies in 2012 and 2016 with ethnic researchers involved and with the ethnic community involved, and they indicated that this is a growing problem in Canada that needs to be addressed. Of course, it is happening for other reasons as well, but the truth of the matter is that this is a scenario where the majority of Canadians are saying they are not polarized the way certain groups would like them to think they are. This is an issue where Canadians come together and want a law that restricts sex selection as an option for abortion.

• (1800)

Ms. Pam Damoff (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak today to Bill C-233.

Let me start by saying that our government condemns all forms of gender-based violence. We have taken strong legislative action and made investments to protect women and girls since we took office, from improving judicial education to prohibiting discrimination based on gender identity and gender expression, investing in an ambitious gender-based violence strategy and, yes, approving the use of Mifegymiso in Canada.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we have provided an additional \$100 million in funding to organizations across the country to support their efforts to end gender-based violence. In my community, \$170,000 of that funding has gone directly to organizations that are dedicated to combatting gender-based violence.

There is no evidence to support the need for Bill C-233. This is a bill searching for a problem that does not exist. Canada is not seeing a disproportionate number of male versus female births. The sex ratio at birth for Canada is consistent with the global average. In fact, I believe this bill introduces considerable risk in stigmatizing racialized communities, which already experience disproportionate police surveillance, over-criminalization, and violence and discrimination at the hands of public officials.

Abortion providers and counsellors are trained to ensure that each person is comfortable and certain about their decision and that they are not having an abortion under pressure from anyone. Abortion is health care, and the patients' health and life need to be the primary concern for health care providers; that means ensuring that they can have access to a safe abortion.

We must assess the bill's ability to achieve its intended objective in light of the evidence showing that ensuring access to abortion services advances gender equality. Evidence shows that restricting such access, in particular through criminal law, has a detrimental and negative impact on equality rights. I am concerned that this bill may serve to exacerbate sex-based discrimination, not combat it.

This is not the first time the Conservative Party has attempted to legislate women's bodies. The anti-choice movement has co-opted the language of human rights and feminism to try to limit access to abortion.

The United Nations has issued reports recommending against criminalizing any aspect of abortion, including sex-selective abortion, since research shows that doing so creates barriers to accessing abortion services, which negatively affects women's equality. International agencies have made strong statements that women's right to make decisions about their own bodies is at the very core of the fundamental right to equality, and I agree.

Abortion is a medical decision made between a woman and her doctor. There are already safeguards in place within the medical community surrounding abortion. Legislators are not doctors and have no business interfering with the doctor-patient relationship. I firmly believe that legislators have no place in the uterus of women across our country.

There are obviously those in the Conservative Party who do not feel that way, including the sponsor of this bill, who has said she believes that abortion should never be performed, under any circumstances. If the hon. member truly is concerned about gender-based violence and discrimination, I would ask whether she supports preventative measures that are far more effective at reducing abortions, including comprehensive sex education, consent-based awareness-raising activities and campaigns, free and accessible birth control, and laws and policies that promote gender equality and actually address gender-based discrimination, including gender parity in all decision-making spaces, pay equity, paid parental and other forms of leave, and comprehensive social support services, including affordable housing, universal pharmacare and national child care. The list goes on.

If we want to tackle stereotypes that value men over women, the answer is not criminalizing women's bodies. The answer is getting to the roots of misogyny and sexism and doing the hard work, as a government and society, that we need to do to ensure that women's lives are valued. We need to ensure that young women who want birth control can access it without fear of recrimination. We need to ensure that we support the work that local women's organizations like SAVIS and Halton Women's Place are doing to cultivate male allyship, and we need to call out all people, regardless of gender, who think it is their right to control what a woman does with her body.

In 1988, in the Supreme Court of Canada's well-known *Morgentaler* decision, restrictions on abortion were found to violate women's section 7 security of the person rights. Since then, it has remained a medical decision, as it should be.

• (1805)

This bill is one more example of the rising power of the anti-choice movement across our country. Here in my riding, I have worked with the Sexual Assault and Violence Intervention Services to raise awareness about how hard it is for women in my region to access abortion services. One cannot get an abortion in Halton unless it is an emergency. Over half a million people live in Halton Region. We are one of the safest and wealthiest communities in the country, and one out of five women in my region who choose to have an abortion in their lifetime will have to go outside the region to seek essential health care.

Halton Region is the best-case worst-case scenario. We sit between Toronto and Hamilton and are part of the most densely populated area of the country. Members should think about the barriers that exist for women who live in rural or remote areas or women who do not speak English or French. Members should think about the barriers that exist for women who cannot pay for the \$100 taxi ride from Oakville to Hamilton. Now members should think about how these barriers are amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic. Travel between provinces is limited, sometimes outright banned, and clinics have closed. These barriers do not make our communities safer; they put women in danger and they act to restrict choice.

The rise of the anti-choice movement has also led to dangerous online misinformation campaigns sponsored by Alliance for Life Ontario, spreading dangerous falsehoods about medical abortion. This is part of a larger ideological initiative that seeks to misinform individuals and restrict their reproductive rights.

What is medical abortion, and why does the anti-choice movement want to convince Canadian women that it is unsafe and can be reversed? To begin with, medical abortions have been practised all over the world for more than 30 years. Despite three decades of evidence that proves they are safe and effective, they were only made available in Canada since 2017 under our Liberal government.

There are two drugs that are used for a medical abortion, sold together in a product called Mifegymiso. Mifegymiso is prescribed by a doctor, and it can only be given within the first nine weeks of pregnancy. A woman takes one tablet, and then 24 to 48 hours later the subsequent tablets, and that is it. Medical abortions are safe and effective, and the vast majority of abortions in Canada, about 90%, happen very early in a pregnancy, before the sex of the fetus is even known, I might add.

The campaign is targeting women who are seeking an abortion with wrongful claims that a medical abortion can be reversed mid-procedure, in the 24 to 48 hours after the first tablet. Advocates for the abortion pill reversal frequently cite research from Dr. George Delgado, a medical adviser for the Abortion Pill Rescue Network and medical director of Culture of Life Family Services in San Diego, a self-professed provider of Christ-centred medical care. This research has been condemned by the medical community, and compelling evidence exists that abortion pill reversal is ineffective and potentially dangerous. The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists

of Canada has released a statement condemning the practice, as has the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.

Simply put, denying access to health services that only women require, including abortion, is a form of gender-based violence. The UN has recognized this, our Supreme Court has recognized this, and I am confident that a majority of the hon. members in this place will recognize this.

I call on all members of this House to call out the anti-choice movement and recognize this bill for what it is, a bill that is trying to find a problem that simply does not exist in Canada, and I ask all members to join me in voting against this bill.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, it is with a heavy heart that I rise today to speak to Bill C-233.

The Bloc Québécois is obviously against the bill, which is essentially an anti-choice bill. The Bloc Québécois unequivocally defends the right of women to control their own bodies, their right to free choice and their right to free and accessible abortions. Of course, the Bloc Québécois opposes sex-selective abortion, but it also opposes the idea that the government can tell women what to do with their own bodies. Women are free to choose whether to terminate their pregnancy or not.

The fight against sex-selective abortion is a pretext used by the Conservatives to initiate a debate on abortion rights. Although the Conservatives claim that they do not want to reopen the debate on this issue, they keep coming back to it. Bill C-233 is yet another example. The Conservatives are looking for new legal grounds to criminalize abortion. Although sex-selective abortion is based on misogynistic and sexist ideas, we cannot fight it by imposing more social control on women. We cannot fight sexism with sexism. The solution is not more control, but more equality.

I will share the Bloc Québécois's position on the issue. I will then speak about the importance of defending the right of women to control their own bodies, and I will conclude by tying this in to reproductive health.

The Bloc Québécois believes that rhetorical manipulation, the hijacking of the discourse on human rights and the fight against discrimination for other purposes are outdated and worn-out stratagems that do not show the manipulators in a good light and undermine citizens' confidence in democratic institutions.

Private Members' Business

Hijacking the discourse on human rights undermines the fight for human rights. It is our responsibility as parliamentarians to state our real intentions when we open a dialogue on behalf of the citizens we represent. This is about the quality of the democratic conversation. Obscuring the debate on abortion rights undermines the quality of the democratic conversation. This is why these practices must be recognized and condemned, and they must stop. The Bloc Québécois demands that the leader of the Conservative Party publicly acknowledge that Bill C-233 is merely a stratagem for attacking abortion rights, that he ask his members to oppose it, and that he call to order the hon. member for Yorkton—Melville.

Let me provide a definition of sex-selective abortion. It is a selective abortion based solely on the sex of the child. It involves primarily female fetuses in countries where cultural norms value boys. In Canada, a 2016 study by the Canadian Medical Association reignited the debate about selective abortions within some South Asian communities in Ontario. There is some evidence suggesting that, for cultural reasons, certain groups choose to terminate certain pregnancies in order to promote male birth in Canada. Nevertheless, this is extremely rare in Canada, and it has no impact on the ratio of male to female births in this country.

It would be wrong to think that this is a common practice in cultural communities in Quebec and Canada. The vast majority of cultural communities do not practise sex selection. Most importantly, the practice tends to fade away on its own within one or two generations. This evolution happens precisely because of the cultural effect and the value placed on gender equality, and not because of any prohibition. It reminds us that we must oppose all instances of discrimination. We need to emphasize the importance of valuing equality and promoting human rights and minimize coercion and control. Yes, sex-selective abortion is a legal practice that does happen in Canada, but it is much less widespread than is being suggested.

I would remind the House that the Bloc Québécois has taken the same position as the women of Quebec. The debate on women's right to control their own bodies is over and done in Quebec. It is a fundamental value that we uphold.

In connection with the debate on sex-selective abortion in 2012 and 2013, the Fédération des femmes du Québec clearly and publicly expressed its position against sex-selective abortion, against banning it and controlling women and against the Conservatives' veiled tactics. In keeping with our long-standing commitment, the Bloc Québécois stands with Quebec women and endorses that position.

There is a huge difference between opposing sex-selective abortion and supporting a ban on the practice in a bill. Criminalizing a medical procedure and making doctors liable to imprisonment is a major move we must not make.

We know that the problem the Conservatives want to solve is not selective abortion but abortion altogether. Quebecers will not fall for the Conservatives' tactics. Women do not need to justify their choice to end a pregnancy. Health care professionals' only concern is and should be the health and safety of their patients, who have the right to a safe abortion.

• (1810)

The provisions of Bill C-233 compromise patient safety by sowing fear and mistrust into the doctor-patient relationship.

The issue of sex-selective abortion is not new to federal politics. In 2012, a Conservative member moved a motion to condemn it, thus reviving the abortion debate. That motion came on the heels of one moved by another Conservative member on the rights of the fetus, asking to create a parliamentary committee to study at what point a fetus should be considered a human being for the purposes of enforcing Criminal Code provisions. These tactics, aiming to surreptitiously criminalize abortion, were carried out despite the electoral promise of the former prime minister not to reopen the abortion debate.

The member for Yorkton—Melville herself has a history of introducing anti-abortion legislation. Is it not a bit odd that the battles waged by the member are never openly about the right to abortion, but that they all result, in one way or another, in a proposal to criminalize this medical procedure and make it subject to stiff prison sentences?

Today, in 2021, 33 years after abortion was decriminalized in Canada, the Conservatives are continuing their pro-life or, in my opinion, anti-choice militancy. By introducing a bill such as this in Parliament, their assault on women's rights pays political dividends by pandering to the religious right.

The Bloc Québécois's response to Bill C-233 is that it gives every parliamentarian, no matter their political stripe, the opportunity to reject regressive legislation that proposes an inappropriate solution to a false problem. By rejecting the bill, they will help put an end to the chronic problem of Conservative attacks on women's integrity and their right to control their bodies.

It was only in 1988 and after much effort that women gained the right to legal abortion. This fragile win continues today to be threatened by these opponents, who are using a set of tactics with a view to reopening this debate and limiting by alternate means women's freedom to choose abortion.

In Quebec, there has been a consensus that the debate on abortion must not be reopened since the 1988 Supreme Court ruling that struck down the provisions that criminalized abortion. The decision to have an abortion is one of the most difficult decisions in a woman's life. Such a serious decision must be left up to women, and women only. The Bloc Québécois is reiterating its support for freedom of choice, which has unanimous support in Quebec. A woman's body belongs to her.

The Conservatives are constantly repeating the same refrain about how they do not want to reopen the abortion debate; yet, they are the ones who regularly draw the debate back to that topic.

Private Members' Business

Let us now talk about reproductive health. Although the practice of sex-selective abortion is rather common in some regions and countries, the selective abortion of female fetuses is rather rare in Canada since it has little or no impact on the proportion of boys to girls. We are talking about a ratio of 105 boys to 100 girls, which is comparable to the international average.

Passing this bill could even have racial consequences. If Bill C-233 is passed, doctors could engage in racial profiling by questioning only pregnant women who are Asian or Indian. Canadians do not want to support a bill that encourages racism. Women's health and safety are at stake. Doctors and staff are trained to ensure that patients are all right with their decision and that no one exerts any pressure on them to have an abortion.

• (1815)

However, a woman could be at risk of physical violence at home if she does not have access to sex-selective abortion. Furthermore, women may feel forced to become pregnant until they have a boy. In such cases, the abortions are much higher risk and full-term pregnancies are even more so, especially when there are multiple ones close together.

The primary concern for medical professionals should be the health and life of their patients. This includes providing a safe abortion, regardless of other circumstances. No reason needs to be given for an abortion in Canada. Doctors should not ask and patients do not have to disclose that information. Bill C-233 could make women afraid to speak up, and it could have an impact on their relationships with their doctors by sowing fear and mistrust or causing adverse health effects.

This bill is clearly driven by an anti-choice agenda and religious beliefs. The bill is ostensibly meant to combat gender-based discrimination, but that is not the case. What we need to do is work on addressing these inequalities.

In conclusion, an ultrasound at 12 weeks will indicate whether it is a girl. However, such a determination also means that it is a human being, which opens up the debate on the right to abortion. If we truly want to protect women's health, safety and rights, we must vote against Bill C-233, in the name of respecting a woman's right to control her own body. Let us act now.

• (1820)

[English]

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Madam Speaker, women in Canada and around the world have fought long and hard for the right to control what they do with their own bodies. Sadly, many women still do not have this right or they have actively lost it. In some cases, particularly here in Canada, the right to choose is only available in theory. The practice of this right is hindered by the fact that consecutive governments have not ensured that all women have the same rights under the Canada Health Act or the charter.

To my utter dismay, here we are again. This private member's bill, Bill C-233, is nothing short of a direct attack on women. Despite all the rhetoric claiming to be in defence of women's equality and despite the Conservative leader's assurances that his party will

not reopen the abortion debate in Canada, we are debating a bill that does just that.

I am not surprised. He, like so many former leaders of the Conservative Party, has allowed his members to repeatedly try to undermine women's rights. Since 2006, members of the Conservative caucus have tried seven times to introduce anti-choice laws. In fact, this is not even the first time the member for Yorkton—Melville has tried to challenge women's rights under the charter, and like the other anti-choice private members' bills introduced by Conservative Party members, Bill C-233 is a Trojan Horse.

I am proud to say that women must retain their rights under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and as a New Democrat in the House and as a woman who has the privilege to speak here tonight, I will never vote for a bill that is quite literally a slap in the face to women who have fought long and hard for the right to control their own bodies.

Dangerously, the argument that is being used within the bill is couched in language around gender equality, but I cannot state emphatically enough that Bill C-233 does nothing to address gender equality. Let me repeat that: Bill C-233 does nothing to address gender equality. It is a step toward regulating and eroding access to abortion.

When abortions are illegal, women do not stop having them. They only take more risks to access the services they need, and these risks can have deadly consequences. Before anti-choice laws in Canada were struck down, there were over 35,000 illegal abortions taking place every year. Thousands of women died because they were not given a choice. They were desperate and submitted themselves to clandestine procedures.

Our Supreme Court struck down the abortion law in 1988 because it violated a woman's right to bodily security. Recriminalizing abortion in any way would be a violation of the charter rights that cis women and transgender people have to life, liberty and conscience.

If we look at examples from India and Nepal, we see that laws against sex-selective abortion do not work, and because of these laws many women avoid the health care system. They risk their health and lives by resorting to unsafe abortions.

A 2019 study found that sex-selective abortion bans in South Korea, China and India are difficult to implement and have limited impact. They reduce access to safe abortion services and negatively affect the life chances of women and girls. By contrast, other studies have shown that policies that include mass messaging and measures to increase gender equality show a quick impact in reducing people's preference for having sons and in increasing parental investments in girls.

Private Members' Business

The sex-selective abortion of female fetuses is a symptom, not the problem itself. The root issue here is misogyny. A law banning sex-selective abortion only sends the problem underground. The answer lies in raising the status of girls and women over the long term.

In the promotion and protection of women's rights and gender equality, Canada must be a world leader. We must commit to the view that gender equality is not only a human right, but also an essential component of sustainable development, social justice, peace and security. These goals can only be achieved if women are able to participate as equal partners, decision-makers and beneficiaries of the sustainable development of their societies.

However, how can Canada be considered a world leader in women's rights when we have members of Parliament suggesting that we revert to the days of gender inequality through the restriction of abortion? How can Canada be considered a world leader when the government refuses to enforce the Canada Health Act, which requires provinces to fund equal access?

In 1988, abortion was decriminalized, but that does not mean everyone in Canada has access. Last year, Action Canada published "Access at a Glance: Abortion Services in Canada". This overview of abortion care in Canada shows huge gaps in what care is available and where. There are significant disparities between rural and urban access to abortion. In some provinces, like Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario, abortion providers are only in urban centres, despite the fact that 35% to 40% of the population is living in rural or remote communities.

• (1825)

Hundreds of people are forced to travel out of their communities to access abortion and must pay for travel expenses out of pocket. Travelling to another city for a procedure can mean having to take time off work, planning and paying for child care or elder care. Some people cannot afford to pay for these expenses.

Access to health services should not depend on one's postal code or income. Unlike any other province or territory, New Brunswick illegally refuses to pay for abortion services outside of hospital settings. This means that abortions provided in clinics are not funded by the government. This is a human rights violation and contravenes the Canada Health Act.

For decades, people across New Brunswick and Canada have been advocating for the government to strike down this discriminatory regulation, yet successive governments and the so-called feminist Liberal government continue to ignore this call, and persist in maintaining an unfair, illegal policy that seriously impacts abortion access in New Brunswick.

Everyone has the equal right to the best quality health care, regardless of race, age, class, immigration status, gender expression, sexuality and ability, but abortion care is impacted by discrimination and bigotry, both systemic and as a result of individual prejudice on the part of service providers. Racism, xenophobia, classism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism and ageism in Canada are all direct and intersecting barriers to accessing abortion.

If the member introducing Bill C-233 was truly interested in strengthening gender equality, this bill could have ensured everyone's right to access health services. It could propose solutions to fight against racism and poverty and homelessness or combat homophobia and transphobia. It could propose operational-based funding for women's organizations, ensure permanent funding for shelters in Canada, put forward a universal early learning and child care bill, introduce a guaranteed basic livable income, ensure free access to birth control or Mifegymiso, create a national action plan against gender-based violence, or implement just one of the 231 calls for justice from the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Inquiry.

If the member for Yorkton—Melville was truly dedicated to advancing gender equality, she could have drafted a bill that actually addresses the social, economic or political inequities women experience as part of their daily lives, inequities exacerbated by past and current governments.

Tragically, this bill does nothing to implement the long-term solutions that would reduce the inequality between men and women. In May 2020, Canada celebrated the 50th anniversary of the abortion caravan, the convoy of activists, advocates and brave women who travelled from Vancouver to Ottawa to protest the criminalization of abortion in 1970.

Canadian women fought long and hard for the right to safe, legal abortions. Women have been forced to put their private lives under scrutiny in the courts and in the fight for the right to choose. I would like to thank all the brave women, organizations and abortion providers who fought for our right to choose.

I urge all members of this House to recognize this bill for what it is, an underhanded attack on women's choice. I urge all members to vote against it. If we are to sincerely achieve true gender equality, we will not tolerate the sham that has been perpetuated against women of this country.

Instead of attacking health services and access, we need to address the reasons why women are undervalued, underpaid and underserved. We need a government that would champion programs and policies that ensure women's contributions to society, the economy and leadership in this country are respected and encouraged. Access to safe, legal abortions is integral to these rights.

New Democrats, it is safe to say, do not support this bill. We will actively fight against any motion or future bill that would threaten a woman's right to choose.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to start tonight's discussion regarding my multiple attempts to write this speech. I kept on changing the way I wanted to discuss it. What is my angle? Who is the audience and what do they expect? I knew I had to focus on the right tone and what specific words to say and why am I, a person strong in her belief, so worried about presenting on this important topic?

I have seen how these discussions have gone in the past, or should I say, I rightly recognize that this is not a discussion. Instead it is a debate characterized by a great deal of animosity from all sides with no resolutions. However, the bill challenges us to have a genuine discussion. The bill could be used as a potential platform to address concerns, but as I have witnessed, I am afraid there are few people willing to come to the table to have a well-intentioned, meaningful debate.

The bill should make us all think on how we feel about this subject, specifically on sex-selective abortion. I know that in these 10 minutes every word that I choose to say will be ripped and torn apart and we are losing the opportunity to have a real discussion and properly debate Bill C-233, the bill introduced by my colleague and friend from Yorkton—Melville.

This is a topic that people are very vocal on, with people being labelled as either absolutely right or completely wrong. Everyone has a label forced on them, but is that really what we want when it comes to such a complex issue? This should not be about how we feel on the right to choose to have an abortion. This is whether sex-selection abortion is happening in Canada and what is ethical in this situation. This is a subject that we just cannot win. There is no right or wrong on this issue.

When I talk about abortion, it is in general and not specific. I support women having a choice and when I speak on this issue, I recognize that there are many Canadians unaware of what our laws in Canada are. I want to go back 33 years to when there was a law. I want to share with everyone tonight the executive summary and the information available on sex-selective abortion.

One of the best and simplest summaries was a bill that the Library of Congress, prepared by Stephen Clarke, senior foreign law specialist in the United States. This where I found the best information on Canada.

Federal legislation that made the obtaining of unapproved abortion a crime was held to be unconstitutional in 1988 and has not been replaced. Canada has no legal restrictions on the obtaining of abortions. Abortion for sex selection is legal and there are reports that it is being practised. Sex selection and reproductive technology is prohibited, subject to an exemption that allows sex selection to prevent disorders or disease.

Until 1988, Canada's Criminal Code required women who wished to have an abortion to satisfy a therapeutic abortion committee established by a hospital that the continuation of her pregnancy would be likely to endanger her life. However, in the case of *R. v Morgentaler*, Smoling and Scott, the Supreme Court held that this provision violated section 7 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Section 7 of the charter provides that everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of the person and the right not to be deprived therefore, except in accordance with the principles of fundamental justice.

Private Members' Business

Since 1988, Canada has not had a law prohibiting any type of abortion, including abortions for the purpose of sex selection, although there have been several attempts at legislative reforms that have failed.

We have actually heard a lot about those tonight.

The absence of an abortion law in Canada does not mean that a woman can easily obtain an abortion at any time during her pregnancy. Physicians in Canada normally do not perform abortions after the 24th week of a pregnancy unless the health of the woman is in serious jeopardy, even though they cannot be prosecuted for this. Although information on the subject is not readily available, it may also be the case that many physicians refuse to perform abortions for the purpose of sex selection.

● (1830)

Now, turning to in vitro fertilization, the same paper from the Library of Congress states that:

Reproductive Technology

Canada's Assisted Human Reproduction Act states that no person shall:

[f]or the purpose of creating a human being, perform any procedure or provide, prescribe or administer any thing that would ensure or increase the probability that an embryo will be of a particular sex, or that would identify the sex of an in vitro embryo, except to prevent, diagnose or treat a sex-linked disorder or disease.

Thus, Canada does generally prohibit sex selection in embryonic procedures, except to prevent, diagnose, or treat a sex-related disorder or disease.

What I just read is from the Library of Congress in a journal written back in June 2009.

There is a much bigger discussion here that we are not permitted to talk about politically. However, I believe in facts. I believe in multiple sides on these issues. When I think about a good debate and great conversations, I think about my own family. Yes, we are all from the same family, but then we add on the in-laws and extended family and brothers-in-law who call themselves the Martyn men. We have extremely heated debates, and sometimes things can get pretty spicy. Sometimes mother sighs, "That is just enough". However, we share unique perspectives and have had different experiences in the past that have shaped our lives and our beliefs on certain issues. One thing I recognize is that I always learn something new about someone or something during these debates. I respect them, and I respect their views on these issues.

We do not have to believe to the same degree on every single issue, and I think that is where we are today. This issue could lead us to more. It could lead us to a study of greater awareness of an issue that is happening, such as sex selection. Yes, it can be a very difficult discussion, but I believe it can be a very thoughtful discussion as well.

S. O. 52

As I have said in the House and in committees many times, I am a Pollyanna. I do believe in the best, and I do believe that when people are committed to discuss issues with diverse opinions, they can find the right balance.

One thing that I have learned through this pandemic is that what is important to people and how people react can be very different. I recognize the vast opinions on COVID-19, and I recognize that I do not have to agree with all of the opinions in this discussion. However, here sex selection abortion becomes something we truly should look at and consider. We have the right to pro-life and pro-choice, and we have the right to question if more needs to be done or considered. I am not saying today that more needs to be done, but is there an issue with sex selection?

As I said earlier in my speech, the debate is characterized by a great deal of animosity from all sides with no resolution. There are a few people willing to come to the table to have a well-intentioned, meaningful debate. My table is always open for all opinions on this matter, for and against.

There are many things that we must challenge our presumptions on. It is important that we are willing to challenge ideas and test them against other thought patterns. That is why in every Parliament we have a government with an opposition that challenges it.

Listening does not mean that one must agree. However, today's debate is on sex selection abortion and, unfortunately, this means that many members have decided to stop listening before the conversation even begins. Does this issue deserve to be studied? Is there an issue that is actually occurring here in Canada that needs to be addressed? We cannot know if we are not willing to even start the conversation. We must be willing to at least have this conversation to discuss this difficult topic and not immediately reach for the attacks and ignore the substance of the bill itself.

I thank everybody for listening to me today, and I wish everybody the best.

• (1835)

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, normally I would say I am happy to rise in this chamber, but on this topic I could not be more disappointed. I am disappointed, as a woman in this country in this day and age, to be once again faced with Conservatives attempting to take away long-fought, long-established women's rights. Members should make no mistake about this. I guarantee nobody in this House supports sex-selective abortions, but that is precisely not what the member has intended with this legislation.

Just this past weekend, members of the Conservative party and their staff gathered with the Pro-Life Association to strategize on and discuss how to get backdoor anti-abortion legislation in this country to take away women's rights. In addition to that, they were referring to MAID and amendments there as an example. According to one article, they said this is "a 'very powerful first step and foundation' to introducing conscience rights in other areas, like targeting abortion or denying access to medical services for trans people."

These are the values that this Conservative party represents, and I am ashamed. In this day and age there should be no debate. The

last speaker said they wish there could be a debate, but the debate on women's rights is over. We are equal, and governments do not make decisions on our health and on our bodies.

There is no law or power that any government has to control decisions on the male body, so if members of the Conservative party want to talk about equality, then this debate is over. Let us work on abolishing inequality in this country, but a woman's right to choose is fundamental, and government has no place and no business in that decision.

• (1840)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member will have eight minutes the next time this matter is before the House to finish her speech.

The time provided for the consideration of Private Members' Business has now expired, and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.

EMERGENCY DEBATE

[*Translation*]

LAURENTIAN UNIVERSITY IN SUDBURY

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The House will now proceed to the consideration of a motion to adjourn the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter requiring urgent consideration, namely Laurentian University in Sudbury.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP) moved:

That this House do now adjourn.

He said: Madam Speaker, I am very proud to be here this evening as the NDP spokesperson for the greater Timmins—James Bay region. I am very touched to open the debate on the future of Laurentian University.

For the people from all around northern Ontario, Laurentian University is a symbol that opened the door to several generations of young Franco-Ontarians, indigenous and young anglophones from small towns in northern Ontario.

It is important for Parliament to look at the crisis at Laurentian University and come up with a solution.

[*English*]

I will be sharing my time with the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie.

People in Canada might be wondering why the Parliament of Canada is talking about the future of a university in Sudbury. There are national implications about what is happening there right now. The use of the CCAA, the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act, to demolish a public institution is something that we have to deal with at the federal level to make sure it will never happen again. If we allow this precedent to happen at Laurentian, we can bet our bottom dollar that premiers like Jason Kenney and other right wingers will use the CCAA to attack public institutions.

This is not an example of the reason that legislation was put in place, and it cannot be used at Laurentian today. A number of programs that have national significance are being attacked and undermined at Laurentian. That is the issue to be debated in this House, and I thank my colleagues from all parties for being present for this debate.

When I look at Laurentian, it is very emotional. My father was in his thirties and never had a chance to go to school. My dad had to quit school when he was 16 because he was a miner's son. There was no opportunity for post-secondary education. My mom quit school at 15 to go to work.

When my dad was 35, he had the opportunity to get a post-secondary education, and he got that because Laurentian University was there. The fact that we had a university in the north made it possible for my father to get the education that had been denied him, and he became a professor of economics. That is what Laurentian did for him.

I was speaking to a young, single mother yesterday who never got to go to school, as she had a child very young. She phoned me and said she was going to go to university next year. She asked where she will go now. Doug Ford and his buddies probably do not think it is a problem if people are in Kapuskasing or Hearst. He would say they should just go to Toronto or Guelph. They cannot.

Laurentian makes that possible. Laurentian removed the barriers for so many people in a region that has suffered such massive youth out-migration, year in and year out. Laurentian was the tool that we used. It is 60 years of public investment. I think particularly of the Franco-Ontarian community that has built a level of expertise and capacity that was second to none.

I think of the indigenous community. The university had the tri-cultural mandate, and the decision of the board of governors to attack indigenous services as part of their restructuring is an attack on truth and reconciliation.

Call to action 16 states, "We call upon post-secondary institutions to create university and college degree and diploma programs in Aboriginal languages." Guess what, with the CCAA, that is gone. Gone as well are the massive and important programs for francophone youth to get educated in key areas.

I believe we have to step up at the federal level. We have to come to the table to work with Laurentian on its future, but I would say part of that has to be that we get rid of the president and board of governors who made this deal possible. If we look at what they put in their plan, this is not a restructuring. This is an act of intellectual vandalism that is without precedent.

S. O. 52

They are destroying the engineering program in the land of the deepest mines in the world. They are destroying the francophone mining engineering program when the majority of young people coming into the mining trades are francophone and work all over the world. They have taken that away.

They made a decision to get rid of the physics program when we have the world-class Neutrino Observatory, which has won awards around the world. Now scientists will be coming in from elsewhere, but the local university will not be part of it. What kind of thinking is that?

● (1845)

[*Translation*]

The decision to cut the nursing program in a region where the majority of the population is francophone goes against the principle of access to equitable services for francophone communities.

[*English*]

We need to look at a couple of key areas to see why this matters at the federal level. The attack on the programs that were designed for the northern indigenous is an attack on reconciliation. The federal government has an obligation there.

The attack on the francophone language rights, services, programming and training is denying opportunities, and it will have an effect for decades to come. It is also going to have an immediate impact on the right for people in rural regions to receive service in their language because young people are being trained in their language to work in those communities. I would point to the decision to kill the midwifery program, which was fought so hard for.

● (1850)

For rural people, that program was essential. It is essential for the far north, in communities like Attawapiskat, where the midwives went to work.

This is showing us it does not matter, in this so-called restructuring, what the mandate of that university was, which was to provide opportunity and education that was second to none in North America.

Anyone who has not read the filings being used under the CCAA should really take a look at them, because this is the road map for the destruction of public education and public services in Canada. What we heard on Monday was a shocking attack on education, programs and opportunities. It was slash after slash after slash, but what is in here is what comes next. It is the ability of this board of governors, the Doug Ford crowd, to go after and destroy the pensions.

S. O. 52

Coming from northern Ontario, we are no strangers to the attack on pensions. I remember when Peggy Witte destroyed Pamour mine and the workers had their pensions stolen. I remember when the Kerr-Addison mine, one of the richest mines in the history of Canada, was stripped bare by the creditors, so there was nothing left but a bunch of unpaid bills, and the workers had their pension rights denied. Is that is the plan for the post-secondary education? That cannot happen. Not on our watch.

Were there mistakes made at Laurentian? Absolutely, but it is indicative of the larger crisis in post-secondary education, where students are forced to pay massive amounts to get access to education. They come out with major levels of debt. We see university administrators putting money into new buildings, into all the bells and whistles, and denying tenure and adequate work for the professors.

We saw another university in northern Ontario that fired a whole crop of young, dedicated professors and put the money into the sports program. What we are seeing with Laurentian and other universities is the creation of a new level of precarious worker, the university professors and staff, who take on enormous amounts of student debt and are given no opportunity or security and now even their pensions are going to be undermined.

I am calling on my colleagues tonight that the federal government has a role to play. We have to change the CCAA laws so we never again can have a precedent where a public institution can be ripped apart and destroyed and where the pension rights and protections of the people who work in that public service are erased.

That is not what the CCAA was established for. It was established for private companies. It was also to give them security while they restructured. What is happening at Laurentian is not a restructuring, so we need to deal with the CCAA.

We need a commitment from the federal government about the Francophone services. We need to speak up for the indigenous programs that are being cut. We have to recognize northern Ontario is not going to go back to third-class status, where the young people, who are the greatest assets we have, have to leave year in, year out because we do not have the services. Laurentian is a service we put 60 years into. We have to protect it.

I am calling on the Prime Minister to show up and come to the table with a plan to work to save Laurentian.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Timmins—James Bay for the personal account in his describing of the opportunities given to his family members.

I must admit, I do not understand how we arrived to this point. I think for a lot of people in Ontario, myself included, it was a bit of a shocker to hear this news a few days ago. Does he have any insight into how we came to be here, how Laurentian came to a place where suddenly it is in this position?

Furthermore, from an actual implementation perspective, can he share details of the plan he is looking for from the Prime Minister? What does he think we can offer as Parliament, as government, in order to help?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, when Laurentian began to find itself in financial difficulties, it did lobby the members for Sudbury and Nickel Belt. I do not know if they brought forward any of the crisis happening to Laurentian to their fellow Liberals, but we, as New Democrats, will certainly speak up.

Multiple issues have happened over the years. The chronic underfunding of post-secondary institutions and the huge levels of student debt have made it more difficult. There have been very bad management decisions, and very bad management decisions made in many universities on where they are going

The one issue on the CCAA is that when it was brought in, it was believed that maybe they were using it just to stabilize. What we would need from the federal government is for it to say that we cannot use CCAA to tear apart a public institution. We have to change that law. We need the Prime Minister to say that the government will put some money on the table.

Are we going to have to rebuild, rethink and re-establish? Absolutely. However, we cannot sit back and allow a public institution, with 60 years of history, to be simply torn apart and sold off like it is at a scrap-metal dealership. That is not on, because if that is allowed to happen at Laurentian, we can bet it will happen in region after region, as right-wing governments decide what an easy way that is to get rid of public education and public health.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I very much thank my hon. colleague for Timmins—James Bay for his strong advocacy for saving Laurentian University. I want to also ask the hon. member if what we are seeing with Laurentian could be the first canary in a coal mine.

Ever since Jane Jacobs drew attention to it in her last book, *Dark Age Ahead*, we have been watching post-secondary universities and post-secondary education having climbing costs for tuition, overcrowded classrooms, less access to professors and a real loss of sustainability in their funding model.

We must save Laurentian University, but do we not need a larger national approach to our universities?

● (1855)

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands has hit the nail on the head. That is why we have to debate what is happening at Laurentian. This is the model of what is going to start happening elsewhere.

S. O. 52

I would like to also point out, which I had forgotten, that the other programs they are cutting are the environmental sciences and environmental renewal. Laurentian invented that. Sudbury was an environmental disaster zone, a wasteland that had been caused by the sulfuric mine acids at Inco. When I was a child, Sudbury was as black as the moon.

For programs that were established to create and restore environments from industrial damage, from the acid rain, from the sulfuric mining, Sudbury is second to none in the world. It became a symbol, yet it is being cut. If this can be done at Sudbury, we know that these programs anywhere else will be on the chopping block when someone decides to turn his or her university into a lean and mean financial machine.

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Resuming debate.

The hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Timmins—James Bay for his passionate speech on this dramatic event.

I would like him to elaborate on the fact that the Liberals always court the francophone vote outside Quebec—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I must mention to the member that he has the floor to make a speech and not to ask a question.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Madam Speaker, thank you for clarifying that. I was about to ask my hon. colleague from Timmins—James Bay a question, but I will go ahead with my own speech after the really impressive one he just gave. It will be along the same lines as the question I was going to ask.

Each year and in each election, the Liberal Party of Canada tries to charm francophones outside Quebec, telling them how wonderful and important they are and how important diversity is. It woos them with fine words, but what happens after? Essentially, the Liberals drag their feet and not much happens. In fact, nothing happens. The tragedy at Laurentian University is unfortunately another example.

Too often in our history, the Liberal Party of Canada has touted the francophone community in its election slogans and speeches. The Liberals use the francophone community as a reliable voting base for when election time comes around, but they are all talk. Nothing ever gets done. The tragedy at Laurentian University is unfortunately another example of that behaviour. I am extremely sorry to see the Liberals treating francophones as a doormat to get easy votes, while never following up with any measures or decisions.

The cuts to Laurentian University are devastating. I just want to remind members that Stéphanie Chouinard, a political scientist who teaches at the Royal Military College in Kingston, called what is being done to French programs a literal bloodbath.

I think that my colleague from Timmins—James Bay clearly explained how Laurentian University was an icon in northern Ontario. He clearly demonstrated how it was an anchor institution that enabled francophones, among others, to continue studying in French and to pursue their education without leaving the region. It provided the opportunity to stay in northern Ontario and to live and study in French without having to move to Ottawa or even Montreal.

The carnage we are witnessing today is utterly appalling. Unfortunately, the federal government is dragging its feet and basically abandoning the 10,000 students who attend Laurentian University every year. The layoffs cost 110 professors their jobs. We cannot just stand by, because it is a shock for those people. If they leave the region, they may never return. That is absolutely terrible. There are also 28 French-language programs that are being eliminated. These 28 programs are important not just for the economic vibrancy of the region and the vitality of the francophone community, but also for access to public service, certain services and professionals capable of doing the work.

I want to list 25 of the 28 French-language programs that have been cut: law and political science; education; environmental studies; French studies; chemical engineering; mechanical engineering; mining engineering; geography; history; theatre; marketing; leadership; outdoor adventure; French literature and culture; mathematics; philosophy; financial planning; health promotion; human resources; midwifery; linguistics; economics; nursing; political science; and zoology. These are the programs that are vanishing before our very eyes.

This takes me back to the days of the great fight to save Montfort Hospital, when we really had to take to the barricades to defend the rights of francophones. It feels as though, right now, not only is there a Conservative government in Ontario that really could not care less, but there is also a Liberal government that is dragging its feet on the issue and waiting to see what will happen.

The Ontario Conservative government is prepared to trample on the rights of francophones and give up on a university like Laurentian and the ability to access programs and classes that are really useful not only for northern Ontario, but for the whole province and the entire francophone community of Canada. Meanwhile, the federal government is up on some kind of pedestal in its ivory tower, talking about how wonderful and fantastic the Francophonie is.

● (1900)

Let us look at what happens when it is time to take action. The Minister of Official Languages sent a letter to her Ontario government counterpart in which she said something that really blew my mind. It says right there in black and white that “the Government of Canada is prepared to study the possibility of providing financial assistance”. I must congratulate the Liberals on taking such a strong stand. Look at that: they are “prepared to study the possibility”.

S. O. 52

Why do they not say that it is absolutely essential to protect post-secondary and university education with a suite of crucial programs for northern Ontario and that they will do everything they can to make that happen?

No, that is not this Liberal government's position. This Liberal government is monitoring the situation and may possibly be prepared to intervene.

Laurentian University is the only institution in northern Ontario that offers programs for francophones as well as a tricultural program. It offers programs in English, of course, but it also offers programs for indigenous peoples. This situation will certainly affect northern Ontario's francophone community, but it could also affect the programs Laurentian University offered in indigenous languages for indigenous communities.

As my colleague from Timmins—James Bay asked, were there problems with management, or poor planning? I do not know, but that is likely the case, given what is happening.

One thing that I am absolutely sure of, however, is that universities and post-secondary education in Canada have become chronically underfunded over the years. Whether under a Conservative or a Liberal government, we are witnessing the systematic privatization of our public universities and their programs and infrastructure, with what look like public-private partnerships. As the Canadian Association of University Teachers recently said, this could just be the first warning sign, the first brick to fall, the first university to run into trouble, and it will become increasingly common to see universities having trouble making ends meet.

Yesterday, the Standing Committee on Official Languages heard from Mr. Doucet of the Société de l'Acadie du Nouveau-Brunswick. He told us that, if things continue the way they are going, we will inevitably see cuts to French programming at the Université de Moncton.

We are also seeing what is happening at Campus Saint-Jean at the University of Alberta. It is absolutely appalling. There is no money at all for the continuity of education at that campus, even though is so important for Alberta's francophone community.

We can see that the problems are piling up, and I am very proud and honoured that the NDP requested and was granted an emergency debate on the matter this evening in the House of Commons. This is like a game of dominoes where francophones keep losing time after time. Unfortunately, Laurentian University may simply be the first to fall.

However, there are solutions. The Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada told us that the federal government can take action and even has a duty to act. We completely agree.

There is another thing we agree on. The Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario is proposing a solution that would involve a separate French or francophone university in Sudbury. We fully support that initiative. In fact, this week, I sent a letter to the Minister of Official Languages, urging her to consider this solution in order to maintain access to a post-secondary and university-level education in French in northern Ontario. To the NDP, that is a top pri-

ority. We think it is extremely shameful that there was no way under the current Liberal federal government to not only properly fund the universities, but to support francophone minority communities.

Since my time is running out, I will share my other ideas as I respond to my colleagues' questions.

● (1905)

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank my NDP colleagues for bringing forward the very important matter of Laurentian University, in northern Ontario, and the problems it is facing. We all agree that access to higher education in French is extremely important in Canada, especially for francophone minority communities.

From what I have been reading over the past few hours, Laurentian University filed for protection under the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act. Obviously, there are long-standing issues and a lot of things had to happen before the university ended up in this tragic situation. Is my colleague of the opinion that the underfunding of universities is having a major effect in Canada?

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Madam Speaker, the effect is not only major, it is absolutely disastrous.

Unfortunately, I have to remind my Conservative colleague that former Conservative governments have not exactly helped fix the problem. Cuts to provincial transfers for post-secondary education made the situation worse and made it more difficult for universities to balance their books.

The last thing I want to see is for a university to download the responsibility of balancing their books to their students. Providing important public services and making universities accessible and truly affordable for students are collective obligations and duties. We have a good record on that front in Quebec, and I think that Quebec's model should be implemented throughout Canada.

[English]

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Madam Speaker, I appreciate my hon. colleague's passion on this issue, as well as that of all members of our caucus.

This is a unique francophone program for midwives. It is the only one in the country. It provides bilingual access and training for midwives. Interestingly, it was stated that the program was being cut because of low or limited enrolment, yet for 30 spaces there is a wait-list of over 300 applicants.

What impact will this have on the provision of midwifery services? Considering the debate we just had in the House about the importance of providing health services to women across the country, how will this impact women?

● (1910)

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for that fundamental question.

Access to services and training is one side of it, but midwives can then provide care and use the expertise they gained at university. The demand for the midwifery program was high because it meets a need in the community. Pregnant women need access to midwifery services. If this program and the training and services it provides are abolished, women are the ones who will suffer because they will not have access to a midwife when they give birth.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): We have time for a brief question.

The hon. member for Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis.

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

Mr. Boulerice, do you agree with me that even though tonight's emergency debate is about the critical condition and major financial problems that Laurentian University is going through, it is also about the French language being in crisis, as well as the decline of second-language educational institutions and our francophone institutions?

You talked about the Université de Moncton and the University of Alberta's Campus Saint-Jean. Today, we are discussing Laurentian University. Is there not a crisis in the francophone community? The budget is being tabled next week, and action could be taken. However, instead of acting now, Liberals are proposing—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I am sorry to interrupt the member for Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, but I asked him to be brief. I also would like to remind him not to address his colleagues in the House by name. He must address his remarks to the Chair, not to the members directly.

The hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie has time for a short answer.

Hon. Steven Blaney: I am sorry, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Madam Speaker, French is indeed fragile and in decline everywhere in Canada, including in Quebec.

It is unfortunate that French educational institutions are not being given more resources, because there is a demand for education in French. We see it in elementary schools, high schools and universities all over the country. More resources should be devoted to education in French.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Sudbury, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am the member of Parliament for Sudbury, and I am currently about one kilometre from Laurentian University.

Laurentian is a flagship institution in our community and a major economic and cultural driver. As we know, it is actually a tricultural institution.

My family has a long history with Laurentian. I come from Kapuskasing, but back in my day, Laurentian offered courses at the Université de Hearst. My mother is a graduate of Laurentian. She took distance education courses. For nine years, she worked on the

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kitchen table to get her degree in social work, which she managed to do.

My kids went to the Touche-à-Tout daycare on the Laurentian campus. They learned to swim in Laurentian's pool. We go cross-country skiing as a family on the university grounds.

I even taught a few advanced taxation classes at Laurentian's school of business, filling in for a colleague who had taken a year's sabbatical. My wife Lynne teaches students in the Faculty of Medicine at both Laurentian University and Lakehead University. She teaches many students.

My family has very close ties to Laurentian, and I am not the only one in this situation. Our entire community is the same way.

[English]

The city of Sudbury and Laurentian have a very close and important relationship. I can look at some of the amazing professors we have there, such as Dr. Peter Beckett, who studies regreening, and its international institution on regreening. As the House may know, Sudbury's environment was devastated because of mining practices back in the forties, fifties and sixties, but because of the ingenuity of the professors and students in the department at Laurentian, we were able to regreen and plant 14 million trees in our area alone.

I think of John Gunn and the Vale Living with Lakes Centre. All of the lakes were decimated, but this changed because of his research. There are other world-class researchers doing research right now. I think of David Pearson and new folks like Dr. Nate Basiliko and Nadia Mykytczuk, just to name a few. We know that we have amazing indigenous professors as well, and students who are learning not only their language, but social work and the many other very important programs at Laurentian.

● (1915)

[Translation]

We were blessed to have professors like Gaétan Gervais, Robert Dickson and Fernand Dorais, and graduates like Daniel Aubin. The La Nuit sur l'étang festival, which has been one of our flagship annual events since 1973, was created by a Laurentian student. Furthermore, the Franco-Ontarian flag comes from Laurentian University, in Sudbury. [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] Gaétan Gervais and his students.

I had the honour of chairing the 2011 Canadian Francophone Games, which were hosted by Laurentian University. The people of Sudbury have a meaningful history with Laurentian University.

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[English]

In 2015, when I became the MP for Sudbury, one of the first things I did was to contact and reach out to Laurentian's leadership at the time and encourage them to apply for the research grants and capital grants that were about to come online. In the spring of 2016, we announced the first of many large research funds for Laurentian.

Metal earth was a \$55-million multi-sector project designed to modernize the research for the deposit of metals. It was right at Laurentian because of the amazing professors it has. Shortly after that, we announced a \$27-million investment in a new research centre to replace the cramped 40-year-old science building. The Cliff Fielding centre for research, innovation and engineering was opened three years later, on time and under budget. It is home to Laurentian's family of internationally recognized mining and engineering facilities.

Since then, I have returned to Laurentian regularly to announce more than \$10 million in funding for the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and CFI. This was for Laurentian researchers and graduate students. We celebrated research week annually at the end of February before the pandemic hit.

Our government has provided funding for research projects on indigenous health, in conjunction with Health Sciences North and Sudbury, and for the study and preservation of indigenous languages. We have provided over \$840,000 to Laurentian for research designed to help first nations communities adapt to climate change. We have also provided \$1.5 million for Laurentian researchers to work with Wikwemikong Health Centre and Health Sciences North in Sudbury to assess the health of indigenous children across the country. In all, our government has provided more than \$10 million in research grants to Laurentian alone.

If we add it all up, over the last five years we have invested over \$100 million in Laurentian University capital projects and research projects. This is on top of the annual subsidies the federal government provides through the French languages program and services.

As I said, I have been engaged with Laurentian from day one, since I became a member of Parliament, and in December and January I continued discussions on how I could help. If it is not through the research funding that I just talked about, it is through a new program on indigenous languages that we created. I invited Laurentian to apply to it, but unfortunately they missed the first round. I then went back to them to encourage them to apply for that funding in the second round.

[Translation]

The federal government also transfers money to the province through the official languages in education program, or OLEP. The province then distributes that funding. Laurentian University has received more than \$1 million over the past five years. The federal government transfers around \$16 million a year to the Government of Ontario.

[English]

On February 1, when Laurentian decided to protect itself from creditors through the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act process, all of the residents of Sudbury and I were shocked and in disbelief. People do not realize this, but one of the largest creditors is the federal government. What has happened is that all the funding I talked about, which was still in Laurentian's coffers, is not there anymore because of the process under the CCAA.

Teachers and students who are conducting world-class research have, since day one, been left without knowing their future or what is going on, and that has certainly left many questions and a lot of people frustrated, to say the least. The effect on the teachers, students and families has been devastating as well. These are professionals. These are students, some graduate students, who have come here to learn from these professionals. The whole process since day one has been extremely difficult.

● (1920)

[Translation]

Monday, April 12 was certainly a dark day for our community, for the Laurentian community and also for the Sudbury community. More than 100 professors and 70 staff members were laid off. These are professionals, experts in their fields. I have close friends who were affected and who lost their jobs. I have friends and family members who are Laurentian University students and who do not know what will happen on May 1 or September 1.

We have talked about the various faculties that were affected. The French-language Faculty of Education was producing our future leaders and our future high school teachers. Without them, there can be no French-language education.

[English]

With regard to the environmental studies program, Sudbury is known to be a world-class pillar. It is something I have championed and mentioned on every platform I could get on. When I talk about my community, I say we are leaders in environmental reclamation and that mining and the environment can be together, with the economy at the forefront. That is because of Laurentian University and its ingenuity.

There is also the physics department. We have the SNOLAB, a world-class research facility, which is two kilometres underground. It is not too far from here. A Nobel Peace Prize was won because of the research that was conducted along with Laurentian.

[Translation]

The French midwifery program receives more than 300 applications each year. Only 30 students are admitted. Still, the decision was made to abolish these programs to allow the university to survive.

We are going through a difficult period. We are having a hard time understanding, and we have plenty of questions. Anxiety is high, and that worries me. I am worried about the mental health of the students, the professors and their families. They do not know what will happen. It is taking a long time for communication to flow and, sometimes, very little information is shared. Our community is going through a very difficult time.

The unfortunate announcement was made on Monday, April 12. When I woke up on Tuesday morning, I told my wife that we were going to have to keep fighting. This fight is far from over. A total of 24 programs were abolished, and our education is again being compromised. I never really thought this would happen in my community, in my backyard. I am so proud of the people who are here. Now we must start thinking about the next steps.

During the restructuring period, from February 1 to April 12, I spoke with the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages to see what we could do. As members have seen, we are speaking to officials from the Province of Ontario.

[English]

Universities and colleges are a creation of provincial law. The provinces have more than a leadership role to play. It is their responsibility and it is their jurisdiction. That being said, certainly our government has been steadfast since the beginning and has said that we will be there to work with the provinces to determine and help out as we move forward. The Prime Minister has said the same thing.

[Translation]

As I said, when I woke up Tuesday morning, I said to myself that we have to keep fighting. I got lots of calls from my friends in the community, and we talked about what we can and must do to make sure our community keeps its post-secondary institution. The community I am so proud of is coming together to make sure that young people, like my children, can earn an art degree in our region. The battle is not over. We really have to get the conversation going. This is a process we have to go through. It is frustrating, but at the same time, we have to keep dreaming. We are hopeful that we will keep being able to get an education in the language and program of our choice in our region. This region is very important to the francophone community in Ontario and Canada.

As my colleagues will have noticed, I am the one who got the entire 20-minute opening slot today given the importance of this topic. I thank my NDP colleagues for raising this matter this evening. This is an important subject, and some people think it is a final decision. I, however, think we have to keep the conversation going now that the process has started and seems to be wrapping up. We really need to have a conversation with provincial representatives, which is what we are doing today.

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That is why one of the things I did was think of solutions, of what I can do. A month and a half ago, in mid-February, I started coming up with ideas. As mentioned earlier, I used to be the parliamentary secretary to the minister of natural resources and I decided not to run in the next election.

● (1925)

[English]

Because I am no longer a parliamentary secretary, I can bring forward my private member's bill, and I have been working on it since mid to late February. We talk about the frustrating aspect of the CCAA, that public institutions like post-secondary institutions can avail themselves of the protection through that process. I believe the reason that law is there is not to protect creditors with respect to public institutions like post-secondary institutions.

That being said, when there is a CCAA proceeding, it is not the role of any politician to insert themselves in an independent judiciary process. I have been asked by my constituents to get involved and stop it. We are not China; we are not Russia. Politicians do not stop an independent judicial process. I know that is frustrating. If we could, we would when we do not agree with it, but that is not how the democracy we live in works.

I will go back to my private member's bill. On Monday, I will be tabling in Routine Proceedings, for the first time as a member of Parliament, amendments to the CCAA to ensure that post-secondary institutions cannot avail themselves of the protection of that act. The reason why I am doing this is very simple.

The carnage and the anxiety I have seen in my community should not be repeated anywhere else across the country. We are living through a stressful time that should not be happening, if the provinces would take their responsibility and jurisdiction seriously.

We knew the situation Laurentian was in, and it is not the only one. We cannot continue cutting post-secondary funding at the provincial level and expect the federal government to always come in with a cheque. It is responsibility of the provinces. They have a duty. As I said, universities and colleges are creations of provincial laws.

That is why I hope all members of Parliament will support my private member's bill to amend the CCAA to ensure that it is not used to basically restructure public institutions across the country.

[Translation]

We all have to make sure this never happens again. We also have to come up with short- and long-term solutions for Laurentian University. I, personally, will never stop supporting Laurentian, but we certainly need to look at the big picture to see how we can ensure the survival of our programs and make sure that the teaching staff that was laid off has a future in our community.

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I think that the federal and provincial governments have a role to play in that. We have to ensure the survival of our institutions across Canada. That is why I am pleased to participate in today's debate. I thank the many residents of Sudbury who have written to me.

[English]

For all my constituents in Sudbury who have written to me or who have reached out to me, I have engaged with not only with the administration, I am engaged with the union, I am engaged with the students and I am engaged with the professors. I am engaging in all the discussions to find solutions in these very difficult times.

I wish none of my colleagues in the House of Commons have to go through what we are going through in Sudbury and at Laurentian University.

• (1930)

[Translation]

I look forward to questions from colleagues.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the time to talk about home and of how proud I am, and to say that it is a difficult time for everyone.

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I extend warm greetings to my colleague from Sudbury. His speech conveyed his commitment to his community and illustrated the challenges that lie ahead.

I want him to know that I graduated from the Université de Sherbrooke, the first private university in Quebec, and I have seen how that institution has contributed to Sherbrooke's development. I certainly understand why he is so concerned about this situation. I look forward to seeing his bill so I can study it and decide where I stand.

In the meantime, we need to address the problems facing our universities. However, there are two challenges here, since we also have to think about our minority institutions. We know how important these institutions are to the vitality of communities, and the member for Sudbury is a living example of this.

I have three questions for him. First, does my colleague recognize that the unique situation of the francophone component of the university requires special attention, and does he recognize the federal government's constitutional responsibilities, particularly under the Official Languages Act and section 23 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms?

Second, could he talk about his vision with respect to the solutions proposed by the Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario, specifically, the moratorium? Also, does he think there could be a francophone identity at the University of Sudbury?

Lastly, I would like him to comment on the fact that the university's satellite colleges were shut down two weeks ago, and that does not make any sense. I would like him to comment on all of that.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Mr. Speaker, that is a big question. I could gladly talk about it for 20 minutes.

Cuts were made at Huntington University in Sudbury and at Thorneloe University. These are historic institutions that play a

major role in our community. We must not forget that. The University of Sudbury is a francophone and indigenous university. This is a very important issue.

Obviously, it is vital that we support French-language post-secondary institutions across the country. The federal government has done that. In its new action plan, the government increased the envelope for French-language post-secondary institutions. We are also providing support to the Université de l'Ontario français in Toronto. If we want a bilingual country, we need to ensure that people are graduating from universities and colleges in both languages across the country. Laurentian University plays a very important role in that.

The federal government transferred \$16 million to Ontario under the official languages in education program. Laurentian University received about \$1 million of that funding. We do not know how the provinces are redistributing that money, but we know that there is an internal mechanism for doing so.

Of course, we are going to continue to support our institutions across the country, which are very important. I will continue to advocate for such support.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

I liked what he said earlier. He asked if we wanted a bilingual country. Recently, there was an unprecedented admission that French is in decline, even though we had been aware of that decline for a long time. Assimilation rates in the francophone and Acadian communities go up year after year. I think that the overall rate of language transfer to English among francophones is around 40%.

We see what is happening with Laurentian University and the University of Alberta's Campus Saint-Jean. There are more and more important signs.

I would like to know what my colleague thinks. Has the decline of French been ignored for too long?

Is a major reform of the Official Languages Act not overdue?

• (1935)

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question.

I am a fourth-generation Franco-Ontarian. My children are part of the fifth generation. I did all my schooling in French in Ontario because those who came before me fought so that I could have that right.

Yes, we must continue to fight, because French is an integral part of who we are, not just in French Ontario, but also in Quebec. We must continue to fight. We are part of North America. We have challenges to overcome. However, I am proud of where I come from, and I am proud to fight alongside members of my community. We will continue to fight for the survival of our institutions as we have for 60, 50 or 40 years. Our accomplishments are greater than ever before. However, the cancellation of French-language programs at Laurentian is hard to accept. Over the past 20, 30 or 40 years, we have racked up many victories. This is a setback, but we will keep fighting and moving forward.

[English]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I understand the emotion in the voice of my colleague from Sudbury. This is a devastation of things we have built and believed in, not just for Sudbury but across the north. I would like to ask him about a couple of things.

My colleague talked about the amount of money that was put into capital projects recently. That would normally sound great, but when I look at what is under the CCAA, a lot of Laurentian's debts apparently came from a lot of these building projects. Now we see the stripping of the re-greening program, the water rehabilitation, as he talked about, the physics, the work that has been done on the university.

I appreciate the fact that my hon. colleague wants to bring forward a private member's bill, but we need more. This is not just the jurisdiction of the provincial government. The Prime Minister stayed at Laurentian. He held his cabinet meeting at Laurentian. This is a national symbol. We have a national moment here. Were there problems with the management, absolutely. However, what has my colleague asked the Prime Minister to do to help Laurentian so we can preserve this important institution for his children, my children and the children to come?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Mr. Speaker, with respect to the first comment on infrastructure and buildings, the building that we actually funded was the Cliff Fielding building, which was fully funded. On the other construction, I am not sure how Laurentian would have financed it, but I know that the Cliff Fielding building is the one we financed, and it was fully funded, with private funding as well.

I will reiterate from my speech that, certainly, we are working with the provinces to find a solution. At the end of the day, it is not the federal government. We have no straight line except to create programs that all universities can apply to. There is no straight line of funding going to universities except through the research councils. That is just the way our jurisdictions are through our Constitution.

That being said, it does not mean that we cannot advocate, and certainly that is what we are doing today. I have talked with the PMO and I have talked with the ministers responsible, as he is doing today, asking them how we can continue. We have been quite clear that we are ready, willing and able to work with the Province of Ontario to help Laurentian University move forward, as well as look at our programming on the francophone side.

[Translation]

As I mentioned, the community is coming together right now, and that includes my friends, relatives and family members. We are coming together to ensure the survival of our programs.

Clearly, the federal government has a role to play. We must have these discussions. These things do not happen overnight. We have done this before, and we will do it again.

• (1940)

[English]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member has been very passionate about this issue all

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week. Being in the Ontario caucus with him, I have heard him talk about it quite a bit.

I would go back to a previous question from the Bloc member who talked about Saint-Jean and another university in Ontario. We, as this particular government, have been there to support French-language rights in post-secondary education over the last number of years. We reopened Saint-Jean. We worked in Ontario with that post-secondary education.

I wonder if the member would like to hit on those points.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Mr. Speaker, certainly, we have been there with historic funding for our francophone institutions across the country. It is still being challenged. At the end of the day, if a provincial government keeps cutting funding for post-secondary institutions, as we have seen in Ontario and Alberta, then, yes, there will be consequences, and that is what we are seeing right now.

Yes, we want to continue supporting. At the end of the day, that is why we need to change the Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act to ensure that the provinces will stop doing this. We need to ensure that we have strong institutions, that the funding is there, that we are not cutting the funding and that there is an oversight to ensure that this never happens again anywhere across the country. We need to ensure that our students are not stuck at exam time not knowing where their teachers are because they just lost their job. That cannot happen again. We have to be there for them.

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wish to inform you that I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier.

We just heard a moving account from a member whose very important community has seen its university put on the chopping block. We also examined this very troubling situation yesterday at the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

For francophone minorities outside Quebec, linguistic institutions are the pillar, the core around which a minority community can flourish. In North America, where English is the dominant language, it is particularly important to ensure that minorities have their own institutions, even in the most remote areas of Canada. Earlier a member referred to Campus Saint-Jean, which is located in western Canada. Other examples are the Université de Moncton in Atlantic Canada, and Laurentian University, which we are talking about now.

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Yesterday I had a chance to ask the Minister of Official Languages questions, and I hope she will take part in tonight's debate. She told us she was looking for solutions for Laurentian University. That was yesterday. Today I hope she has had time to think about the solutions being put forward by, for and with the francophone community, including the member of her own caucus who obviously wants to find a solution.

Yesterday the minister presented her white paper to us. This white paper was not without interest, but there was nothing concrete. For five years now, communities have been calling for the modernization of the Official Languages Act and for concrete action.

I have here a news release from the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, which joins the Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario in calling on the government to intervene and ensure that the University of Sudbury is able to take over, collect the funding that Laurentian was receiving for French-language university education, and become a university by and for francophones.

There are solutions. My colleague mentioned this earlier this evening. This is a full-frontal attack on an institution that plays an important role in northern Ontario.

What we got from the minister yesterday was, unfortunately, a white paper. A white paper is all well and good, but we want concrete action. This issue needs to be addressed. We also need to address Campus Saint-Jean and the Université de Moncton, but we especially need to address what is going on at Laurentian University. That is what we can see.

We are often asked what the Conservatives think about it, and yet our commitment is clear. Even before the Laurentian University crisis, we had committed to increasing funding for francophone post-secondary education in minority communities and to creating a new funding envelope for that.

Next week, a budget will be tabled. Of course, we are still in a pandemic. In the last few years, we realized that budgets for our institutions—such as the Laurentian University—were not indexed. We asked the minister if she intended to index the funding, but our question remained unanswered.

It is still time to do it and to make sure that funds allocated to the Laurentian University to support post-secondary education in French are used only for that purpose. The AFO is calling for that.

I hope the minister will grant that request from the francophone community, so that funds earmarked for the francophone community in northern Ontario indeed are used to its benefit. Teachers and professors must be allowed to remain active, and important programs in engineering and education must be maintained. We have mentioned in particular the programs for caregivers and for women and men who assist women in giving birth.

• (1945)

As parliamentarians, we have the opportunity tonight to make a statement and to encourage the minister to take concrete action for the Laurentian University community. I want to mention that the government does not need to do that out of charity. Indeed, sec-

tion 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms says that the government must enforce the right to minority-language education.

The mandate letter of the present Minister of Official Languages reminds her of her duty to enhance the vitality of minority language communities, to protect their institutions and to increase bilingualism across the country. She must protect the institutions of the francophone minority and, of course, the institutions of the anglophone minority in Quebec.

We have an emergency on our hands. We do not want a white paper that might be tabled after the next election. What I would have liked the minister to do yesterday was present her bill and the concrete actions she would be taking, but instead she told us that she would be holding further consultations and that some measures would eventually be taken.

While the minister jabbars on, we are seeing real tragedies happening all over the country, and tonight we are focusing on Laurentian University in particular. That is why, in this time of great urgency, the members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages are unanimously recommending that the government live up to its obligation to provide help, as well as support, to teaching institutions nationwide that teach official languages and enhance the vitality of official language minority communities.

Tonight, we can see how badly Sudbury and all of northern Ontario have been shaken by this crisis. The minister has a responsibility and an obligation to act to support Laurentian University. I hope that she is in problem-solving mode tonight and that she will offer solutions as well as evaluate the solutions that are being put forward.

As I was saying, the Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario, or AFO, has proposed some very specific courses of action that I would like to share with the House, since we are having a constructive debate.

The AFO is proposing a one-year moratorium on cutting programs. We cannot necessarily react very quickly to this crisis, so there needs to be some breathing room. It is also important that the \$12 million in federal and provincial funding that has already been allocated for university education be transferred as soon as possible so it can be used to retain professors and ensure that the students and community that rely on their francophone institution can maintain this connection. This is a shared responsibility between the federal and provincial governments, of course, and the AFO reminds us that the two governments demonstrated their ability to work together on the issue of Ontario's French-language university. We believe that they could do it again for Laurentian University.

This time, we want the minister to take action. I have a lot of respect for her, but she sometimes goes on partisan rants that can get a bit annoying after awhile. I am thinking here of her references to what she calls Conservative cuts.

I want to remind the minister that the program for official language minority communities was in force until 2015 and was part of the roadmap for official languages proposed by the Conservative government, the second iteration of which was developed by Bernard Lord. When the Liberals took office, the communities no longer had access to that program. They had to wait for the Université de l'Ontario français crisis before the minister finally realized that nothing was being done with the program. That is when the minister reinstated the court challenges program.

The communities do not want us to argue semantics. They want action. The minister has been in office for five years. She has the ability and the responsibility to take action, and that is what we expect in the case of Laurentian University. I believe that the Liberal member is going to speak to her personally in order to ask her to take concrete action.

● (1950)

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.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his speech. I would remind him that the minister is very passionate and active on the ground. She promotes and seeks to protect both of our official languages across Canada and Quebec for all minority language communities. We changed the census questionnaire, we supported the creation of the Université de l'Ontario français and we put together a landmark \$2.7-billion action plan to support those communities. On this side of the House, we appoint bilingual judges to the Supreme Court of Canada. The minister has been focused on strengthening the Official Languages Act since day one.

These are meaningful steps that have been taken to promote and protect our two official languages.

We understand how desperate Laurentian University's situation is. The minister reached out quickly to the provincial government, and we will always be there to support it.

That was more of a comment than a question.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Mr. Speaker, I agree that there was no question in my colleague from Sherbrooke's comments.

I will remind her that the Standing Committee on Official Languages is currently studying the federal government's pitiful management of the pandemic, especially from a linguistic standpoint. Her government submitted tons of documents in English only to the Standing Committee on Health, in violation of the act. Instead of patting itself on the back, the government should take a long, hard look at how it is violating the Official Languages Act and showing its contempt for communities by not meeting their number one demand, which calls for an actual modernization of the act and not a white paper that is nothing but wishful thinking and accomplishes nothing.

I would invite my colleague to urge her minister to walk the talk.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

My question is about Laurentian University's tricultural mandate. Laurentian is pretty much one of a kind in that it prioritizes French,

English and indigenous languages. It gives all three cultures priority.

What does my colleague think of the threat to this tricultural mandate, which is pretty much one of a kind in Canada?

● (1955)

Hon. Steven Blaney: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for asking her question in French. She is absolutely right in saying that Laurentian University operates at the intersection of anglophone and francophone communities as well as indigenous communities, which we have not talked about yet but are an important component.

Here are my thoughts on colleague's question. Both the indigenous community and the francophone minority are at a disadvantage relative to the anglophone community, which is the dominant community, of course. Solution-wise, it would be great to have an institution that focuses on the francophone and indigenous parts of the equation, which would mean overhauling the governance model so we would have an institution created by and for francophone and indigenous communities.

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for granting the NDP's request for an emergency debate.

I think tonight's debate transcends partisanship. As parliamentarians, we have to think about this situation. I listened to the member for Sudbury and sensed a lot of emotion in his speech. This is happening right in his backyard, in his community. As he mentioned, he represents the people of Sudbury. His friends and family members who study or work at Laurentian University do not know what will happen to them.

I thank the Speaker for granting the request by the member from the other opposition party. It is very commendable, and I wanted to highlight that.

My thoughts go out to the member for Sudbury. I was sad to hear during his speech that he will not be running in the next election. I had the chance to work with him on a number of files. I appreciate him greatly. It is unfortunate that we may never run into each other in person again. If he is listening, I send him and his wife my regards.

I want to talk about the importance of emergency debates and their criteria. House of Commons Standing Order 52 states the following regarding requests for leave:

(1) Leave to make a motion for the adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter requiring urgent consideration must be asked for after the ordinary daily routine of business as set out in sections (3) and (4) of Standing Order 30 is concluded.

Mr. Speaker, I do not want to belabour the point, but I thank you once again for granting the request for tonight's debate.

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I am saddened to see the people of that region having to face a loss and reduction in services in addition to the pandemic. The pillars of the French fact in northern Ontario have been shaken. It is sad because these people should not have to face this on top of a pandemic. I think we have to be aware of that and work together to find solutions.

This is what happens when a government has had no vision for more than five years. The Minister of Official Languages has been in office since 2015. I respect the minister. In fact, I told her so yesterday at the Standing Committee on Official Languages. The fact remains that she is not taking action. She is holding consultations. Earlier, her colleague said the minister was promoting the French fact and the two official languages and that she was very present. However, she is always in reaction mode. The government seems to wait until the house is on fire before taking action.

Recently, in December, a white paper on official languages was proposed to us, but it is just another case of postponing decisions and having to hold more consultations to make sure that whatever is put in place some day will be effective. However, that day might be too late, and new consultations will need to be launched. It is important to act. That white paper is no solution.

I met with people from the Canadian Association of University Teachers, or CAUT. They were speaking out against the insolvency situation that started on February 1. This is the first time a Canadian public university has become insolvent. I heard the comments from the CAUT representatives. They are urging the federal government to work with the Province of Ontario to provide the funding that Laurentian University needs and to help bilingual and francophone post-secondary institutions. Given the vital role that these post-secondary institutions play in meeting Canada's current and future challenges, they recommend that the federal government develop a national strategy with the territories and provinces, in order to provide sufficient stable funding to promote high-quality post-secondary education.

• (2000)

I met with these people on February 17. They filed for bankruptcy protection on February 1. Today is April 14. The Minister of Official Languages may have a plan, and Monday's budget may contain some solutions. However, these people filed for bankruptcy protection on February 1. As a member of Parliament, I met with faculty representatives on February 17. There was no reaction until Monday, April 12. As I said before, the government is waiting for the house to catch fire before it reacts.

Mr. Speaker, last fall, we requested an emergency debate on the decline of the French fact in Quebec, especially in Montreal. We are here tonight to discuss Laurentian University, which is in financial straits. What does tomorrow hold?

I have the privilege of sitting on the Standing Committee on Official Languages. Yesterday, the committee heard from the minister and other stakeholders. The stakeholders mentioned that we could not wait for the Official Languages Act to be updated. If Laurentian University is in trouble today, other Canadian universities will also have problems in the future, be it tomorrow or the next day.

Does the government want to turn its back on post-secondary institutions that teach linguistic minorities? If so, it had better tell us. It is not taking action, and that does not sit well with me. I have to talk about what the Conservative Party of Canada has done. I am not trying to be opportunistic. As soon as our new leader was appointed, we presented a clear plan. In the first 100 days of a Conservative government, we will invest the money to sustain our institutions, defend the French fact and protect official language minority communities.

Today, we have to come together because the problem is bigger than the 28 programs that were cut. It is a society-wide problem. As long as Canada has two official languages, and as long as the people of Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier place their trust in me, I will rise in the House to defend the French fact. We have to roll up our sleeves and find solutions that give Canadian citizens access to education in French.

Our professors and our students have been wronged. Down the line, that will either stifle our French language or ignite it.

In closing, I would like to read a brief excerpt from the preamble to the Official Languages Act:

...to respect the constitutional guarantees of minority language educational rights and to enhance opportunities for all to learn both English and French;

That is what the preamble to the Official Languages Act says, so I think the minister needs to act immediately.

• (2005)

[English]

Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Timmins—James Bay and my colleague from London—Fanshawe for bringing forward this important emergency debate this evening.

Members who have already spoken have made it clear Laurentian University in Sudbury is of importance. I am concerned about a number of aspects about this. There are important protections of the CCAA that provide safeguards other than relief of debts for assets. There are certain protections for pensions of workers in these situations.

I know some of these protections do not go far enough. In fact, I have a bill before Parliament that would expand those protections. We need a comprehensive solution that maintains some of the protections for workers that exist with the CCAA.

With that being said, I do fear invoking the CCAA in this way for a public university might be a sneaky way to privatize it. If this were done by the board or the administration of the university, I wonder if the province should not have had the opportunity to step in here and protect the state of the university, including ensuring it remains a public university. I wonder if the member would like to speak to some of those points.

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Speaker, it is important to be able to see what is happening in the institutions. In the preamble, there are indicators that call on us to react, observe and demand accountability. It is not interference. It is about holding those in charge accountable.

On the other hand, we have a responsibility to ensure that everything is going well. In this case, we could see this problem coming a mile off. Let me be clear: We are going to see more problems at other post-secondary institutions. We have to put mechanisms in place to protect our institutions and, most importantly, to protect the French fact.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages (FedDev Ontario and Official Languages), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to be able to ask my hon. colleague from Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier a question.

I listened to his speech very carefully tonight. He said that, within the first 100 days of forming a Conservative government, his leader would move forward to find solutions for francophones.

I recall that in November 2018, a Progressive Conservative leader made the same promises to francophones in Ontario. What did that leader do? He slashed everything.

I would like to know how anyone can trust the Conservatives when they were in power between 2012 and 2015 and made no investments in francophones, either in Canada or in Ontario.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague, with whom I have the privilege of serving on the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

I will provide her with some information. From 2009 to 2015, investments did not increase. From 2015 to 2021, there were no investments in institutions.

My colleague attended yesterday's committee meeting. Representatives from Campus Saint-Jean pointed out that there were no increases during that whole time.

I invite my colleague to do the math with me. From 2009 to 2015 is six years. From 2015 to 2021 is also six years. We cannot change the past, but we can change the future. What we do know is that if the Liberal government remains in power, the French fact will be in trouble.

● (2010)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Longueuil—Saint-Hubert. We have time for a 30-second question and, I hope, a 30-second answer.

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we are not going to fix the whole issue with French in 30 seconds.

I find it pretty pathetic to hear the Liberals and Conservatives passing the buck over the French language. There is just one language at risk in Canada, and that is French.

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Three per cent of North Americans speak French. We do not need a policy on the two official languages. We need a policy for one dominant language and one language at risk. So long as the government does not officially acknowledge that French is at risk in Quebec, Ontario, Alberta and all across Canada, we will not get any policies to specifically address this serious issue. A culture is in the process of dying.

Does my colleague agree that there is one dominant language and one language at risk in Canada? Could this become a policy?

The Speaker: The hon. member for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier has 30 seconds to answer the question.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Longueuil—Saint-Hubert.

We are in a country called Canada. There are two official languages. We are here in Ottawa this evening in the Parliament of Canada as part of an emergency debate on the French language in Ontario and on Laurentian University. Yes, we need to protect the two official languages across Canada, from coast to coast, to ensure that we remain a bilingual country. Some substantial work is needed to address the French fact specifically.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I wish to express our complete solidarity with Franco-Ontarians and their ongoing struggle to preserve their language. I think that the young people of the sizable francophone community of northeastern Ontario deserve quality services without having to move as far away as Ottawa or Quebec.

Laurentian University, in Sudbury, is about to slash some 60 programs to avoid bankruptcy. We have learned that programs for francophones were especially hard hit. This always seems to be the case.

The president of the Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario, Carol Jolin, said there had already been cutbacks in French-language programs for years. He also pointed out that the board of governors of Laurentian University was predominantly anglophone. Historically, whenever an anglophone majority has made decisions for francophones, the outcome has not been positive.

That is why there is the principle of “by and for francophones”. We even learned today in a Radio-Canada article that there was a confidential meeting between several leaders of bilingual universities, including the University of Ottawa, which tolerates Quebec bashing, but that is another issue.

These leaders met with the new Government of Ontario, which had just come into power, so funding for the Université de l'Ontario français had already been secured. They worked hard and made all sorts of proposals to allow the bilingual universities to conduct their programs in French. Three weeks later, we find out to everyone's surprise that the province cut the Université de l'Ontario français and the Office of the French Language Services Commissioner. People joined forces. I admire the francophone and Acadian communities. It is often said that they are experiencing a growing rate of assimilation. That is true, but these people fight for French every single day. We saw that with the Montfort Hospital and the Université de l'Ontario français and we are seeing that yet again with Laurentian University.

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The University of Sudbury intends to become a francophone university. I think it is very important to strengthen French in Ontario. The francophone and Acadian communities are saying, and we have seen it, that immersion schools are actually assimilation schools. The francophones who attend those schools get assimilated. That is why I am very concerned to see that, in her official languages reform bill, the Minister of Official Languages plans to increase funding for immersion schools, but she says nothing about schools that are run by and for francophones.

I think that, before increasing funding for immersion schools, the government should ensure that francophones outside Quebec have access to French-language schools. A very large proportion of francophones do not have access to elementary and high schools because of the infamous “where numbers warrant” principle, which is completely shameful. I will come back to that. They do not currently have access to French-language schools, so they end up going to immersion schools and getting assimilated, when all they really want is to go to a French-language school. I think we need to work hard to change the very principle of the Official Languages Act.

When Ms. Risbud, from the Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta, appeared before the Standing Committee on Official Languages, she talked about how serious the situation is in Alberta. The whole issue of Campus Saint-Jean does not make any sense, particularly since the Government of Alberta recently announced a \$98-million commitment to improve the infrastructure of post-secondary institutions. However, not a single penny of that money was allocated to Campus Saint-Jean.

• (2015)

We also learned that the Government of Alberta repeatedly refused to sign federal-provincial agreements which would have resulted in federal funding. The Government of Alberta refused to provide any money for Campus Saint-Jean. Many people ignore or pretend to ignore the fact that all provincial governments that today are primarily English-speaking created laws or regulations prohibiting French-language instruction for francophones. This led to the assimilation of francophones. They were truly ethnocidal laws. That is not too strong a term.

There was a certain rallying of the Estates General of French Canada. We heard about the Laurendeau-Dunton commission. We were told that André Laurendeau himself asked for this commission.

The Speaker: I must interrupt the hon. member for a moment. The technical support officers are telling me that another microphone, not the member's headset, is connected. We want to ensure that we understand and hear everything the member has to say. Please ensure that the headset is connected.

We will resume debate and determine whether the sound is working properly.

The member for La Pointe-de-l'Île.

• (2020)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Mr. Speaker, I will try to slow down, because the interpreters tell us that the faster we talk, the more difficult their work is.

My point is that the language issue has been brushed aside for too long. Up until very recently, we were told that everything was great and that Canada stood as a model in terms of treatment of linguistic minorities. Meanwhile, assimilation rates of francophone populations increased everywhere and the proportion of people who spoke French at home, for example, declined. Nevertheless, everyone kept saying that everything was fine, including in Quebec.

Now that an election is looming, suddenly there is a recognition that French is declining and we have emergency debates. That is great, I am very happy about it, but I think a fundamental change is in order. The Official Languages Act does not work.

The Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, the Laurendeau-Dunton commission, considered more territorial models, like in Switzerland and Belgium. They are the only models that work. Unless there is a common language in a given territory, the survival and vitality of that language cannot be ensured.

In Canada, outside Quebec, we see that English is clearly the common language. In spite of the immigration levels being quite high in Canada, about 99% of language transfers among newcomers favour English. Therefore, English is not threatened in Canada.

We have seen laws against the French language being adopted everywhere. At the time of the Dunton-Laurendeau commission and the Estates General of French Canada, things started moving in Quebec, and the independence movement was born. That was the time when people started waking up. I believe Mr. Pearson had good intentions, but when Mr. Trudeau came, he refused to allow anything to be called into question and did not want to grant any collective rights to Quebecers or to francophones. He established a model of institutional bilingualism based on individual rights which would be exercised conditionally, in accordance with the famous “where numbers warrant” rule. That model does not work.

Wherever such a system of institutional bilingualism is used in the world, with the same rights applying everywhere, it invariably leads to the assimilation of minority languages. Conversely, systems of territorial bilingualism do work.

In Flemish Belgium, the public service operates in Dutch. That does not stop people from learning four or five second languages easily. Dutch, which is not widely spoken in the rest of the world, is not in danger in Flemish Belgium. The same is true in Wallonia, the francophone region. We need a system that looks like that.

A people's right to self-determination includes the right to secure the future of its national language and culture. That is not what the government opted for. “Where the number warrants” is ludicrous. It means that, if French is in decline somewhere, services in French are cut. That is a bit like having a law to promote employment and fight unemployment that cuts job-finding services wherever employment rates drop. It makes no sense. It is an absolutely ludicrous principle.

The other ludicrous principle was the official language minority rule, which separated French Quebec from francophones in the rest of Canada.

It just so happened that, in Quebec, anglophones were considered to be minority language speakers even though anglophones had school and university systems that received vastly more funding than francophone systems.

According to the rule, anglophones were a minority. Well, they would be if Quebec were independent.

Anyway, they received loads of funding. I just want to quote a study about university funding across Canada. Oddly enough, the study is virtually impossible to find. It was carried out by Frédéric Lacroix and Patrick Sabourin some time ago, in 2005.

● (2025)

They looked at the share of funding for universities based on language.

At that time in Quebec, the Government of Quebec and the federal government jointly provided 27.7% of funding. However, the Government of Quebec is exemplary in its treatment of its linguistic minority as primary and secondary schools as well as CEGEPs and English universities are overfunded. You will find English schools and services for anglophones almost everywhere in Quebec. Where there are very few anglophones, the means are found for English services. Universities have more equitable funding. In the case of Quebec, the funding is not equitable and English universities and education are overfunded.

Approximately 33% of New Brunswick's population was French. Funding for the Université de Moncton and for French-language university services was 26%. That was pretty good. In Ontario, funding was 3% for 5.9% of francophones. In Nova Scotia, it was 1.6% for 4% of francophones. In Alberta, it was 0.2% for 2.5% of francophones. The percentages keep dropping—

The Speaker: I am going to interrupt the member for La Pointe-de-l'Île because of a point of order.

The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I was surprised to hear my colleague say that the francophone population in Ontario was 3%. In northern Ontario, it is 50%, and 70% in northeastern Ontario.

The Speaker: I will let the member continue.

The hon. member for La Pointe-de-l'Île.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Mr. Speaker, I may have misspoken. I meant to say that the proportion of funding that goes to university services in French in Ontario is 3%. I was not talking about Franco-Ontarians. I think that the percentage of Franco-Ontarians whose mother tongue is French is 5.9%.

There is a serious underfunding of post-secondary institutions, including French-language ones, across Canada and Quebec. There is not a lot of research on these institutions, but the Commission nationale des parents francophones conducted a study in 1996 on primary and secondary schools entitled *Où sont passés les milliards?* or where did the billions go? That study showed that only 28.5% of the funding for the official languages program had been allocated to francophones outside Quebec for education in their mother tongue, while anglophone schools in Quebec received 47.7% of the subsidies.

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When the Official Languages Act was brought in, English-language institutions in Quebec were already over-funded. Every Quebecer agrees that anglophones have the right to have English-language institutions by virtue of their historic minority status. That being said, the more a linguistic community has strong and well-funded institutions, the more powerful their language becomes.

The French language is at risk in Quebec because language transfers are too low. About 55% of language transfers go towards French, but 90% is needed to maintain the demographic weight of francophones. In Canada, 99% of these transfers go towards English. That is way off, and if the government wants to get back on track, it has to fund post-secondary institutions and health care. This is important, because it is directly connected to the attraction power of French. French-language institutions need to receive equal funding in the rest of Canada, as in Quebec.

This really needs to be reconsidered. To my friends who are advocating for francophone universities outside Quebec, I suggest that they use the example of funding for Quebec's post-secondary education system. In 2015-16, 33.5% of federal funding for post-secondary education went to the English-language system. In 2018-19, that figure was 32%.

We need a complete overhaul of the Official Languages Act. We need to get our heads out of the sand. The government took the first step when it admitted to the decline of French in Quebec, as in the rest of Canada. Now it needs to walk the talk.

Quebeckers get worried every time that French-language elementary and high schools or universities outside Quebec get funding, because education is normally a provincial jurisdiction. It is rather absurd that the federal government is required to provide this funding to the other provinces to ensure a minimum number of French-language institutions. There are not enough of them, though, and there is a lot of catching up to do. Assimilation progresses as time goes on. My compatriots in francophone and Acadian communities are fighting like the devil. This is laudable, and I think they are an inspiration to Quebeckers.

We need to join forces, and for that to happen, the Official Languages Act needs to be amended. We need to work on it together to reverse the decline of the French language.

● (2030)

Everyone has good intentions and is saying all the right things. When election time comes around, everyone makes lofty promises. After the election, as a certain singer once put it, "The day before the election he called you his son; the very next day, of course he forgot your name." This is all talk and no action.

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If nothing is done, the situation will be untenable in Quebec. We will not accept this decline of French. Things are very difficult in the greater Montreal area. Francophone students are in the minority in French-language schools. Francophones, people whose mother tongue is French and who speak French at home, are becoming a minority. All indicators are pointing in that direction, unless there is a big shift, a fundamental change.

What we heard from the minister yesterday at the Standing Committee on Official Languages was not at all reassuring. Nobody other than the Bloc Québécois has conveyed Quebec's demands on the modernization of the Official Languages Act. We do have some allies, I do not want to point fingers at everyone.

What we want is for Quebec to be its own master when it comes to language policy and language management, and for the federal government to recognize that Quebec is part of the francophone minority in North America. We are surrounded by 350 million anglophones.

It is only natural for newcomers who settle somewhere to lean towards the majority. Everyone is like that. Whether in Quebec or anywhere else in Canada, the majority is anglophone. The majority on the continent is even more so. That is why French must remain the common language in Quebec.

In my view, if the government really wants to ensure the future of French outside Quebec, then there should be territories. I think Acadians were or are demanding community governance in some places. It came very late. The first public high schools in Ontario—

The Speaker: I am going to interrupt the hon. member. His time is up. Questions and comments.

The hon. member for Sherbrooke.

• (2035)

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.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech this evening and for the request for emergency debate, which enables us to discuss this important issue.

Obviously, we support the French language. Before I became an MP, I earned a living working with French. It is part of my identity, my history and my daily life. I will therefore do everything I can to defend it.

With regard to Laurentian University, it is vital to have strong institutions, particularly in francophone minority communities in other parts of Canada. Our government is there. We are present. We encourage the provinces and territories to provide their communities with a quality French-language or bilingual education and support them in doing so. The government has been supporting education in the minority language for over 50 years. We will continue to do that with investments of \$150 million per year and an additional amount of over \$15 million per year from 2019 to 2023.

Unlike the official opposition, which denies the fact that education is a provincial jurisdiction, I would like my colleague to tell me what action the government can take within our areas of jurisdiction.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I would say that the Government of Quebec is asking that positive measures of the Official Languages Act—and this is different from post-secondary funding—not be implemented in Quebec unilaterally, but that they be agreed to by Quebec, and that they consider the real needs of the anglophone community in Quebec as well. The federal government must work with the Government of Quebec.

I think it is the same thing and that we could accomplish that. We must speak out against what is currently happening. Francophone Acadian communities have to fight every day and are forced to start over every time. We see it at the Standing Committee on Official Languages. People cannot get over the fact that although the Official Languages Act has been in place for 50 years, French has fallen by the wayside with the arrival of the pandemic.

The federal government must work with the provinces. At some point, the government will have to acknowledge reality. It has now started to do so and it must stay the course. It must realize that this makes no sense. Ontario officially apologized for Regulation 17, but it then went back to its old ways. It is as though there was no awareness of Canada's history of assimilation. More than 75% of francophones outside Quebec were assimilated, since they did not have access to French-language schools.

I knew a union member who left for Alberta with his family. There were no French kindergarten classes and so they started one. Then they fought for primary education. They did what they could. Finally, his growing family moved back to Quebec because they could not keep up the fight. Some people do continue to fight and I respect them for it. I believe we should give them maximum support. Quebecers should work with them to change the Official Languages Act, which is not meaningful and puts us at loggerheads. I think we can do it.

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague, with his usual passion, has shown that tonight's emergency debate on the elimination of French-language programs at Laurentian University is just the tip of the iceberg, and that it is really the decline of the French language in Canada that is extremely worrisome.

I would like to bring the debate back to the situation at Laurentian University. Apart from what he said in his speech, I would like to know whether he agrees that this is a bilingual university in an anglophone setting and, as the Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario, or AFO, has said, the solution must be to create a francophone institution, eventually with an indigenous component, but with francophones.

Does the member think we need to rethink the governance model and, of course, come up with a temporary solution that I am sure the minister will look into?

I would like to hear the member's thoughts on the governance model he favours for breaking Laurentian University's current impasse.

• (2040)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Mr. Speaker, my colleague gave me the answer in his question. I would also like to thank him for being an ally at the official languages committee and helping to launch the first ever study on French within Quebec, as well as French outside Quebec.

I agree that we need to focus as much as possible on the idea of “by” and “for” francophones. In partnership with the Association des enseignantes et enseignants franco-ontariens, the University of Sudbury has announced that it intends to become a francophone university. I think we should give this initiative all our support. The French programs at Laurentian University need to be maintained, but we also need to move more towards models “by” and “for” francophones. Earlier I was looking at my list and the percentage of funding that went to universities. For Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, Saskatchewan and British Columbia, the funding is zero dollars.

Alberta has Campus Saint-Jean, and we need to try to preserve it and ensure its development. We need to move towards models “by” and “for” francophones as much as possible.

With diminishing support for post-secondary education in French, where will the professors come from if there are no more francophone universities and no more French programs? This is crucial. The Francophone and Acadian communities cannot afford to lose these French programs. Personally, I think there should be a lot more than there are now.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member from La Pointe-de-l'Île for his speech.

His comments are sometimes a bit confused and unclear. He throws a lot of numbers around. He even said that in Quebec, francophone students are the minority in French schools. I did not quite understand what he was trying to say. That said, I share his passion for defending the Francophonie and the French fact throughout Quebec and North America.

I have a very simple question for him. Does he believe the federal government has a role to play in defending francophone rights and that it is therefore the role of the federal government to support the French fact in Quebec and across Canada?

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Mr. Speaker, what I said earlier was that students in Montreal are in the minority in French schools. I will send him the numbers, and we can debate them at the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

I do not think what I said was confusing. Everyone who defends French in Quebec supports the territorial model of bilingualism. If the member were more accustomed to listening to them, I think he would understand what I am saying more easily.

As was mentioned, the federal government's role in Quebec is to negotiate agreements and not impose unilateral measures. Quebec already allocates too much funding to anglophone institutions. We do not need measures shoved down our throats by the federal government. That is a fundamental principle of self-determination.

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When I shared Quebec's demand with Ms. Joly yesterday, she said that her government was acting in accordance with the Constitution. However, this Constitution was foisted on Quebec. No Quebec government has signed it, because it is primarily designed to dismantle Bill 101.

The federal government needs to respect provincial jurisdictions, and this is done through agreements. It needs to get its head out of the sand. It doles out funding in the rest of Canada and then acts as though it is doing a good job and everything is fine, but meanwhile French is on the decline everywhere. There is something wrong there.

• (2045)

The Speaker: Before we move on, I want to remind members that they cannot use other members' names. They can refer to ridings or to the member's title in the House. Debates can sometimes get heated, and I know that it is easy to forget this rule. I just wanted to give a reminder.

Resuming debate, the hon. Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages.

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to see you and all my colleagues this evening. I will be sharing my time with my esteemed colleague, the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance.

The reason we are gathered here this evening is a sad one. Laurentian University is an institution that makes a tremendous contribution to the region's economic development, but it is also a flagship institution for official languages because it offers courses in French to northern Ontario's francophone population as well as programs for the indigenous community, as some members have mentioned. As such, we are gathered here this evening out of a sense of solidarity, and I want to thank my colleagues for taking the time to share their perspectives, contribute to the debate and, ultimately, find solutions to this problem.

My government and I are extremely concerned about the cuts at Laurentian University. It breaks our hearts, and it breaks my heart, to hear about the professors and researchers who have lost their jobs and the students who will not be able to finish their degrees because their programs were cancelled. We have to be cognizant of their reality, we have to be there for them and we have to work with them to find solutions.

[*English*]

Of course, I am extremely saddened by the stories we have all heard about students, French-speaking students and English-speaking students, who have lost a lot of opportunities to continue to study in their region of northern Ontario.

[*Translation*]

The situation calls for clear direction and problem solving.

Since coming to power in 2015, our government has taken several measures to rebuild bridges with francophone communities across the country and to protect the linguistic rights of people who are fighting every day to be able to speak French.

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For instance, there was the historic \$2.7-billion investment to help our communities, as well as the funding to build the Place des Arts in Sudbury, which I had the opportunity to announce with my colleague, the member for Sudbury.

There are many more examples that demonstrate how proactive we have been when it comes to official languages. Ontario's French-language university, the first university by and for francophones, is one example. Let us not forget the cuts made by Radio-Canada in Windsor and at other French-language stations in Ontario. We were able to reverse those cuts and invest \$175 million. Let us not forget the census issue either, or the changes made to part IV of the Official Languages Act to increase services offered in French by federal institutions. We have been extremely proactive.

In order to keep our official language communities strong and enable them to continue speaking French, both now and generations from now, we know that they need strong institutions. The very existence of these communities is at stake, along with their survival and, of course, their future prosperity. That is why we decided to go above and beyond investments, to get to the very heart of the system that protects our language rights in Canada, and to modernize the Official Languages Act.

Over 50 years ago, Canada came up with a way to protect our language rights. All members know that we have agreements with the provinces and territories regarding education. Through these agreements, we help the French and French-as-a-second-language education systems. During our time in office, we have increased the funding transferred to the provinces. In 2018, we increased funding by \$60 million.

• (2050)

We want to go even further because we know that education does not just involve elementary and secondary school. We need to recognize that children whose parents want to ensure that they can continue to speak the minority language must also be able to go to day care in the minority language, which is French in this case, and that, of course, the education continuum then needs to continue through elementary school, high school and post-secondary studies.

That is why our reform recognizes the importance of the education continuum. We need to protect the institutions and recognize the education continuum. We need to work with the provinces to do that because we are operating within a federal system that provides for two things.

First, the Constitution provides for linguistic rights based on our two official languages, and the federal government is responsible for protecting those rights. It also provides for a division of powers. Education is a provincial jurisdiction. The Supreme Court had many opportunities to establish a clear precedent in that regard. Just last summer, with the British Columbia school boards, the Supreme Court stated that both official languages had to be truly equal and that provinces had to play their part in financing their education system in the minority language, in this case French.

Whether it is Campus Saint-Jean or Laurentian University, provinces need to be at the table and find concrete solutions to make sure that the francophone minority and francophiles have ac-

cess to high quality post-secondary education in their region, like every citizen should.

Regarding Laurentian University, which is the subject of tonight's debate, I had a chance to talk with the Ontario minister of education and the Ontario minister of francophone affairs. It goes without saying that they have to play their part in finding a solution to protect a French-language post-secondary institution in northern Ontario. I am prepared to have many conversations with them. At the end of the day, they have to be able to come up with a solution, and we will be there at the table to help them financially. We will be there because we believe, as the federal government, that we have to protect the linguistic rights that fall under our jurisdiction in accordance with the Constitution. However, the groundwork has to be done at the provincial level.

The province is facing a major language crisis. It must acknowledge that and take action. It should be able to find solutions. It is not normal to find ourselves in a situation where a public university has to go to court when there are management problems. In those circumstances, we will certainly be there to help the community find solutions and to make sure that funding is available. For our education system to work, we must also make sure that provinces are accountable.

What is happening now is especially dramatic because some programs were abolished, namely the midwife program. Such a cut has devastating effects on a whole generation of francophones because the program offered by the Laurentian University was the only public health education program offered outside Quebec. It was a key program for women's health, especially in Canada's Far North. As we can see, it has a very real impact. We must be able to work with the province and with the community to fund education programs in that field.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the really important quality work which the members for Sudbury and for Nickel Belt have been doing for years. My colleagues are very much in touch with their community and are proud Franco-Ontarians. I know they do a great job in defending the interests of their fellow citizens. I also know that they maintain an ongoing dialogue with people like Stéphane Gauthier and Denis Constantineau, who are involved in trying to find solutions to strengthen the French fact in northern Ontario.

• (2055)

Franco-Ontarians and Sudburians are resilient. We will stand by them and help them defend their language rights and ensure the sustainability of the French fact in Sudbury, in northern Ontario and across Canada.

I look forward to questions from my colleagues.

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for her speech.

I imagine that she has known for a while that Laurentian University has been struggling. She probably knew before the university decided to seek bankruptcy protection.

When was she informed that the university was experiencing difficulties? What did she do when she got this information?

She certainly did not learn only at the beginning of February that Laurentian University was struggling.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question.

Laurentian University is an important institution. That said, the university primarily discussed its management of public funds with the province and not the federal government.

[*English*]

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister and I have had many conversations. As she knows, I am the member of Parliament for the riding that has Campus Saint-Jean in it. I am deeply worried about the impacts on universities. My big concern is this. Today, she spoke about how the provinces needed to come to the table and how we needed to depend on our provincial leaders to act. I cannot depend on my provincial leader to act. I cannot depend on Jason Kenney to do the right thing for francophonie in Alberta. It feels like a cop-out when she says that I need to ensure Jason Kenney will act.

How will she protect the francophonie in my riding, if we cannot get our UCP leader to come to the table?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, I commend my colleague for her leadership on the question of Campus Saint-Jean. We have, indeed, had a lot of conversations together regarding the survival of Campus Saint-Jean.

As a federal government, we do many things to ensure that francophones in Alberta are not only able to continue to have a post-secondary institution, but that they are able to uphold their rights. That is started by ensuring that Campus Saint-Jean has adequate funding. I am very aware of the funding that has been left on the table by the Alberta government. I want to reiterate the fact that there are \$2 million on the table to help Campus Saint-Jean. That is the first thing.

The second thing is that we want to ensure we protect the court challenges program in the Official Languages Act. We very much know that francophones in Alberta right now are before the courts fighting the Alberta government. We need to stand by their side to help them, and that is through the court challenges program.

I hope my colleagues in the Conservative party hear me loud and clear on this one. We want to ensure that the court challenges program is protected under the Official Languages Act. When I am able to table a bill, I really hope they will support that. We all know the court challenges program was abolished by the Harper government in the past.

• (2100)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have two questions for the minister.

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First, does she intend to support the plan to make the University of Sudbury a francophone university?

Second, the minister said that she wants to help promote French in Quebec. Does this mean that the government will continue to fund English only through the development of official-language communities program and the enhancement of official languages program, which fall under the Official Languages Act?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, there are several things.

We recently provided funds to Ontario to support recruitment and retention of French teachers. In the media, we see that teachers are being laid off. Obviously, that makes no sense.

The federal government has been providing funds to Ontario to make sure there are teachers to teach our youth, knowing that there is a shortage of French teachers, and Laurentian University lays them off.

Our goal is to be there to emphasize to Ontario that there are other possibilities and solutions.

To answer the member's question concerning the University of Sudbury project, I am very open to different scenarios. Ultimately, the objective would be to be able to offer university courses in French in northern Ontario because, as my colleague from Sudbury stated earlier, francophones who were born in Ontario and whose parents and grandparents grew up in Ontario have the right to continue to speak French, to live life in French and to hope that their children and grandchildren can continue to live in French in northern Ontario, and to have access to good jobs, since they will have obtained a university education—

The Speaker: The minister is out of time. I am sorry.

The hon. Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mona Fortier (Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to start by thanking my colleague, the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages, because we are really working as a team this evening. I really appreciate her remarks and the fact that we are calling for solidarity this evening.

As we have shown repeatedly, our official languages are a priority for our government. They are at the heart of who we are as Canadians. French and English are integral to our shared identity. Our linguistic duality helps build bridges between our communities.

I would like to start with a brief tangent.

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As a proud Franco-Ontarian, I have always been part of a minority community. I was raised and educated in French and I fought for the Montfort Hospital, our post-secondary institutions and services in French. I raised my three children, worked in our institutions and businesses and celebrated my francophone identity every day. That is why I am troubled by the recent news about Laurentian University.

Like thousands of Canadians, I studied sociology and completed an MBA in French. I did my studies in French. I am a graduate of the University of Ottawa, but I also did some courses at Campus Saint-Jean in Alberta. I learned to appreciate the advantages and the added value that these institutions bring to our country, from both an economic and a social perspective.

I also want to take this opportunity to tell the students, faculty and staff, as well as the entire community of Sudbury and the Franco-Ontarian community in general, that I stand in solidarity with them and that they are my foremost concern.

This evening, I want to thank my parliamentary colleagues for focusing on solidarity in our debates in order to support those who have been adversely affected by this situation. We believe and know that French-language, francophone and bilingual post-secondary institutions across the country are essential to the vitality, development and even growth of Canada's francophone and Acadian communities. They are at the very heart of official language communities.

That is why we are prepared to help Laurentian University, and we are working in partnership with the Government of Ontario to remedy this situation, as my colleague who spoke just before me said.

• (2105)

[English]

It is why I can say that through an ambitious mandate, tireless work, real actions and concrete investments, our Liberal government has proven our ongoing commitment to the vitality of our official languages and of our linguistic communities.

[Translation]

I would like to remind members about our action plan for official languages 2018-2023 entitled "Investing in Our Future".

It includes new investments of nearly \$500 million in addition to existing funds, which represents a historic investment of \$2.7 billion over five years for official languages. These historic investments seek not only to help Canadians in official language minority communities to thrive, but also to ensure that all Canadians of all ages and in all regions have the opportunity to learn and live in their two official languages.

[English]

Education, from early learning and child care to post-secondary and adult learning, is essential to the vitality of communities, and our investments reflect that. We have increased investments of \$64 million, for a total of more than \$95 million, in infrastructure, including for community education infrastructure, to support institutions in renovating and upgrading their infrastructure. This means

more funding for post-secondary institutions that serve official-language minority communities and French second language learners.

[Translation]

Our government is also proud of the \$12.6 million in new funding invested in scholarships to help anglophone students take post-secondary programs in French. We also invested an additional \$17.5 million in the Odyssey language assistant program, which gives young people the opportunity to work for a year as a language assistant in a classroom for second language learners.

I also remind members of the \$62.6 million investment in teacher recruitment and retention strategies for French-language minority schools, French immersion programs and French second language programs. Recruiting qualified teachers to teach French in Canada is extremely challenging, especially in the context of the pandemic. These new investments will help ensure that there are enough teachers to meet the demand.

[English]

We are also proud to be working with our partners, the provinces and territories, on this particular issue. Our government is committed to renewing our bilateral agreements to support minority-language education and second-language instruction. In budget 2019, the government went a step further by announcing new investments totalling \$60 million over four years to support minority-language education across the country.

[Translation]

In concrete terms, this means that under the bilateral agreement with Ontario on official languages, according to the 2019-20 annual report submitted by the province, the federal contribution to Laurentian University was over \$1 million in 2019-20.

The Government of Canada supports Laurentian University through its bilateral education agreement with the Government of Ontario. Between 2015-16 and 2019-20, \$59.3 million was provided by the Government of Canada to support all post-secondary education in Ontario. We are also proud to say that under the 2021-23 agreement, the federal contribution in 2020-21 in support of post-secondary education is \$16 million. This does not include the significant investments in research that my colleague from Sudbury talked about earlier this evening, and I give him my regards in passing.

• (2110)

[English]

Let us not forget the important work we do for rights holders. We have also increased core funding for organizations working to promote and support minority-language education, empowering them to encourage more rights holders to choose minority education and facilitate the sharing of educational resources with educators.

[Translation]

With regard to rights holders, I would add that not only has our government reinstated the long-form census, but it has also added new questions to the 2021 long- and short-form questionnaires, which will more accurately determine the number of people entitled to minority-language education in the next census.

Our government is determined to promote and protect the official languages, and it will continue to propose meaningful and positive measures to that end.

We are pleased to continue the work begun with our provincial and territorial counterparts and also with our opposition colleagues on this shared objective. This evening we should work together and think also of our future generations that wish to attend post-secondary institutions offering French-language programs in Ontario and across the country. I am thinking of my children.

We will continue to do this work, not just because it is the right thing to do, but also because it is the smart thing to do. We know that when we invest in our communities, education, trade, tourism and French culture flourish for everyone. Across the country, from Moncton to Sudbury, from Edmonton to Victoria, our linguistic communities are vibrant and resilient. That is why I am proud to represent the residents of Ottawa-Vanier and to be part of a government that takes action, is proactive for official language communities and is making important investments to help them prosper.

I hope we will be able to continue working together to find solutions.

I am pleased to have had the opportunity to speak this evening.

The Deputy Speaker: Several members would like to ask questions. Before we proceed to questions and comments, I would remind hon. members to be concise.

The hon. member for Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis.

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the speech by my colleague who asks us to show solidarity this evening. We are facing a crisis and unfortunately, I heard my colleague boasting and passing the buck to the provinces.

I will respect the wishes of the Deputy Speaker of the House of Commons and ask my colleague a specific question about the situation we are discussing this evening. Does she agree with the proposal by the Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario to take the federal funding for French-language university education that was earmarked for Laurentian University and send it to the University of Sudbury instead as soon as possible?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Mr. Speaker, we have to weigh all the options and work with the community. We know that this is not the first time Ontario's francophone community has gone through this type of situation. I remember when we were standing up for Collège La Cité, Collège Boréal and the Université de l'Ontario français. Now it is time to see what the federal government might do together with the Government of Ontario to contribute to the development of an institution that offers French programs in the Sudbury region.

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Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will try to be brief even though the issue of French is so important that we could talk about it at length.

Fifty years ago, Canada brought in the Official Languages Act. They said they would permanently protect French and English until the end of time. Fifty years later, we are still here this evening to hold an emergency debate because a francophone community in Ontario is under threat.

According to Statistics Canada, the demographic weight of francophones outside Quebec was 3.8% in 2011. According to the projections, that percentage will be 2.7% in 2036. In 2021, is it not time to admit that the Official Languages Act has been a failure and that we need to move on to something else?

● (2115)

Hon. Mona Fortier: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question.

I worked on the development of this reform, and I participated in the discussions regarding the options for the next official languages bill. Thanks to the modernization of the Official Languages Act, we will be able to continue to help official language communities flourish and, above all, to help the French language thrive across the country. Obviously, this will also enable us to encourage both official language communities to live in French and English across the country.

[English]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, earth to Liberal cabinet: Laurentian University is on fire. What I heard from the minister was a lot of pats on the backs of the Liberals that everything is fine. Everything is not fine. That is why we are having an emergency debate.

There will be the destruction of the indigenous language program, the Anishinabe language, the Cree language, the training of a young generation of indigenous people who live in the north and stay in the north, in law, in politics, in environment. That is all gone. I have heard nothing from the member, who sits at the Prime Minister's table, about what they are going to do, nothing. We heard from the member for Sudbury that he is going to bring forward a private member's bill at some point in the distant future. They are abandoning Laurentian.

I want the member to tell us what her cabinet is going to do to help the people of Laurentian, particularly indigenous students.

[Translation]

Hon. Mona Fortier: Mr. Speaker, I am in the same situation as my hon. colleague. As I mentioned, I am calling for solidarity because it pains me to see that our French-language schools are once again having to fight to offer programs in French and English. What is more, as the member mentioned, they need to fight to support indigenous communities.

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We need to sit down with the Government of Ontario and see how we can work together to better serve the communities and better support the programs offered in northern Ontario. My family is from northern Ontario, and all of my family members contacted me to ask what was going to happen. I told them that we were going to work with the Government of Ontario to develop a plan to support our institutions, not only in the north, but across the country.

[*English*]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I think there are two orders of problems here that are crises. One is with universities in general across Canada.

I do not think I am wrong to say this. I am going to be blunt. The Ontario government, when we look at Laurentian, is partly responsible for this mess. Four of the people on the board of governors are appointees of the Ontario government. The faculty association is calling for the minister responsible for colleges and universities in the Ontario government to be fired. There has been mismanagement. They spent millions on building buildings instead of paying professors and now 110 professors are out of work and programs are slashed.

I think the federal government needs to step up and say this is a publicly funded university and that it is going to save it, not trust the current mismanagement to figure out how to mismanage more dollars if the government gives them those dollars.

Hon. Mona Fortier: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for sharing her views and also the reality of what is happening in Ontario.

I think at this time it is really important also to be a part of the solution. That is why our government will be working with the Government of Ontario to try to see how we will make sure that there are French-language programs and also other programs that are delivered, not only in the region of Sudbury, but for the whole region of northern Ontario.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to be joining tonight's emergency debate on the situation unfolding at Laurentian University and to say at the outset that I will be sharing my time.

We see a fairly familiar pattern when we talk in this House about the federal government's actions in areas where there is a primary role for the provincial government, and it is frustrating for me to see how this unfolds. Very often, the federal government is eager to offer opinions and direction about what other levels of government should be doing, and yet in the same areas or in proximate areas we see the federal government neglecting its own responsibility. The government members are more keen to tell provincial governments how to manage things within their own provincial affairs and how to spend their own provincial money than they are to step up with respect to their own federal responsibilities.

This is very familiar to Canadians when they see the unfolding of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Prime Minister has not been shy about offering provinces all manner of advice about things in provincial jurisdiction and trying to pass off blame to other levels of government, for instance around the vaccine procurement challenges. On things that are clearly within the jurisdiction

of the federal government: things like appropriate measures at the border, screening processes, resolving the absurd spectacle of their hotel quarantine policy, actually procuring vaccines in the first place for provinces to then distribute or supporting a kind of tracing infrastructure that would assist the provinces, we see these failures in areas of federal responsibility, but then a diversion of the conversation to what members of the government think the provinces should be doing.

When it comes to official languages and defending the vital linguistic duality we have in this country, of course there is a core responsibility for the federal government. Any time the government does not agree with the direction another level of government is going in this respect, the federal government and members of the Liberal caucus are very loud about it. Yet when it comes to actually partnering with the provinces, stepping up and engaging and being at the table appropriately in a federal way to defend official languages in areas of federal responsibility, there has been a lack of response.

Members of our caucus have been calling on the government to modernize the Official Languages Act, for example. The Official Languages Act is a federal statute, very clearly within federal jurisdiction, and we see the failure of the government to move on that at the same time as talking about what happens at other levels of government.

As the MP for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, I want to say that I believe very much in the importance of the French language. I am proud of the strong, vibrant francophone community that we have within my own constituency, and I have been pleased to support the work of members of that community through letters to ministers with respect to work that they are doing and projects that they are pursuing. I have benefited from French language education that is available at the Campus Saint-Jean in the greater Sherwood Park area, as we like to call it, in Edmonton.

Although the issues at Laurentian University and in Sudbury are not local to me, I can identify with and appreciate the importance of having strong programs and supports that are available, and in particular that are available to support programs for indigenous languages as well as francophone programs.

I have been looking at the numbers here because they are interesting in terms of understanding what is happening and some of the engagement of the provincial government as well as the federal government. Just one observation that I would have is that in Ontario, the provincial government allocated \$74.19 million in the 2020-21 fiscal year for French-language programs in Ontario; whereas, the federal contribution was much less. The federal contribution was \$14 million. Therefore, the Ontario government is substantially providing for French-language education in the province, far over and above the federal contribution.

• (2120)

However, it is not for me to say, and we do not have anybody from the Ontario government who is able to speak in the House to defend their point of view, but I suspect they would challenge the federal government and say that if it has suggestions or things it wants to see happen, then coming to the table and providing that support might be one way to do that.

Of course, we know that following many comments about the francophone university in Ontario, it ultimately came to pass that there was an agreement that was signed between the federal government and the Ontario government to support a stand-alone francophone university here in Ontario. The federal government engages more constructively when it recognizes its own areas of responsibility and is willing to come to the table in those areas rather than simply trying to sort of dictate and tell other levels of government what they should be doing.

Another point, which is evidenced in the numbers in terms of spending and so I think it is worth observing, is that the provincial government support accounts for 40% of Laurentian's total revenue, and that is in the last year of data available in 2019-20. This compares to the provincial average in this province of 23% of universities' revenue that comes from the province. The argument would be that Laurentian University is receiving substantial dollars in terms of provincial support, but clearly there are challenges and clearly there are needs. There is a need for discussion and resolution in getting towards addressing those issues. However, the federal government, again, while keen to point the finger sometimes, I think needs to recognize its areas of responsibility when it comes to official languages, when it comes to defending and supporting university education and when it comes to working collaboratively with the provinces on these issues.

Although is not central to the topic tonight, I think it is important for members to think about and ask the question of how the delivery of education programs is going to change with changing technology. Many people in my own circles are looking at university programs that are in other parts of the country, perhaps further away or joint programs that are happening between institutions. Their participation in those programs is enabled by distance learning and by the kind of online environments that we are all living in as a result of COVID-19.

There is one school of thought that says as soon as the pandemic is over, people are going to want to snap back to the way it was, and there will be a desire to have the same kind of on-campus presence with most programs offered in person, the way things were, not in every case, but generally speaking, prior to the pandemic. However, there is another school of thought that maybe the flexibility that is associated with the new potential learning environment with people being able to take university courses from institutions anywhere in the world from the comfort of their own homes and communities, provided they have sufficient Internet access, is another possible future world.

One of the questions we should be thinking about in terms of post-secondary institutions in Canada is how that possible adaptation will occur and how our universities could thrive by offering education programs to people all over the world who might want to

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participate remotely. Some may, no doubt, like to be on campus, but some would want to participate in and benefit from those programs from other parts of the country and, indeed, other parts of the world. My encouragement to the federal government and provincial governments would be to think about how to collaborate with universities in this process of innovation so that we have a thriving university sector coming out of this pandemic, kind of riding these technological trends, and offering top instruction and information to people who are interested in accessing those programs from all over the world.

• (2125)

It is exciting to think about the opportunities my kids may have to be able to study somewhere else and take courses in different parts of the world at the same time, so we should try to be hopeful and build toward that future, where Laurentian University and other post-secondary institutions will be a strong part of our national fibre.

• (2130)

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague is of course my neighbour, and his comments were very interesting.

One of the questions I have for him is that he talks about the value of online learning and about the excitement of being able to study abroad or in different places. First of all, does he not recognize that campuses, Francophone campuses, particularly in communities outside of Quebec, are vital to the communities they support?

In my riding of Edmonton Strathcona, Campus Saint-Jean is fundamental to the Francophone community we have in our riding. Without it, we would lose so much of what makes Edmonton Strathcona so special. I am wondering if he recognizes the value campuses have for the communities in which they reside. Could he comment on that, please?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, I actually specifically addressed the benefits I personally received from language classes at Faculté Saint-Jean, so I very much understand and appreciate the value of communities that are created by physical locations.

I addressed the issue of potential changing technology around the delivery of university education relatively parenthetically at the end of my remarks, but it is important to note that change in technology may provide opportunities for strengthening these campus communities as well. Perhaps existing campus communities would also be able to draw in additional revenue by offering online as well as in-person opportunities. That does not, in any sense, negate the value of those campus environments, but it gives them more flexibility to offer more courses, more offerings, and to reach more students in person as well as remotely.

These kinds of evolutions are going to happen as people seek for them to happen, but we should be watching and attentive to these trends and supporting innovation so all of our campus communities can survive into the future.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his excellent speech this evening.

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Brenda Austin-Smith, the president of the Canadian Association of University Teachers, said that poor decisions on campus modernization left Laurentian with big mortgages on still half-empty buildings.

I believe that reflects what my colleague just said in his speech about how universities have to adapt to new technology while recognizing, as the member for Edmonton Strathcona pointed out, that francophone campuses are very important at universities outside Quebec. Is it possible to reconcile those two points of view?

[English]

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, of course there can and there must be a connection between those strong physical campuses and being able to offer more options to more people. I am sure there are many cases of people in Alberta, to use my province as an example, who would be interested in benefiting from courses that are available at Faculté Saint-Jean, but who do not live in or around Edmonton, and for whom it is not feasible or practical to attend courses in person.

The evolving technological environment allows that campus to be able to offer more services to more people at a greater distance, but that does not take away from the importance and the value of the physical community and it becomes a destination that maybe students who are studying from a distance can still come to and participate in physical events from time to time, so there can be a connection between that adaptation to the new environment and the opportunities it presents while at the same time working to reinforce the physical environment.

We do not know exactly how that evolution is going to work, of course. It is hard to predict these things in advance, but I think it will be driven by precisely the things students are seeking. It will be driven by demand, and governments should work with these institutions to offer the best possible options.

• (2135)

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, before I begin my speech, I would like to acknowledge my colleague from Sudbury. Earlier this evening, he gave a very important speech about his region, his city, his family and Laurentian University, an institution I am quite sure he cares deeply about.

It was my pleasure and privilege to work with him at the official languages committee for several years. I want to acknowledge him and tell him I know what he is going through. My hometown of La Pocatière does not have a university, but it does have a private college with about 500 students, some of them from around the world. We also have a big high school, elementary schools of course, and an agri-food technology institution that was in jeopardy some time ago. There was also a university presence until 1962, the year I was born, because Université Laval had its agriculture faculty in La Pocatière.

That is why I understand what my colleague is going through and how upsetting it must be for the people of Sudbury to be dealing with this very worrisome situation and the looming threats fac-

ing Sudbury's Laurentian University, which was established in 1960.

I did a little research earlier, and the priest Gustave Blanche must be turning over in his grave today to see what has happened. In La Pocatière, François Pilote founded the Collège de Sainte-Anne-de-la-Pocatière. It was often priests who founded these institutions, which have become so important in our communities. All the economic spin-offs of college, university and academic endeavours are obvious in La Pocatière, not to mention all the secondary benefits that have arisen over the years.

The university provides an important post-secondary education offering in northern Ontario. It is the only university in the region, which is located more than four hours' drive from Toronto, and it plays an important role in ensuring the survival of the French language in the large Franco-Ontarian community of Greater Sudbury. In addition, it is a highly regarded university, even today, despite the administrative problems that led to it filing for protection under the CCAA. It is worth noting that this institution is now protected from bankruptcy.

What I am going to say may sound strange, but every challenge presents opportunities. One of these opportunities is that Laurentian University now has the possibility of eliminating some of its debts to suppliers or financial partners, as provided for under the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act. I am trying to see the bright side of this crisis. Eliminating this debt could breathe new life into the university, especially if the federal government and Ontario both invest additional funds to get the university back on its feet. The university can only be revitalized by the current situation.

Education is obviously a provincial jurisdiction. Contrary to what my colleague from Sherbrooke said in her speech about how the official opposition does not recognize this provincial jurisdiction, we know this very well and we respect this jurisdiction. The province has the first say in the day-to-day administration of Ontario schools and universities.

However, the Government of Canada also has a role to play, as it has a moral obligation to enhance the vitality of francophone minority communities. I have been a member of the Standing Committee on Official Languages for several years in my time as a member of Parliament, and I know that the federal government has an extremely important role. The minister spoke about it earlier. I do want to point out that the Liberal government has been in power for more than five years, but I do not want to politicize tonight's debate.

• (2140)

The Minister of Official Languages makes nice announcements. She gets to have fun doing that job. She gives fine speeches constantly repeating that her government is investing record amounts to support official languages.

I have some questions, and I am wondering whether the Liberal government, which is here tonight, can explain where all those billions of dollars that were spent to support Franco-Ontarians went. I asked the minister when she found out that Laurentian University was in trouble. Surely she did not find out about it just two months ago, at the beginning of February. She must have been made aware of the university's situation well before that. I would like to know when she was told what was happening and what measures she took at that time. What discussions did she have with the provincial government to try to find solutions in order to avoid the current situation?

It is clear from the articles published by CBC and La Presse that the university's financial troubles are nothing new. That is what I was saying. The university was founded in 1960. Photos of the university show that the buildings are not new, and surely they were paid off a while ago. It takes years and years of poor management to become financial insolvent, which is how the university described its situation.

Earlier, my colleague and I referred to Brenda Austin-Smith, president of CAUT, who said that the administrators must be held to account for their lack of transparency about their financial missteps. In fact, we would likely need to go back a few years to figure out what happened. We also need to ask ourselves whether COVID-19 exacerbated the problem over the past year. That is surely not the only reason the university is in this position today.

In the wake of these events, I want to salute the students and the professors who lost their jobs. The students have had their courses cut and are unable to complete their degrees. The abrupt end to their studies and the various programs is a devastating blow and will be hard for all the students and professors to accept. Many are wondering about their future. We are talking about 1,000 employees at the university and nearly 7,000 students, including more than 1,300 francophones, so it is a large francophone university in Canada.

As francophone parliamentarians, we have a duty to discuss the solutions to be put in place and to do everything we can to make the opportunity I mentioned earlier a reality. We must be able to rebuild the university on a new foundation. I would like to thank my NDP colleague for requesting this emergency debate.

Depending on the outcome of the current legal proceedings, students do not know whether they will have to move to another region to complete their degrees. It would be awful if all these students had to leave the region to study elsewhere, as my colleague from Sudbury mentioned. When students leave to study elsewhere, they often do not return to their region. They decide to leave and stay away. That would be really devastating.

I am not entirely sure what my NDP colleagues want the federal government to do for the time being since the process is already under way. Would they like the federal government to nationalize the university? I hope not. That could happen. The collective agreements for the professors and the staff should be renegotiated and possibly changed to help make the university solvent again. Would the NDP support that? There are all sorts of challenges in this situation.

S. O. 52

I assume the federal government will be there to financially support the French program, which it was already doing in part. However, will it be able to invest more and do more? Right now, that is a question for the minister.

• (2145)

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to my colleague.

There is the Official Languages Act, but this evening we are talking about whether the two languages are on equal footing. In fact, there is one language that is doing very well and another that is not doing well at all.

I have a question for my colleague, who has been an MP much longer than I have. I have been an MP for about five minutes, and we have already had two emergency debates on French. That is crazy.

When was the last time there was a debate in the House of Commons on the status of English in Canada?

Mr. Bernard Gagné (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

The Bloc Québécois is well aware that Canada is a country where English is predominant and French is the minority language. When it comes to issues that affect official language minority communities, the situation is precarious. Over the years, the Official Languages Act has helped support these communities. I agree with my colleague that there is still much work to be done. Many projects have been proposed by different governments over the past 50 years to improve the visibility of francophone communities across Canada and empower them. However, it is clear that more needs to be done.

[English]

Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate everybody's interventions tonight, but we have to stay on topic. We are talking about a public institution, a university, that is going into bankruptcy protection and trying to survive.

When we look at it, it has nothing to do with the French language or the English language. It is an institution that made some mistakes through its board of directors. The provincial government has cut \$360 million from Ontario universities. The federal government has been stagnant with what it usually gives. It has cut, too.

The full-time faculty have declined over a few years, so it is not salary costs. It is some bad decisions that had been made by the board. The university is over-mortgaged, and it has empty buildings sitting there. We have to find a better way for the provincial and federal governments to provide proper funding and make sure that these institutions stay alive. We cannot just concentrate on saying that it is a French school or an English school. This is just the start of it.

S. O. 52

The provincial Government of Ontario is taking a very sneaky way of saying to the federal government, “Provide more funding, even though we cut costs, or we are going to privatize the institutions.” Something—

The Deputy Speaker: We will have to go to the response to that.
[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

As I said earlier, since we cannot change the past, we must look to the future. There will be other opportunities, primarily financial ones.

I agree with my colleague that the university is just as French as it is English; it may even be more English than French. The reality is that the federal government can intervene in very specific areas and it should do more than what it did in the past to ensure that it can place the university on a better financial footing.

I will repeat that it is unfortunate to see a university in this situation, but this is an opportunity for everyone to get involved and get it back on its feet as best we can and ensure that it will be managed by people who know what they are doing.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, the member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup.

I appreciated his comments about the management problems at this university. That is nothing new. For nearly a year now, there have been articles and reports in Sudbury's newspapers about this university's financial troubles, but no one made an effort to ask for or demand better management to avoid disastrous results.

What does my colleague think we can do now?

• (2150)

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Mr. Speaker, I will repeat the answer I gave earlier.

We can judge what was done in the past and, of course, we need to change things to avoid repeating the same mistakes. The students, teachers and researchers are not the ones responsible. The only ones responsible for the present mess are the administrators. They must be held responsible, and we must replace them if they failed to do the work required to ensure the long-term viability of the university. That is the reality.

Let us look forward and see what must be done. Funding will have to come with conditions that will enable the university to grow.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages (FedDev Ontario and Official Languages), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that I will be splitting my time with my colleague, the member for Nickel Belt.

I rise today as a proud Franco-Ontarian and the member of Parliament for Orléans. I am concerned and upset by the black Monday that befell our community in northern Ontario. The devastating cuts, mostly to French-language programs, remind us once again

that our minority language communities and their institutions are at constant risk of being assimilated.

Our post-secondary institutions are the key to a strong francophonie and will ensure the sustainability of our language and the future of francophone communities across Canada.

I was pleased to see that Parliament and all its members joined together yesterday to stand behind my community against these devastating cuts. Every member of the House, concerned about the state of our post-secondary institutions, sent a clear message that our institutions must be protected and governments must act.

The House also sent a clear message to provincial governments that do not treat minority language education and francophone services as a priority. We saw that with the Ford government, and we have seen it with the Kenney government for over a year now. These Conservative governments have made cuts every time things have gotten tough for francophone institutions and services.

Only after communities rose up and people mobilized, united in their demands, were we able to have a dialogue with those governments.

I want to make it clear that the federal government is ready and willing. It has a duty to help, but we are waiting on provincial governments that are responsible for their jurisdictions.

In these troubling times, all governments must work together to find solutions and protect the Canadian francophonie's flagship institutions.

Our government has come through for the Franco-Ontarian community in the past, and we continue to stand with the Franco-Ontarian community during these dark times. Franco-Ontarians can count on our government, because we have repeatedly shown that we are here for francophones from coast to coast to coast.

The throne speech was historic in that it recognized that the federal government has a responsibility to protect and promote French in both Quebec and the rest of Canada.

One month ago, the Minister of Official Languages followed up with a plan for the modernization of the Official Languages Act entitled “English and French: Towards a Substantive Equality of Official Languages in Canada”. This reform document presents discussions on the future of French and English in this country in a clear and unifying manner that is above all centred on Canadians' needs.

I am proud to support this transparent approach, and I am convinced that the bill will be as well received as was the vision.

The reform document actually starts by acknowledging several realities and recent trends on the ground. First, the French language is vulnerable and needs to be better protected. For the first time, the Government of Canada will adapt its interventions and take real action to protect and support key institutions in official language minority communities, such as Laurentian University, to protect their vitality.

It is understood that our efforts will fully respect provincial jurisdictions and the existing rights of English-language minority communities. However, it is also understood that the government will continue to support Canadians as long as this feeling of linguistic insecurity persists in any way. As the minister said, it is a question of respect and dignity for French and English speakers.

• (2155)

[English]

Secondly, I would like to highlight the measures in the reform document that would promote French language learning from coast to coast by increasing opportunities no matter where one lives. Our government recognizes that it is unacceptable that parents who want their children to learn French are subjected to wait lists and lotteries to register their children in coveted immersion programs, or that adults do not have access to the opportunities they desire to learn their second official language.

Rest assured, our government will act. The reform document outlines the development of Mauril, a free online second official language learning tool designed for adults, a new francophone immigration corridor for qualified French teachers, and a national initiative in collaboration with the provinces and territories to recognize French language teaching qualifications across Canada to facilitate greater professional mobility.

Finally, but not least, is our government's renewed commitment to official language minority communities. The reform document outlines new regulations for federal institutions with respect to positive measures under part VII of the Official Languages Act, increasing supports to community institutions and establishing a better estimate of eligible rights holders for minority language education under the charter.

In partnership with local organizations and stakeholders, we will ensure that these communities of francophones outside Quebec and anglophones in Quebec continue to thrive well into the future.

[Translation]

I encourage members to have a look at the reform document. Under this government, the future of the official languages is promising. We will continue to defend the French language and strengthen the official languages in Canada.

To all teachers, researchers and students, I say “we are here, and here we will stay”.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, the member for Orléans, for her speech.

I have a very simple question for her. Did Canada's chronic underfunding of universities create the situation at Laurentian University, which is not able to continue providing valuable services to francophones, anglophones and indigenous students? What, exactly, will the government do to fund all universities to ensure that they can fulfill their missions?

• (2200)

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

S. O. 52

In 2018, our government presented a concrete action plan for official languages, in which we made a historic \$2.7-billion investment. I think this has been mentioned. Our Liberal government has invested just over \$500 million more in support of official languages. It decided to help linguistic minority communities, including those that speak French, which is on the decline in Canada.

I remind my colleague that the government made an additional investment through the official languages in education program, which supports minority-language schools across Canada. This \$60-million investment was made in budget 2019.

We must continue to do more, which is why we are having this debate tonight. This is also why the minister sent a letter to Ontario's education and francophone affairs ministers to express that we are committed to helping Laurentian University. This is what the community expects.

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my question for my colleague is quite simple: Has the government already determined the amount of money that could be reinvested in Laurentian University?

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from my colleague, who mentioned provincial jurisdictions in his speech.

The minister has reached out. We want to work with the provinces and territories, as we have been doing from day one. The Government of Ontario just has to give us a call. The minister has already called them. She is ready and willing to keep having those conversations. Everyone will have to come together around the table to find a way to save Laurentian.

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.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech, and I congratulate her on her recent appointment as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages.

I wonder if she could tell us more about the need to collaborate and stand together so that our efforts to reach out to the Province of Ontario yield positive results and so we can show our determination to protect and always promote French in minority language communities.

S. O. 52

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for this very relevant question. In November 2018, after the Ford government's cuts to an important project at the Université de l'Ontario français, the federal government reached out once again to support the project.

I would like to take this opportunity to say that this subject is not only important in the context of tonight's debate in the House of Commons. I would like to thank all the organizations that spoke out and that continue to talk about it, as well as the media that reports on it.

I have always said that it is by coming together that we can be a majority in French. We need Canada's francophone communities to help us in this. However, obviously, the provincial government needs to give us a call, first.

Mr. Marc Serré (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank you for allowing this important debate to take place tonight. I am very proud to be here as the member for Nickel Belt and Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources. I am currently in my office, here, in Ottawa, to participate in this debate.

Laurentian University is a pillar of my community, Greater Sudbury, and of all of northern Ontario. It offers first-class services to anglophones, francophones and indigenous and international students.

Let us be clear: This university is an institution that is dear to my heart. It is a part of three generations of my family and of the lives of many of my friends. My father started his studies at the University of Sudbury in 1958 and obtained his diploma from Laurentian University in 1962. I myself obtained a B.A. in communications in 1990, and my daughter got her master's in speech language pathology at Laurentian University.

• (2205)

[English]

Laurentian University is located in Greater Sudbury, which has a population of 160,000. My riding of Nickel Belt represents 45% of the population of Greater Sudbury. I share the city with my colleague, the MP for Sudbury.

Since being elected in 2015, I have had a tag-team approach with my colleague from Sudbury to ensure that Laurentian and the entire region receive their fair share of funding. That is our responsibility as members of Parliament.

Earlier in the debate, my colleague talked about all the funding announcements we have made to support Laurentian University. I want to assure everyone tonight that we have been there to support Laurentian University, and we will continue to support post-secondary institutions in Greater Sudbury and all over northern Ontario.

I want to thank all of my constituents and my family for communicating with me and my team in these very challenging times. Given all the anxiety everyone is facing with COVID-19, I ask everyone to please continue to be safe and reach out to neighbours.

Laurentian University has been so important to several generations of men and women for accessing higher education. They are the leaders of yesterday, today and the future. They have roots all over the world.

Let me be clear: I am very disappointed, and actually angry, that we have arrived at the situation today. I am so sad for what our community is going through with the massive uncertainty, and sad for the faculty, staff and students, who are finalizing their exams as we speak. Many students are unsure if they want to attend Laurentian University in September.

What can we do as elected officials? What can we do as a community? What can we do as members of the city council of Greater Sudbury? What can the provincial and federal governments do to support the many faculty and staff who have lost their jobs and address all the uncertainty that students have today? They are our friends, neighbours and families. What role can the Greater Sudbury Chamber of Commerce play? We can actively get involved in facilitating employment opportunities to retain the talented individuals in our community.

I will take the remainder of my time in the debate tonight to simply say that this is within the jurisdiction of the Province of Ontario. We could let the local MPPs advocate at Queen's Park, but no, we must work through this together.

[Translation]

I would also like to thank the staff and the board of directors of the three federations that established Laurentian University 60 years ago. Without those three federations, Laurentian University would not exist. Huntington University, Thorneloe University and the University of Sudbury have been offering top-notch programs for more than 60 years.

[English]

Laurentian University has a world-class program on environmental studies at the Vale Living With Lakes Centre. There is also the Cliff Fielding building, for mining and innovation studies. It is respected all around the world.

[Translation]

The education program has been cut.

[English]

There is also the indigenous studies program. It is so important for our region to understand the history, culture and link between the environment and our indigenous communities all across northern Ontario.

There is the CROSH, for world-class health and safety training. It was created with a local steelworkers union. There is SNOLAB, the world-class neutrino lab, with many other programs. Also, because of NSERC funding, there are many national research chairs at Laurentian.

We need to find a solution. All political parties and governments need to work together to support the communities of Greater Sudbury. I know that the people of Sudbury are very concerned, but I also know they are resilient. I know we will get through these challenging times.

• (2210)

[Translation]

I would like to thank the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages and the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity for listening to us, for having an open mind and for taking action. I thank them for working with the francophone community of Greater Sudbury and Ontario and for working closely with the Province of Ontario.

I can assure the House that the federal government will live up to its responsibilities regarding minority language services across the country. We must focus on finding a solution and working with the Province of Ontario.

I would also like to thank many volunteers from francophone organizations and the people who continue to advocate for the French language across Canada and especially in northern Ontario. Laurentian University is an important institution and is central to economic development here in Greater Sudbury. There is history there. We must find solutions together.

I am very glad that the Speaker granted the request for the debate tonight and that we can take proactive measures.

I look forward to questions from my colleagues. I know that we all care about Laurentian University and services in French and that we want to find a solution.

[English]

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have been in the House all night listening to the Liberals make excuse after excuse, and there seems to be a pattern: There is a lack of responsibility. I am perplexed, because for years the member for Sudbury and the member for Nickel Belt, who is a parliamentary secretary within the government, have sat idly by while this crisis has unfolded. They are members of the government, yet it was the New Democrats who brought this emergency debate forward.

I want to note for the member a message that I got from Hayley Horton, and I hope he has a response for her. She is a fourth-year midwifery student at Laurentian University who was born and raised in Blind River. She wants to return there after her graduation, but her schooling has stopped. It has been cut off entirely.

There is a critical need for obstetrical and reproductive services in the north. The member must know this, as he serves with me on the status of women committee. We know there is a lack of reproductive services for women.

What does he have to say to Hayley Horton about the lack of midwifery services, the ending of her education and his and his government's unwillingness to take responsibility?

S. O. 52

Mr. Marc Serré: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for this important question. I appreciate the time we spend on the status of women committee.

Yes, it is sad. For students in the midwifery program and in the many other programs that were cut, this is unexpected. Laurentian's course of action here with the CCAA has shocked everybody.

We need to find a solution, but there is no silver bullet here. We have to work with the province. We have to make sure that the province is accountable. This is in provincial jurisdiction, but I want to assure the member, and she knows this, that the federal government will be there to support universities. We have to wait to see the developments in the core process and then work with the province to ensure that we have a plan.

What is the plan right now for funding? Is the member suggesting that we provide \$1 million, \$2 million, \$10 million or \$100 million? We have no plan right now from the province, and it is important to have a plan to make sure that we look at the long-term sustainability of programs at Laurentian University and northern Ontario.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened closely to the speech my colleague from the region gave. He is a parliamentary secretary, as my other colleague said earlier.

Apparently the situation we are in now has been in the making for months, maybe even for more than a year. The government talks about partnering with the provinces, but it looks more like the government wants provinces to shoulder the burden. In this country, the federal government has a role to play for minorities and in all services provided to francophone minorities.

I would like to ask my colleague how he and his party were involved in coming up with proposals.

Over the past year, what have my colleague and his government done to assess the situation? They had to have seen it coming. It did not just come out of nowhere. On February 12, the institution was in bankruptcy protection, but there had to have been discussions before that.

How was my colleague involved?

• (2215)

Mr. Marc Serré: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

I want to reassure my colleague that since 2015, the member for Sudbury and I have both been working closely with the administration and staff. We have had the opportunity to support Laurentian University's programming on several occasions.

S. O. 52

Obviously, as far as the board is concerned, there are still short-term implications and financial problems, but I can say that, personally, I did not expect the institution to file for protection under the CCAA.

Laurentian University has made a drastic decision, but this is where we are, and we need to look at what solutions are available to support the university during this trying time. The most important thing today is to look at how, together, we can support the staff and students. The plan remains the same. We need to work with the province to find a way to do that. There is no easy solution or answer to such a difficult situation for Laurentian University, the faculty and the students.

[English]

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am so interested in speaking to this topic, a university in Sudbury, Ontario. I am a member from the west coast of Canada, almost as far away from Sudbury as one can get in Canada, and I am speaking on the heels of a member of Parliament from that region. I have a great deal of respect for that, and I speak tonight with a bit of trepidation.

The reason I am so interested in the topic is that I understand that Laurentian University has a very big French speaking department. I am a proud Canadian, and my Canada was founded by two founding nations: one French speaking and one English speaking. I was raised by immigrants from Europe, Dutch speakers, and they were very proud to become Canadians. To them, Canada was two languages, French and English. That is the way I was raised and that is the way we raised our children. A lot of people out here on the west coast, even though British Columbia is English speaking, the most unilingual province in the whole country, are very interested in what is going on in Ontario, in the Franco-Ontarian community and in universities like Laurentian University, which is doing its part to promote the French language.

As I said, Canada was founded by two founding nations, but it is not geographic, first and foremost. The Ottawa River is not the dividing line between French Canada and English Canada. Canada is dual from coast to coast. That is the Canada for which I am standing. That is why I got into politics. I am a passionate Canadian and I want to do my part to promote unity within that diversity. That is what Canada is and that is the Canada for which I want to fight.

Even though I am out here on the west coast, I am very interested in the topic, and I do not stand alone. I know that many people in my riding are passionate about Canada and about the dual nature of Canada. If we look at French immersion enrolment in British Columbia, it is very big: 6,400 British Columbia students are enrolled in French immersion schools. If we could build more, more people would go. I know there are a number of them in my riding here, and the parents and the children are passionate about what they do. We could double the number of French immersion programs and we would fill them.

I know I do not stand alone. I am speaking on behalf of, and I am confident I have the backing of, my constituents when I am passionate about Canada being both French and English. I applaud the efforts of universities like Laurentian University that would put that forward.

I said I was raised by—

● (2220)

Mr. Blake Richards: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I did not hear the member, but I believe he was intending to split his time with the member for London—Fanshawe. I did not know if I had heard it, so I thought I would check.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Mr. Speaker, I thank my whip for that. I will be splitting my time with the member for London—Fanshawe.

Laurentian exemplifies the duality of Canada, but, unfortunately, today it finds itself under creditor protection under the CCAA, the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act. I do not know the arrangements and circumstances under which that had to become a reality for it, but it is indeed sad. I understand that it will be axing 58 undergraduate programs. Of those, 34 are English language and 24 French are language. That decision is going to have a disproportionate negative effect on the Franco-Ontarian community. That is unacceptable.

I talked about French immersion being popular in elementary schools and high schools in British Columbia, but that does not necessarily translate into students then going on to French language universities. It is not true in British Columbia and I understand it is not true in Ontario. Therefore, the closure of this French language program represents a lost opportunity to promote French and a truly bilingual Canada.

Financial woes for universities across the country have become a reality, not just for this university but right across the nation, including a private university in my riding of Langley—Aldergrove, Trinity Western University. A lot of the financial challenges that universities face have come to light in the pandemic. We have discovered that universities rely very heavily on income from foreign students. Of course, with the closure of our borders and restrictions on temporary foreign students coming into the country, that has hurt a lot.

What the solution is I do not know. We are all optimistic that the pandemic will soon be over and maybe by next year, foreign students will come back in big numbers. Canada's universities are leading academic institutions and there will always be an attraction among foreign students to come to Canada.

Universities also rely on corporate partnerships. I am a Conservative and I applaud that. I applaud private initiative, which is a good thing, but it can lead to problems as well. A lot of our research chairs are funded by foreign corporations, which creates a real challenge if those foreign corporations are owned and controlled by foreign nations, especially if those nations are not particularly friendly to Canada.

I am thinking of companies like Huawei that have financed research chairs. They get the best and the brightest of Canadians to use their intellectual prowess to find new technologies and then the foreign nation takes the technology with it. It walks right out the front door. Canada needs to do something to protect intellectual property assets within Canada, to promote more research and development and to protect universities and corporations.

One idea that has been floated is patent collectives. Canada is a big country geographically, but small in number, so we need to band together to protect our intellectual property assets, our universities and keep our IP at home, working productively for our country and economy so we can export that. We should not be exporting our students or our intellectual property. We should be developing all of that at home and selling the finished product through patent licenses, for example.

The CanSino vaccine fiasco is a great example of where Canada is failing industrially. All Canadians thought that Canada was one of the leading countries in the industrialized world, so we were all very shocked to find out that we did not even have our own pharmaceutical industry. We cannot even develop our own vaccines to keep ourselves safe. We are lagging way behind other countries in vaccinating our citizens. Certainly, too, with the country that we like to compare ourselves to, the United States, which is right next door to us, we have fallen far behind. How did that happen?

• (2225)

There is a fundamental problem that Canada faces, and that is a lack of industrial willpower to do it on our own. Canadian universities have to be a central part of that.

That was a bit of a diversion away from the main topic of what is happening at Laurentian University. I understand it is not necessarily a research university, but the work that it is doing is very important. I would applaud any efforts that we could apply to keep this university sound and healthy.

It is not for the federal government to tell the province how it must build, promote and defend its universities and it is certainly not for me, a member of Parliament from the west coast, to tell Ontario what it must do or tell the university how it must survive and thrive.

I want the university community, the Franco-Ontario community and all Ontarians to know that we out here on the west coast have a great deal of emotional investment in what is going on in the country and in the university community. We stand behind them. Please make this happen. Make Laurentian University survive. We have their backs.

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am a bit sad. In this debate, there is talk of small measures. The government will invest a bit more money in immersion here, give a bit of money for post-secondary studies there, and so forth.

This is the second time in a year that we are having a debate on French. I have been fighting for French in Quebec for 20 years. In North America, 3% of the population is francophone. For anglo-

phones, this issue may not be clear. Across the border, we have the United States of America. It has the most dominant and overpowering culture in the history of humanity, what with Netflix and its ilk and all the films, music and songs flooding over the border. How can we compete with that unless we declare a real linguistic emergency in Quebec and Canada?

I think that the Official Languages Act has been a failure. We should immediately declare an emergency over the French language so that we can bring in the significant measures we need to save French in Canada and Quebec.

[English]

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Madam Speaker, I would do whatever is possible to protect the French language. It is a part of Canada's culture. We must defend it and protect it.

I recognize what the hon. member is saying about our living right next door to the United States, an English-speaking country of about 350 million people. The French language needs proactive investment and protection. It is a beautiful language, but it does need help to withstand the onslaught of the English language in North America. I understand and appreciate that.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, I understand there are only three midwifery programs in all of Ontario. All the student midwives in the Ottawa region, for example, are from Laurentian as it has the only French program in Ontario. We know midwives are essential to improve maternal and newborn outcomes, and they deliver important care to marginalized communities. People who have given birth have said constantly that midwives provide holistic, inclusive, medical and emotional care. This is even more critical for indigenous communities and communities of colour. Getting a midwife is hard enough and losing Laurentian cuts one-third of the training programs.

My question for the member is this. Who should be accountable for the demise of a highly reputable centre of higher learning like Laurentian University, its board of directors or the Doug Ford Conservative government?

• (2230)

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Madam Speaker, there are severe economic strains and stresses throughout Canada's economy. Universities are not immune from that. I do not know the source of all the financial blows for Laurentian University, but universities are primarily a creature of the provincial government. I would encourage the government to work together with the university community to keep that university alive and well. Maybe it needs to focus more on certain programs than others.

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I am not in a position to tell the university how it needs to govern itself and how it needs to remain strong and vibrant. However, certainly there are good solutions that well-meaning people and intelligent people, when they put their heads together, can come up with.

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Madam Speaker, I have been listening to this debate, and I think it is really important that we maintain the French language in universities, but also the revitalization and protection of indigenous languages.

Universities are struggling across this country. In my own riding, Vancouver Island University struggles for funding and has to reach out for corporate funding. I listened to the hon. member talk about corporate funding, but then he highlighted some of the issues that were related to that. Universities become too dependent on it, and corporations end up making out like bandits. I am wondering where the disconnect is, if he sees that disconnect.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Madam Speaker, it is a problem if the partnership is with foreign corporations that are controlled by foreign nations that are not friendly to us; that is the problem. I do not think there is a problem with universities partnering with well-funded, responsible Canadian corporations.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to start off tonight by thanking my colleague from Timmins—James Bay for his work on this issue and for requesting this emergency debate.

I also want to recognize your hard work, Madam Speaker, as the member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing. You have been serving in the Chair, so you are not allowed to speak, but we have been talking about this and working on this issue for so long. I know how dedicated you are to the students, staff and community of Laurentian University, so I want to thank you for that as well.

Because you have been an incredible advocate, you shared with me that your own son, Shawn Hughes, is an alumnus of the biomedical science program at Laurentian. You talked to me about your niece, Emily Reese, and your staff member's daughter, Izabel Timeriski, who are all students in the biomedical science program that is now being cut. These are amazing young people with so much potential, but in order to complete their education, now they have to leave home.

The crisis at Laurentian University is one that should not be a surprise, however. After years of neglect and underfunding from federal and provincial governments, Canada's post-secondary education system is in trouble. The COVID-19 crisis has of course exacerbated this situation.

Laurentian University received insolvency protection under the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act on February 1. This is important to note, as this is the first time a public university has declared insolvency and been granted insolvency protection by the courts in Canada.

Years of investment by Canadians have built this institution, like so many other post-secondary institutions across Canada. Now we see a provincial Conservative government willing to dismantle it, and a federal Liberal government standing on the sidelines watching it happen. Words of empathy from a Liberal government will not pay the bills at Laurentian University.

Canada's New Democrats, in concert with Ontario New Democrats, will not be silent, however, and we will not let Laurentian be sold off to the banks. We will fight to protect our education system and protect these institutions that Canadians have built.

Laurentian is a public post-secondary institution with a tricultural mandate to support French, English and indigenous communities. This institution is an essential economic driver in Sudbury and the third-largest employer. It serves as a beacon for francophone excellence and indigenous research and reconciliation.

The impending restructuring and cuts will result in devastating impacts on students, workers and community members. This week, over 100 faculty members received termination notices. The university is also cutting nearly 70 programs, including entire departments, many of which are unique indigenous and francophone programs that Laurentian is mandated to support. It is also cutting programs like engineering, math, economics, entrepreneurship, nursing and midwifery.

Specifically in regard to the midwifery programs, there are only three in Ontario. They are offered at McMaster, Ryerson and Laurentian. The program being cut at Laurentian was offered in English and French, and in fact it is the only bilingual midwifery program available not only in Ontario but in Canada.

Of course, the impact on female students is measurable, as the majority of students who generally take this program are women. The midwifery program also benefited many indigenous students, since it allowed indigenous graduates to provide important health services to their local communities and particularly to the women in those communities.

Reproductive health services are severely lacking throughout Canada, but this is especially true in rural, remote and northern communities. Earlier, I rose in this House to speak about the importance of providing fair and equal access for women to health services in Canada. There are significant disparities between rural and urban access to these services, and midwives are often the major providers of women's reproductive health services in underserved areas.

Hundreds of people are forced to travel out of their communities to access reproductive health services and must pay for travel expenses out of pocket. Travelling to another city for these procedures can mean having to take time off work, planning or paying for child care or elder care, and some people cannot afford those expenses. Access to services should not depend on one's postal code or income. I said that earlier this evening, and I will say it again.

This is a human rights violation, and it contravenes the Canada Health Act. Throughout Canada, access to health services in remote, marginalized and indigenous communities or communities that remain removed from urban centres because of religious choice, like Amish communities, depend a great deal on midwives and the services that graduates from Laurentian provide.

Fifty-two per cent of students who attend Laurentian are the first in their family to pursue a post-secondary education, and 65% of Laurentian alumni reside in northern Ontario after they graduate. These are people who stay in their communities and offer the training and help they learned from Laurentian, and this is so important.

• (2235)

I want to share a story from a dear friend of mine, Kathi Wilson, who works as an assistant professor in the midwifery education program. She said, “Yesterday I did a presentation on Zoom for the third-year class of midwifery students at Laurentian. They would have only just been informed of the termination of their program, and I thought, ‘Will they even be able to focus on what I’m teaching them today?’ I figured they must be devastated, but I was so impressed with how engaged they were.”

Kathi continued, “They asked me interesting and challenging questions and made thoughtful comments. Truthfully, they were an instructor’s dream to teach. Their passion for the profession of midwifery and care for childbearing people shone through, even on Zoom. They will become excellent midwives, but they deserve to be able to do that in a university where they have been attending, with professors and instructors that they know.”

She concluded, saying, “Ontario and Canada need more midwives, especially racialized, francophone and indigenous midwives, to serve diverse communities, and we need the Laurentian midwifery education program to be able to meet our growing need.”

I want to thank Kathi for sharing her story with me. I also want to focus on an important point that she makes, and that is the diversity and strength these students have. The cutting of this program will directly impact the 14 faculty members who are women, the 120 students in the program, many of whom are indigenous, Black or persons of colour, francophone, and trans or non-binary folk.

In recent years, Laurentian has made important strides toward providing indigenous programming in courses that incorporate traditional teachings and indigenous language. These programs are a crucial component of reconciliation. We keep hearing about the government’s commitment to reconciliation, yet this institution is failing right before their very eyes. What good are all the pretty words without the action needed to back them up. It is the government’s responsibility to help this institution.

Laurentian University is and must continue to be an important part of our commitment to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s calls to action on indigenous education. This institution has an immense impact on indigenous communities in Canada, and if the government lets it fail, it will represent the first indigenous studies program to be shuttered since the discipline began in 1969.

I spoke to people at the Canadian Association of University Teachers, and they were clear that without indigenous studies pro-

grams we have no indigenous language teaching at Laurentian. There are more than 1,200 indigenous learners without access to formal language instruction if they want or need it, and virtually no indigenous content requirement courses for other students.

Tonight, we have heard from members of the government on this crisis, and their response is to say that they feel bad or that this is not in their jurisdiction. Repeatedly, we see the government fail to take responsibility. It is this attitude that has left so many indigenous communities behind and has led to the poverty rates we see on and off reserve, and the boil water advisories across Canada. After all the signalling and words from this Prime Minister and the government, how can the government just sit there and do nothing once again?

I often plead with the government, on humane or compassionate grounds, to act, but I find often when it comes to Liberals and Conservatives, it is only about money. Across the country, universities are facing losses in the hundreds and millions of dollars, and now, because of COVID-19, in the billions of dollars.

In Ontario, the rising costs and revenue shortfalls from COVID-19 total more than \$1 billion. In British Columbia, universities and colleges have requested an exemption to run deficits of more than \$178 million. With the university seeking bankruptcy protection, its liabilities may expand and this may raise costs for universities across Ontario and Canada as banks reassess the risk of lending to them.

In other words, without action now, this crisis will spill over to other universities. This should not be a surprise to the government members as they have left colleges and universities to struggle alone throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. I wrote to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion back in May 2020 to ask that the Canada emergency wage subsidy be extended to them. I asked the same question in the House several times. The minister’s only response was, “We’ll think about it; we’ll talk about it”.

After a lot of thinking and a lot of talking, we now see the result of the lack of action from the government. The question now is this: Will the government wait another year, think about it a little longer and do nothing, or will it finally take the necessary steps to save Laurentian University?

• (2240)

[Translation]

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Madam Speaker, you are also a francophone member from northern Ontario. I salute you and I stand with you.

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I thank my colleague for her speech. Does she think that minority language universities should be 100% funded by the government, or should the government fight to ensure their relevance and funding in partnership with provincial governments? If the funding comes only from the federal government, it would have major repercussions in all other provinces.

How much does she think the government should invest?

[*English*]

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: Madam Speaker, there is an important role for the federal government to ensure that there are many services provided to Canadians equally, fairly and in a balanced way. Education is certainly one of them.

The federal government certainly has a role to fund post-secondary education. It has failed in that role for many years. The transfer payments that universities were provided through the provinces have not moved or increased in the way they need to. That has actually shifted a lot of the responsibility to students, who have to pay a lot more in tuition, and it has left universities looking for other alternatives.

The member who spoke before me talked about turning to private partnerships. This is unacceptable. It is the federal government's responsibility to ensure fairness and balance throughout the post-secondary education system.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Madam Speaker, we talked about Laurentian University. The University of Sudbury also wants to become a French-language university. We say that schools must be “by francophones, for francophones”, because bilingual and immersion schools often facilitate the assimilation of francophones. The same more or less holds true for universities.

Does my colleague think that the government should strongly support the University of Sudbury's plan to become a French-language institution?

• (2245)

[*English*]

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: Madam Speaker, I truly believe in the equality of access for education to all. That is in both official languages. That is for the indigenous education piece that is part of our reconciliation promise.

No matter where one is—

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. There seems to be a technical issue.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Madam Speaker, the interpretation is not working.

[*English*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The interpretation is working now.

The hon. member for London—Fanshawe.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: Madam Speaker, just as in this House we have equal access to languages, which we need, as it is equal, balanced and fair, that has to exist in our education system as well.

I really thank the hon. member for that question about equity and the provision of French language services to all students across Canada.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I would say to my friend from London—Fanshawe that I agree that the federal government needs to do more.

There are billions of dollars transferred under the Canada social transfer that are supposed to go to post-secondary. What suggestions does the member have about how that money could be tied to actual results to protect post-secondary institutions?

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: Madam Speaker, the answer, and something that New Democrats have been pushing for for a long time, is a post-secondary education bill. It would ensure that the monies that are transferred get to where they need to in terms of educational access, the programs and the institutions that provide incredible services to Canadians in that post-secondary education sector.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to mention that I will be splitting my time with the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands. I have not seen her in a long time and I have missed her. I hope to soon be able to sit with her in the House.

I am the member of Parliament for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell. I like to tell my Ontario colleagues that I represent the riding where the sun rises in Ontario.

Madam Speaker, I love these exchanges. As long as it is French, we can understand each other. I get interrupted from time to time, but it is not a big deal.

As I was saying, I am a proud Franco-Ontarian. More than 60% of my constituents are francophone. Although I am a Franco-Ontarian, I do not have the same day-to-day experiences as my Franco-Ontarian colleagues elsewhere in the province. It is very easy to find francophone schools in my riding. It is very easy to access an education in French within 100 kilometres. Although we do have our share of problems and there are some gaps, I know that my reality is completely different from the reality of my francophone colleagues in York Region, for example, who may not have access to the kinds of francophone institutions or community centres I have access to here. This is why we need an action plan on official languages, which we presented in 2018.

There is another thing I want to mention. Since 2015, I have had a very good working relationship and friendship with the member for Sudbury, who will not be running in the next election. All of us Franco-Ontarians get along well, including the member for Nickel Belt. We are a small group, each with our own accents. People from Kapuskasing have an accent, francophones from Orléans have an accent. The francophone accents in Hawkesbury and Embrun may be different, but that is okay. We celebrate our accents when we speak French. We make a good team.

On that dark Monday back in 2018, we all stood in solidarity with the member for Orléans and the member for Ottawa—Vanier. We worked together to inform the minister responsible for official languages. I know that she even hired some Franco-Ontarians, including a francophone from Casselman who is very familiar with the challenges our community faces.

I am a graduate of the University of Ottawa and the Cité collégiale. I was fortunate enough to sit on the board of directors of the Cité collégiale, but I also studied at Laurentian University, where I did a personal finance course. It has been quite some time since I have had any interaction with Laurentian University, but today I am thinking of Dr. Yves Robichaud. I remember my conversation with him. I do not know if he is still at the university or if he was a victim of what happened recently, but I want to thank him, because he had an impact on my career and my education.

Before I studied at Laurentian University, I knew there was a partnership between the Cité collégiale and Laurentian University for the personal finance course. I had called Laurentian University, and Dr. Yves Robichaud called me back right away to tell me that I could take an online course, no problem. Funnily enough, I often meet people from Sudbury who move here. It is often older people who move for family reasons. I was just a guy from eastern Ontario taking classes at a university with connections to northern Ontario. I know people from northern Ontario often come east to study or work, but I thought it was a rare for a student from eastern Ontario to go north. This is important, and it shows how connected our francophone community is.

Getting back to Dr. Robichaud, if he is still at the university, has lost colleagues or has lost his own job, I would like him to know that my thoughts are with him, with all of his colleagues and with the entire student community at the university.

• (2250)

I hear some members say that we must find a solution, that we should have done so over 24 hours ago. The fact of the matter is that it will not be so simple. The federal government is not responsible for finding a solution. Yes, we will be partners, as we always have been, whether through official languages programs or funding provided by Canadian Heritage. However, it is the Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities that must find a solution, in collaboration with Laurentian University. This we know very well, having heard my colleagues' speeches during this debate. The federal government will be there, represented by the Minister of Official Languages. The Prime Minister has said that the government would absolutely be there.

Right now, there is no plan. I do not say this to point the finger at the provincial government, but it will take some time. It is impor-

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tant to take the time to prepare a solid business plan to ensure the viability of Laurentian University. We must not find ourselves in another emergency debate in the House of Commons in five years, rehashing the same arguments and accusing one government of not having done this and another of not having done that. This means we must take the time. I heard one of my Conservative colleagues say that it is really a dark day for our community, but we must roll up our sleeves and get to work. We can find a solution, as we did for the Université de l'Ontario français.

I disagree that the federal government should fully finance Laurentian University or any other Canadian university. The federal government must be a partner but it should not finance universities 100% because they fall under provincial jurisdiction. I would hate for the federal government to encourage provinces to stop investing in post-secondary education for our minority communities, which is what would happen.

It is true that, for the Université de l'Ontario français, we said we would pay for the first four years as long as the provincial government committed to paying for the next four years. We have a solid agreement that will last at least eight years under which the Université de l'Ontario français will get \$40 million from the provincial government and \$40 million from the federal government. This will make the institution viable and give our community access to programs in French.

In closing, let me say that I know exactly what our francophone community is going through. I myself was raised in a Franco-Ontarian family. My father was a founding member of the Association française des municipalités de l'Ontario. He was not as lucky as me for his high school studies. I lost track of how many times he told me about how, when he was in school, the minute there was one anglophone in a class, that class was taught in English even if the other 30 students were francophone. In the 1960s and 1970s, that generation fought for its rights. It fought for access to education in French.

I know that all of us, the NDP, the Conservative Party and even the Bloc Québécois, will work together. I am pleased to hear Quebec speaking today about francophone communities outside Quebec because that is really important. I heard my Bloc Québécois colleagues say that we francophones represent only 3% of the population of North America. It is true that we are very much in the minority. It is true that we must act. It is true that French does not have the same status as English because we are a minority throughout North America.

Despite everything, I am confident. I am confident because our government includes people like the Prime Minister, who recognized that the official languages action plan and the budgets were not enough and increased this funding. Our government recognized that for francophones to have access to French institutions and French-language education, it had to recognize the issue of—

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• (2255)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. I have to interrupt the hon. member because his time is up. He can say more during questions and comments.

The hon. member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup.

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened closely to my colleague. As a francophone from eastern Ontario, near Quebec, these issues are obviously important to him.

I have asked my question many times during this debate this evening. What are the real measures the Liberal government has been able to take in light of these problems? His colleague from northern Ontario said earlier that the financial problems at Laurentian University had been on the horizon since 2015. Today we are 2021. This has been floating around for five or six years. It was clear that there were potential problems. In February the university ends up in bankruptcy protection. Between 2015 and the bankruptcy protection, a lot happened.

Does the federal Liberal government—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I have to allow others to ask questions.

The hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell.

• (2300)

Mr. Francis Drouin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

I was surprised when this happened in February. Perhaps it is because of geographic proximity, but I have a lot more ties with the Cité collégiale and the University of Ottawa.

That being said, I know that there are recurring programs in the memorandum of understanding. Laurentian University is allegedly having major financial difficulties and administration problems. I think that we all read the same newspaper articles. I do not know exactly what happened, but what I can say is that it is not right for the university to seek protection under the Bankruptcy Act. I am pleased to know that the member for Sudbury is going to introduce a bill to prevent that, because it is not right.

We will have to see if it is possible to negotiate an increase in Laurentian University's share of federal funding. To date, I have not seen a funding plan. I could not say—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Questions and comments.

The hon. member for Longueuil—Saint-Hubert.

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Madam Speaker, I have a somewhat convoluted question.

Earlier, the member for Langley—Aldergrove in British Columbia talked about his commitment to the principle of Canada's two founding peoples to explain why he feels the French fact is important. That is not how I see history, but it is an honourable view that I can respect. In 1982, former Prime Minister Trudeau reprogrammed the founding myths upon which Canada is built.

Does the member not agree that the introduction of official bilingualism and state multiculturalism has created old habits that prevent many people here in the House from seeing the real solutions that could be proposed to ensure the full development of French in Canada?

Mr. Francis Drouin: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question, but I am scratching my head because I do not know what quarrels from 1982 have to do with anything. I was not even born then. I was born in 1983. I do not see the connection to this situation or how this will help Laurentian University.

What I can say is that when the time came to create Ontario's French-language university, the federal government came through with its 50% share to ensure the long-term survival of this university, which was established in 2018. Today, Ontario's francophones have access to this university as a result of equal federal and provincial funding.

• (2310)

[English]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to join in on this debate this evening. I want to thank my colleagues in the New Democratic Party for bringing this forward as an emergency debate. I completely agree, this is an emergency. I am speaking to members from the traditional territories WSANEC first nations and raise my hands to them.

[Member spoke in SENCOTEN]

[English]

It is important tonight that we remember we are talking about a university that offers programs for anglophones, francophones and in indigenous languages.

I want to start at a broader analytical level of post-secondary education in Canada in general in crisis and then focus in on Laurentian. I hope to be able to offer some useful suggestions.

Back in 2005, the last book written by Jane Jacobs, one of Canada's great minds, was *Dark Age Ahead*. She spoke of the threats to five major pillars of civilization and culture, and she said they were all under assault. The pillars were family, community, science, proper taxation and education.

She said that post-secondary education was under assault because it was becoming “transactionalized”. We were trading in education for the purposes of broadening our minds and exploring what we could be internally, finding out talents. We were trading education for something she described as “certification”. We pay our money and we get our ticket, so that young people were increasingly consumers, as Jane Jacobs explained, of a decreasing and impoverished intellectual experience with larger and larger classroom sizes, and less and less contact between students and their professors.

It led to more insecurity around the finances of universities. We have seen a real trend where universities have to be beholden to large corporations, some foreign, some Canadian, with chairs in this and that.

When I was teaching at Dalhousie University, it was very hard to see that the professors working on the threats to marine mammals from seismic testing would get far when Shell gave a lot of money to the university to run a chair in offshore oil and gas development. The money also tended to flow in ways that meant that the research that was produced by universities became proprietary. The information that was gleaned from academic pursuits had suddenly become the property of the corporations funding the universities. These trends are dangerous.

We have also had an increasingly large bureaucracy in universities, often focused on fundraising. There are these trends toward raising money. What do wealthy people want? They want to give money so that the building is in their name. We do not see tenure-track positions created with a big plaque with the name of the professor that says the wealthy person who gave them money so that professor has a tenure-track position. The trends are not good and these apply right across Canada.

As I mentioned in an earlier question to the hon. member for London—Fanshawe, the federal government provides billions of dollars in federal and provincial transfers to provinces for universities and post-secondary, but we do not track where those dollars actually go. The trend lines are not good and, as I said, Jane Jacobs pointed this all out in 2005.

We see some of those poorly paid workers in Canada or the exploited group of recent Ph.D.s who do not ever really get a tenure-track position, but teach part-time and are sessional lecturers. We see increasingly reduced opportunities for students, and increased tuition and increased student debt. I suggest that the whole pile of financial mistakes and failure to support post-secondary education adequately is a national crisis.

I want to turn now to Laurentian University, which is tonight's focus. Laurentian is in Sudbury, a wonderful community. I have been very honoured to have given lectures at Laurentian University over the years. The community of Sudbury went from being described as a moonscape to being a green and sustainable place. Laurentian University and the research done there in places like the co-operative freshwater ecology unit are part of that story, so too is what has been happening with a francophone education and indigenous education. I want to speak of the students tonight, because we have not heard their voices.

My daughter's friend Kristen Lavallee, a student at Laurentian, wrote this letter, which was published in the local newspaper, saying the people who made the financial mistakes that led to Laurentian being in bankruptcy protection need to be held accountable. These are Kristen's words, because the students have been going through a terribly stressful time. She wrote:

We, as students, deserve to have clarity about our choices in order to continue our education. Laurentian University is a publicly funded institution which should be receiving the support of the provincial and federal governments. Instead staff, faculty and students are experiencing the brunt of the irresponsibility of a select few in administration.

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It is important that we hold the people who are responsible for having caused the current fiscal chaos at Laurentian University accountable.

I also note that Senator Moncion has made it very clear that what we are talking about here are constitutionally enshrined rights and must be protected. She states, "Upholding these rights requires strong institutions. Canadian courts have long recognized the importance of maintaining strong institutions, protecting language and the culture of official language minority communities. Substantive equality requires it."

Laurentian University's situation is not unique. It reflects the continuing underfunding of post-secondary institutions that wholly or partially serve official-language minority communities across Canada. The case of Laurentian University is sounding the alarm, as is this underfunding that threatens the constitutional rights of communities. It is a very important point that we are not just talking about one small problem; this requires really creative out-of-the-box thinking for the federal government to take control of this and say it is sorry it applied corporate commercial insolvency protection in the case of a publicly funded university.

[Translation]

I also want to say in French that we now have a crisis affecting francophone minority communities in Ontario, but also across Canada. The elimination of education programs at Laurentian University, and in particular the treatment of francophone programs, is an attack against the vitality of the French language in minority communities. I want to say clearly that we must now do something and do it in a different way.

[English]

To protect this university, the federal government must say it is sorry to the province. It is provincial jurisdiction usually, but constitutionally protected rights are at risk.

Mismanagement of this university includes a mania for building. A spending spree is the proximate cause of its financial disaster of the moment. I agree with the students and the faculty association. I say to the students and faculty, the 110 fired professors of Laurentian University, that this is a wrong that members of Parliament understand is wrong and we want to fight for them.

We will demand that there be a special new paragraph drafted right now for the budget we will see on Monday to ensure the mid-wifery, indigenous language, environmental studies, philosophy and theatre programs at Laurentian University be resurrected and that it not go under. It is the canary in our educational coal mine. We will fight for it.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I similarly have not seen my colleague in person in a very long time. This is how we see each other now. I was very moved by some of the comments she made.

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She will know that in Edmonton Strathcona the University of Alberta is under incredible attack by our provincial government and we risk losing an awful lot, not just the Campus Saint-Jean but the university itself. I am curious as to what she would say we can do at the federal level. What are those concrete things we can do to protect our universities? Luckily, she has an NDP government in British Columbia, but in Alberta we do not. We have a Conservative government. What would she suggest we could do, despite our government, because we know we cannot do it in collaboration with it?

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, I have never applied the adverb “luckily” to having an NDP government that is cutting through our old growth, fracking and ignoring its commitment to shut down Site C, but moving on to the point of what to do about better provincial-federal co-operation, we have to make sure that money transferred to provinces for post-secondary education is tied to spending on post-secondary education. I agree with her wonderful colleague for London—Fanshawe: We need a post-secondary education act in Canada that would ensure that we hold to standards.

We are looking at a slippery slope when we will have students who emerge from universities with, as Jane Jacobs said, “You pay your money and you get your ticket,” but they are not really getting the educational experience I was very fortunate to get 40 years ago when I went to law school. I think we need to pay attention, because—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I have to go to another question.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Langley—Aldergrove.

• (2315)

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands talked about universities having to think outside of the box. I wonder what her comments would be about universities partnering with responsible, Canadian-controlled corporations that have a good track record of social responsibility to fund research chairs and to partner with the intellectual property assets that would come out of that very valuable research.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, obviously any place that universities can partner is welcome, as long as it does not restrict or transactionalize the intellectual process of research.

Publicly funded universities and the work in academia should remain publicly accessible. Information should not be privatized and knowledge should be shared, but in that kind of partnership, absolutely.

[Translation]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for her speech and for quoting an urban planner I like very much, Jane Jacobs, who was in favour of Quebec independence, in fact, because it would be good for the Montreal area.

Does the member believe there is a problem in bilingual universities? Where the vast majority of students are anglophones, should

the governance of programs in French be transferred to franco-phone universities? I know that is what some people want.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot for his question.

It is extremely important to protect the rights of students living in minority francophone communities. The member may be right, but it is the first time I hear that English-speaking students are a threat in a bilingual context.

I think everyone benefits when anglophones, francophones and indigenous students can work together. The best thing that could happen is that students will share values and an understanding of life in French.

[English]

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Madam Speaker, we are switching to the mountain time zone shift, and with that I will be sharing my time with the member for Edmonton Strathcona.

This is a really great debate, and I want to congratulate the NDP for putting this forward, because it is something we actually have not really talked about in Parliament. We are debating the specific issue with the specific university and its insolvency, its funding model and how we proceed forward, but it is really a flashpoint of a larger issue that has been brewing for several years, which was really disrupted this year by the pandemic. What is really interesting about this debate is that I am not sure there is necessarily a partisan line on this. I actually think we have an opportunity here, as parliamentarians, to really think about workforce development in Canada in the context of what our post-secondary education system looks like writ large.

Since we are on the late show here tonight and this sitting is remarkably well attended by my dozen or so colleagues who are here tonight, I will give a bit of information about myself and my interest in this topic. Prior to entering politics, I spent close to a decade in senior roles in academic administration at two of Canada's top universities, the University of Manitoba and the University of Calgary, so I did see first-hand both the challenges that universities face and the opportunities they bring to the Canadian economy.

We really cannot talk about post-COVID recovery without talking about the role of post-secondary institutions and what the role of the federal government is in supporting that vision, without really looking at post-secondary education writ large. Many of the issues that my colleagues have raised tonight are with regard to the need to ensure that every Canadian has viable and tangible access to post-secondary education. This is something I do not think we have ever achieved in Canada. When I think about Laurentian University and many universities that service rural and remote communities in Canada, they are providing services to students in a language of choice, which is very important, but also to indigenous communities that have been traditionally underserved, pigeonholed and forced into learning in a certain way that might not align with their context.

It is really important that we talk about these issues, but we also need to talk about the broader challenges that post-secondary education is facing right now. I read a really interesting article from RBC Human Capital. I think it really outlined the inflection point that Canadian post-secondary education is facing right now. In March of last year, in both colleges and universities in Canada, about two million students were moved from the classroom onto online learning in a matter of weeks, and that was remarkable, but it really did create a disruptive force in how post-secondary education was delivered.

I am not necessarily saying that in a bad way, but here is the reality, the stats that are in this article: “Nearly 1.6 billion learners have been affected by national school closures” globally, and “91% of the world’s students were displaced from the classroom” during the pandemic. “In Canada, more than 7 million students had to shift their learning style”.

Some of the challenges that have been highlighted here are these: “Canadian institutions historically lacked the resources or expertise to fully develop online learning”; “Canada’s advantage in international student attraction is at risk”, and I want to talk about international students in a second; “Digital spending comprised only 2.5% of global education expenditures pre-lockdown”.

Some of the key questions this report asked were these: “Will the explosion of remote-based learning lead to more options for students?”; “Which learners are most vulnerable to disruption [that is, which students or people whom we want to reach would be most negatively affected by these changes]?”; “Will online learning in Canada still appeal to international students?”; “Can job-ready skills [for example trades] be cultivated through online learning?”; “Can learning on a massive scale become more personalized?”; “Are post-secondary institutions at an inflection point for their business model?”

● (2320)

That is where I want to start. When I worked at both the University of Manitoba and the University of Calgary, I did a lot of work in sponsored research and tech transfer. A lot of the operation of universities is focused on research and commercialization. That is great. We want to have research-intensive universities in Canada, but what does the shift mean? What does it mean for universities that may not be research-intensive? Are we now seeing perhaps a delineation between research-intensive universities and teaching-intensive universities? Is that happening? Does our funding model need to change to support that?

One of the things in the report that I mentioned that is critical for us to address as parliamentarians is whether we can reach every student in Canada in a meaningful way. Infrastructure issues, such as rural broadband and wireless, have been a barrier to accessing education not just for people in rural and remote communities or on reserves, but also in urban centres. The Internet in Canada is now in crisis mode, and this is affecting our post-secondary education system as well. These are questions that nobody really wants to ask.

I want to underscore that I certainly support the services that Laurentian University provides. Given the tax dollars that go into post-secondary education, we have to be asking what business model best serves the needs of Canadians. That is something people

of every political stripe have an opportunity to talk about. My argument in this debate tonight would be that we should avoid necessarily being attached to one form of rigid dogma on what works. We have to start with the student or learner as the focus of the services delivered and the funding models we are supporting, but we must also tie that to the vision for Canada’s future workforce to ensure that we have platforms that are nimble and provide services to train that workforce.

I said that I wanted to talk about international students. International students provide a lot of revenue to Canadian universities right now. Many universities have reached out to me during the pandemic to talk about the fact that they have lost revenue. We have to talk about the elephant in the room: Should we be relying on international students to bolster a business model for universities? Many people say that the shift to online learning is here to stay in some way, shape or form, and that universities are going to have to be more competitive to get top students and teachers. However, universities also have to think about how they allow universal access to students. A well-educated population means that we have better economic growth, more innovation, better social determinants, less discrimination and more opportunities for marginalized communities. There are all sorts of questions that we could be asking in Parliament.

I understand that this university is in a crisis right now and we have to deal with that for a variety of reasons, but that has to be done in a broader context. Many of my constituents say they are paying tuition for in-class learning now, but they have been online for a year and ask if that is fair. That is something we should ask. We should be asking if it is fair to be demanding online learning if somebody does not have a safe place to learn online. There are privileged assumptions that go into the capacity to have online learning as well.

I would encourage my colleagues to look at this from a broader perspective. I hope we can come together as a Parliament and really be a world leader as a country in the shift of post-secondary education post-COVID.

● (2325)

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Madam Speaker, when we talk about education, there are a lot of conversations we have to have. I think of myself. I represent a more rural and remote riding that has international students. One of the biggest challenges is that the international students are really interested in staying, but there are no systems in place to allow them to look at the opportunities in my region. There are a lot of important things to talk about.

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When I think of this particular issue, I can relate it to the experience in my riding. I have heard again and again from educators in my region from North Island College and Vancouver Island University, which is in Powell River, that we need education to be provided closer to home. That is how we support people staying in our region. That is really important for rural and remote communities across the country.

Could the member talk about whether she thinks the federal government has an important role to play in ensuring that access to post-secondary education is there, especially in these kinds of communities? In this particular case, the francophone supports and indigenous—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Unfortunately, I have to allow for other questions.

The hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Madam Speaker, I love that. I wish we had more time to have this conversation.

The answer is yes. When I was in ministries in previous Parliaments, one thing that I got really excited about was the ability to bring, for example, augmented reality or virtual reality training trailers for trades to northern Manitoba communities. Yes, we should be looking at every way possible to allow people to get education as close to home as they can. We need to be cognizant of community needs and intersectional needs.

I wish I had more time to speak about the very valid point that was brought up with regard to needing supports to integrate international students and new Canadians into rural remote communities, but perhaps I can do so another day in another emergency debate.

• (2330)

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard G  n  reux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivi  re-du-Loup, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her excellent speech.

I find it very interesting that she wants to broaden the discussion on university education.

I have a question for her, since she worked in university administration for about 10 years, if I understood correctly.

What does she think could have happened to make Laurentian University file for protection under the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act?

[English]

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Madam Speaker, unfortunately I have not read Laurentian University's audited financial statements from the past several years, but I will say this. I think many universities across Canada are going through a fundamental shift in their "business models". They are asking themselves questions: Are we providing research? Are we providing teaching, and to what level? How are we providing online learning?

Institutions that provide these services and that are not necessarily in urban centres are at risk for a wide variety of reasons, and I think we have to have this conversation in the context of a broader macro-level look at the post-secondary education vision in Canada.

We should not be tied to one business model. We should be tied to outcomes for learners and to workforce development.

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member talked about her previous professional experience in university administration. I wonder what her thoughts are on the state of Canadian research university entrepreneurial initiatives. How are we faring compared with other world-class universities?

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Madam Speaker, again, that is a question for a broader conversation about the retention of intellectual property in Canada. It ties into our trade agreements and macroeconomic conditions around taxation, labour, etc.

Research-intensive universities are important for the provision of basic research, but we also have to figure out how we retain intellectual property in Canada. That cannot happen without other broader macroeconomic conditions being in place. Frankly, I do not think we are in good shape on that right now.

[Translation]

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am sorry that I do not speak French very well. I did not study French in school. I am very pleased that my children were able to study French. I will fight so that all children in Alberta and all Canadians have that opportunity.

[English]

I want to thank my colleagues, the members of Parliament for Timmins—James Bay and London—Fanshawe, for raising this vital issue and ensuring that all parliamentarians have a chance to debate this, and I want to urge the government to finally take action to protect la Francophonie in Quebec and across Canada.

This particular debate is looking at the devastating potential loss of Laurentian University. I am deeply saddened by what is happening in this institution. Laurentian University is the only educational institution in northern Ontario with a robust, tri-cultural mandate, serving francophone, indigenous and anglophone communities.

Laurentian has been a key hub of instruction and culture for Franco-Ontarians, offering more than 150 courses in French, in addition to being one of the largest indigenous education providers and a vital provider of unique programs, such as midwifery training.

It is terrible that it has come to this. It is unbelievable, really, that the Liberals have been silent and have failed to protect and defend one of northern Ontario's biggest universities: an institution that is key and central to northern Ontario's largest city of Sudbury.

I cannot believe that it took my colleagues within the NDP to raise this issue and call for an emergency debate. I am thankful for the strong leadership of the MP for Timmins—James Bay and the MP from Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasings, who are fighting for northern Ontarians.

I have heard from many people who are deeply concerned about what is happening in Laurentian University. I am going to share something that I heard from one of the alumni. Michel Laforge is a resident of Sudbury, Ontario, and twice a graduate of Laurentian University. I am going to quote him:

This year, Laurentian sent face masks to alumni. I wear it, logo facing in, black side out, in solidarity with the Laurentian community's loss of jobs, colleagues, knowledge and research. I protest on behalf of everyone who depends or who has depended on this university. The "Laurentian 2.0" being discussed in restructuring plans behind closed doors will be a shell of its former self. My real alma mater closed its doors today. This is a slap in the face to people like me who strive to make northern Ontario a better place to live.

While I am deeply concerned about what is happening with Laurentian University, I want to raise the alarm about what is happening in Sudbury. The loss of infrastructure and the loss of institutions that support Franco-Canadians outside of Quebec is not just occurring in Ontario. It is occurring in my province, it is occurring in my city and it is occurring in my riding.

The federal government must do more to stop this insidious attack on the French language, on our francophone citizens and on our cherished bilingual country. As an anglophone member of Parliament from Alberta, joining the House this evening from Treaty 6 Territory, I want to raise my voice during this important debate, because I am proud to represent the strong, determined Franco-Albertans in communities across Alberta.

Madam Speaker, I know you know, but one such francophone community is my constituency of Edmonton Strathcona. We are very lucky to have an incredibly dynamic francophone community with strong institutions like La Cité francophone, incredible public service organizations like la FRAP and the Alliance Jeunesse-Famille de l'Alberta Society, and great festivals like FrancoMusik and the Canoë Volant. For those who do not know, who have not had the great privilege, this is a spectacularly beautiful festival, where my brothers and I came third in the downhill canoe races that were held last year before the pandemic.

• (2335)

There is another institution that makes Edmonton Strathcona, and indeed Alberta, great. It is one we have heard a great deal about this evening, and that is Campus Saint-Jean. Campus Saint-Jean is the only French-language university west of Winnipeg, and it serves francophone and bilingual students from Alberta and across western Canada with a wide range of undergraduate, after degree and graduate programs. It is a hub in my community. It encourages immigration, which in turn makes Edmonton Strathcona more vibrant and more diverse.

Campus Saint-Jean is critical to the vitality of the French language in Alberta and in western Canada. Its education programs train future teachers for Alberta and other provinces' primary and secondary French and French immersion programs. Without Campus Saint-Jean, Alberta would not have the qualified teachers it needs to serve its francophone program. In fact, so many Albertans

want their children to access French and French immersion school, that there are long wait lists to enrol. Already, we cannot keep up with the demand, and we cannot meet our obligations to provide French school opportunity.

Today, we are at real risk of losing Campus Saint-Jean. In violation of the contracts that were signed between the faculty of Saint-Jean, the University of Alberta and the governments of Alberta, the promised adequate funding to operate, maintain, expand and enhance the school, the UCP government, the Conservative government in Alberta and the cuts to post-secondary education are threatening the very existence of Campus Saint-Jean, its very survival.

Just like in Ontario, Jason Kenney and his government is failing to live up to its obligations, and this has profound implications for the future of French-language instruction and vitality in Alberta, so it must be addressed by the federal government. The federal government must step in at this point. We need systematic change that acknowledges the need for post-secondary education, not just to grade 12, over long term and right now there is an enhanced for immediate support that does not rely on provincial governments to match.

Current federal funding is not sufficient to meet the intent of the Official Languages Act. Article 23 of the charter cannot be fulfilled without support for post-secondary institutions to train French-language teachers and to guarantee that Alberta's francophone parents have the right to have their children receive primary and secondary school instruction in French. The Supreme Court ruling affirmed this right and more. It found that minority language communities must receive equivalent support to the majority language, not proportional support as was argued in British Columbia.

The implications for Alberta are very, very clear. Unless Campus Saint-Jean is supported, Alberta's school boards will not be able to meet the equivalency standards. The federal Liberal government needs to step up to support French-language post-secondary education and to ensure that francophones across Canada have their minority languages protected.

I urge the minister to stop hiding behind jurisdiction and stop waiting for the provinces that we know are not going to act and we know are not going to come to the table. We know that we cannot rely on them to protect our official languages, so I will quote to the minister from the minister's own mandate letter, which reads:

...make new investments to help train, recruit and attract teachers in both immersion and second official language programs [and]...develop and promote new opportunities for language and cultural exchanges and invest in building infrastructure that supports Official Language minority communities, including schools and cultural centres.

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We need a federal government willing to stand up for public higher education in northern Ontario, in Edmonton Strathcona and across Canada. We have had enough empty words. We within the NDP are looking for action.

• (2340)

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Madam Speaker, I do not know whether my colleague from Edmonton Strathcona is aware of the relationship between Campus Saint-Jean and the Collège de Sainte-Anne-de-la-Pocatière. They have an agreement dating back a number of years that enables anglophone and francophile students from Campus Saint-Jean to come learn and improve their French in La Pocatière. We have that in common.

For me, it is important that all Canadian universities, particularly those in minority communities, have adequate funding. When the member said that it is important that the federal government invest more money, has she or the NDP ever assessed how much should be reinvested in Canada's university faculty?

[English]

Ms. Heather McPherson: Madam Speaker, one of the things we heard from the minister earlier today was that there was money on the table waiting to go to the institutions, but the hold-up was that the provincial government was not accessing it and was not providing the match. If we are working with a provincial government that is not willing to meet its own contractual obligations, then the federal government needs to, at the very least, be prepared to move forward to protect the official language and minority communities, without the match. Even just that is a big piece of it.

I also like what many of my colleagues have said before, including my colleague from London—Fanshawe, about having a post-secondary act and being able to tie funding that goes to provinces to post-secondary and ensuring it goes to the right spot. That is another excellent way to ensure that.

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Madam Speaker, I have kind of a tough question for so late an hour. I imagine those of us who are still here are here because French really matters to us.

There is one aspect we have not talked about tonight, which is promoting francophone universities and francophone knowledge internationally. Our universities could be a unifying force within the Francophonie, and Canadian universities outside Quebec could be part of that movement. Does my colleague agree that funding research in French and promoting it internationally could be viable approaches for enhancing the value of francophone university culture in Canada?

Quebec is prepared to invest in promoting French-language research and science internationally. If Canada recognized the benefit of doing so, would that motivate the federal government and the Canadian provinces to get serious about supporting francophone universities? Does my colleague recognize the prestige—

• (2345)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I have to give the member time to respond.

The hon. member for Edmonton Strathcona.

[English]

Ms. Heather McPherson: Madam Speaker, one of the really wonderful things about Campus Saint-Jean and other francophone universities across the country is how they encourage immigration, how they encourage francophone immigration, which we know needs to be increased and promoted and supported in Canada.

I agree with the member that to have research be done in French and to have our French universities be part of an international collection of people doing that research and work can only strengthen the relationships that our French universities have with other French universities and increase the participation of members of the Francophonie from around the world.

Like I said in my speech, one of the things I most love about Campus Saint-Jean is how it increased immigration in Edmonton Strathcona and made our community so diverse and—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Sorry, I do want to allow for a very brief question.

The hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I very much enjoyed the speech by my colleague from Edmonton Strathcona. I would like to give her the opportunity to expand on her remarks.

How can Campus Saint-Jean contribute to francophone immigration in her province? How should the federal government support this francophone immigration, despite Jason Kenney?

[English]

Ms. Heather McPherson: Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague who is such a voice in Quebec for the francophones. I know he is so supportive of the francophonie across the country.

We need to do a better job. We know that French immigration needs to increase, that we need to commit resources and we need to have a better plan with regard to immigration to encourage the francophonie to come to Canada to settle in Quebec but outside of Quebec as well. The best way to do that is to ensure we have communities that are supporting the francophonie, francophone culture and francophone language. Campus Saint-Jean is the heart of that community in Edmonton Strathcona.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Madam Speaker, today I join my NDP colleagues in calling for an immediate federal government intervention with regard to the devastating situation faced by students, faculty and staff at Laurentian University.

First, I want to state that I, along with my NDP colleagues, stand in solidarity with the students, faculty and staff at Laurentian. This is devastating for Sudbury, for the north, for indigenous communities, for francophones living outside Quebec, particularly in Ontario, for women and for Canada as a whole. This is the time for federal leadership. This is the time for federal leadership for the north.

I am joining from my home in Thompson on Treaty 5 territory, the territory of the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation. Thompson is a sister city to Sudbury. The same mining company, Inco, has operated and been the economic backbone of our cities. I, like many people who grew up here in Thompson, have many friends from Sudbury. Many people go back and forth between our communities. Our stories are intertwined in many ways.

Our communities, like many across the north, have experienced a brutal hollowing out in recent years. Foreign ownership, like the takeover by Vale of Inco, has only meant the loss of good Canadian jobs across the board. It has meant that decisions that deeply affect our communities are no longer made in our country when it comes to our jobs and our future.

The devastation of Laurentian University adds to this. It robs opportunity from northern young people, from indigenous people, from Franco-Ontarians and from working-class young people, whose ability to access a post-secondary education can make all the difference. The north, particularly indigenous communities, has a history of being exploited for the resources and the people for their labour. The loss of a university and access to post-secondary education in our region turns the clock back on everyone.

We as northerners should have the opportunity to be educated in the north. We know that people who are able to access a post-secondary education in the north tend to stay in our communities and regions. As a former instructor for the University College of the North here in northern Manitoba, I know this reality well. I stand in solidarity with students, faculty and staff fighting back.

I also want to share some quotes from friends from Sudbury, advocates in this time of need.

Julie Lalonde wrote, “I don't live in Northern Ontario because youth migration is REAL. I'm one of thousands of young people who grew up in the North but were forced to leave to find work. Laurentian U imploding is horrific for the economy in a way that southern Ontario folks just don't get.”

Caelie Frampton said, “I was taught by amazing queer professors who changed my life. The classroom opened up my world. What's happening at LU should have never been allowed to happen. I'm sad for generations of Indigenous, francophone and all kids from a working class mining town who won't get to go.”

Maggie Frampton wrote, “Laurentian's francophone, indigenous and English programs are integral to the arts community of Sudbury, of northern Ontario and beyond. Many have come to study in Sudbury and discover we have something special. The long-standing institutions created at Laurentian University continue to engrain our landscape. My question now is, what will happen to the next generation? Who will continue what was started here?”

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The bottom line is that we need a federal government that believes in northern Canada, not in terms of slogans but in terms of action, in terms of investment. Northern Canada has one of the youngest populations in the country. There is immense opportunity, but with the shuttering of post-secondary opportunities, we close the door on our future. If we push the north backwards, inequality between our regions grows, and with it, Canada goes backwards too.

• (2350)

[Translation]

We need leadership for Franco-Ontarians, for French-language education, for the rights of francophone people. The future of Canada is at stake.

Post-secondary education in French outside Quebec is already under threat. My colleague from Edmonton Strathcona talked about cuts to Campus Saint-Jean. Major institutions within our education system are struggling to survive. We need federal leadership to support post-secondary education in French.

I would like to share with my colleagues the words of Monique Beaudoin. She said she mourned the loss of these incredible people who greatly contributed to the development of our community and our region, the arts, literature, the economy, the environment and the future. She mourned the collapse of a tri-cultural vision, as symbolic as it was. In terms of management, the people working there were fully devoted. To them it was not just about money, it was hard work over several decades. This was taken from them, just as their land and heritage were taken from them and put in museums. This vision, as fragile as it is, gave her hope that reconciliation on N'Swakamok land may finally be possible.

The survival of Laurentian University is essential to the protection of francophone rights in northern Ontario. The survival of French programs, in both midwifery and nursing programs, is essential to the protection of a woman's right to receive medical care in her language. The survival of Laurentian University is essential to the future of the francophonie and the future of bilingualism in the country.

[English]

This is the time for federal leadership on post-secondary education. We must be clear: Post-secondary education should not and cannot be a commodity; it is a right. Post-secondary institutions should not be run like corporations, and I want to add my voice to those of my colleagues opposing the Laurentian University administration's application for creditor protection under the CCAA. This problem, this crisis, requires all levels of government to step in right now for the good of students, faculty and the future of an institution that is at the heart of a community, of a region and of our country.

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There has been immense concern shared about the future of the indigenous studies program. Will Morin, an indigenous professor at Laurentian, has fought against the possible termination of the indigenous studies program. If it were to go, it would represent a significant turning away from Laurentian University's tricultural mandate and its commitment to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's call to action on indigenous education. It would also have an immense impact on indigenous communities in Canada, and it would represent the first indigenous studies program to be shuttered since the discipline began in 1969.

As students have pointed out, "I think that's what we've learned, realizing our professors aren't just our professors in the academic sense, but our teachers, our elders, and our knowledge holders. That it isn't just losing a professor. It's like losing an auntie, a grandfather or grandmother."

As my colleagues in the NDP have said clearly, this requires a long-term sustained commitment to post-secondary education that is not premised on making a profit. Instead, it should be a post-secondary education that is seen as vital to our personal development and to the betterment of our communities and society.

We have a lot to learn from the COVID crisis. One of the biggest lessons, I would argue, is that the neo-liberal status quo must go. The constant push for profit, including from our post-secondary institutions, has led us to a point like this. The emphasis on the individual over community has also led us to a point like this. The exploitation and marginalization of working people, indigenous communities and women, and so many others, render us all worse off.

The fight for Laurentian is more than a fight for an institution. It is a fight for the future of our country. A brighter future must come out of this crisis. Let us be on the right side of history and find a way to support the students, faculty and staff at Laurentian.

In closing, I will share a few words by Miriam Cusson, a professor of theatre, one of the programs that has been cut at Laurentian University. This is just a small snippet of her poem *Cher Robert*:

• (2355)

[Translation]

A brutal attack
Against midwives
First nations
Franco-Ontarians
Students and immigrant students from francophone countries

They tried to silence us
To cut out our tongues
They forget that we will remember.

[English]

This will be yours to discover

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have a question about funding for universities, which of course is a big challenge for all universities. I know that Laurentian University is not really a research-focused university, so the question is more general.

Does the member see a role for universities to partner with responsible Canadian-controlled corporations, to be more en-

trepreneurial and to raise money in that way to reduce tuition fees for students?

Ms. Niki Ashton: Madam Speaker, I think the research work at universities should be publicly funded. I am a huge supporter of it. For years, I have fought for public funding of our research councils and research institutions. The problem is that we have relied on corporate models that have led us to where we are.

To bring the focus back to Laurentian, what is clear is that a number of problems have existed for some time now, but it should not be students, faculty, the north and Franco-Ontarians who pay the price. We need the federal government and all governments to step in for a publicly funded solution.

• (2400)

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Madam Speaker, the member is a representative of people in remote communities from the north. One of the huge programs being cut is the midwifery program. It is the only bilingual midwifery program in all of Canada.

Could she talk about the impact that will have on her communities and on women in those remote areas who have limited access to reproductive health services?

Ms. Niki Ashton: Madam Speaker, indigenous women, and particularly those living in northern Canada, are already at a disadvantage in terms of accessing reproductive services and crucial health services. It is a no-brainer that the loss of the midwifery program is nothing short of devastating. We need to see an immediate governmental response, in part because of the gendered impact of these cuts. It is women who will pay the price: Indigenous, northern and Franco-Ontarian women. We cannot let this happen. We need the federal government to step in.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for really articulating the impact of these cuts on northern Ontario and all of Canada. One thing we have not talked enough about is what students are going through right now. We hear about students across the country. Last summer they had a shortened work season. They are studying under difficult conditions. With COVID, they are under unbelievable stress.

Can the member talk about how unfair this is to those students, how this is going to cost them the ability to further their educations and how many of them are having to transfer to other institutions and impede their—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): We have run out of time and I was hoping to allow a quick question.

I will ask the hon. member to answer briefly. The hon. member for Churchill—Keewatinook Aski.

S. O. 52

Ms. Niki Ashton: Madam Speaker, my colleague has clearly spoken to the personal crisis that so many students are facing. I also cannot imagine what Laurentian students are going through right now. There has been a lot out on social media.

This is a crisis on many levels and this really is about the desperate need to have all governments step in, particularly the federal government, to ensure that these young people have a brighter future. We can do that. We have the power to do that. Let us resolve to do that coming out of this emergency debate.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): It being midnight, I declare the motion carried. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until later this day at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 12 a.m.)

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