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The Honourable GEORGE J. FUREY,
Speaker

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THE SENATE

Thursday, December 16, 2021

The Senate met at 2 p.m., the Speaker in the chair.

Prayers.

SENATORS' STATEMENTS

REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN

THIRTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF INDEPENDENCE

Hon. Victor Oh: Honourable senators, I rise today to mark the thirtieth anniversary of the independence of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

In these last three decades, Kazakhstan has made tremendous progress toward reforming the fabric of its society. Although this journey has been a bumpy path at times, Kazakhstan has persisted and advanced significant economic, social and democratic reforms that have benefited the Kazakh people. This progress has been hard fought by many brave Kazakhs, and their efforts will continue to light the way for other Central Asian countries.

Since 1992, our countries have enjoyed a rich history of collaboration. Today, Kazakhstan has become Canada's largest trading partner in Central Asia, with foreign direct investment from Canada to Kazakhstan now exceeding \$5 billion. Canada continues to work with Kazakhstan to foster fair and reciprocal trade, helping to grow our respective economies and create jobs in both Kazakhstan and Canada.

Canada has been and will continue to be a friend to the people of Kazakhstan. Our respective countries share common values on a variety of key international issues ranging from climate change, gender equality, international security, multiculturalism and nuclear non-proliferation. These commonalities will continue to guide the bilateral work ahead of us, along with our cooperation in a variety of multilateral forums and through the Kazakhstan-Canada Business Council.

As a member of the Canada-Kazakhstan Parliamentary Friendship Group, I look forward to the work ahead that will further strengthen our countries' relations and our shared goals in the social, political, economic and scientific fields.

Colleagues, I ask that you join me today in congratulating and recognizing Kazakhstan on the thirtieth anniversary of their independence.

Thank you.

THE LATE PAUL CRONIN WEILER, O.C.

Hon. Brent Cotter: Honourable senators, Paul Cronin Weiler passed away on July 7 of this year at the age of 82. He was born in Port Arthur, grew up in northern Ontario and studied law at

Osgoode Hall Law School. Many, including his close friend and roommate in those days, Justice Dennis O'Connor, describe Paul Weiler as the most outstanding graduate in the history of Osgoode Hall Law School. He subsequently taught at Osgoode, where so many great legal minds have taught, before moving to B.C. to chair the British Columbia Labour Relations Board and rewrite B.C.'s labour laws, themselves a model for labour legislation across North America.

Mr. Weiler served as an adviser to Prime Minister Trudeau in the constitutional negotiations of 1979-81. It was his influence that led to the adoption of the "notwithstanding" clause into the Constitution that broke a logjam in negotiations. Former premier Roy Romanow described Paul Weiler's paper and passion regarding the "notwithstanding" clause as key to that resolution.

He was subsequently lured to Harvard Law School. There his abilities and commitment to reform and improvement in the field of labour law led to him being asked by then-president Bill Clinton to serve as counsel to the Dunlop Commission on the Future of Worker-Management Relations.

I came to know Paul Weiler through sports. All of the Weilers, but particularly Paul and his brothers Bobby and Joe, are sports enthusiasts — some would say fanatics. Paul's own enthusiasm led to his combining his academic interest in labour law with sport and, over time, becoming a beloved iconic professor at Harvard and dean of sports law academics across North America. He was greatly admired by those who worked in that field, of whom I was one.

There was a deep affection for him among his family and friends and the thousands of students he taught, many of whom are in this chamber, and some have risen to the highest ranks in the sports world. One of his students, Brian Burke, now president of hockey operations with the Pittsburgh Penguins, described Paul Weiler as a pioneer in the field of law and sport. His leading works, *Sports and the Law*, is the sports law bible in North America.

Approximately 20 years ago, Paul Weiler contracted a rare, degenerative neurological disease, from which he died in July, with family and his devoted wife, Florrie Darwin, at his side. Consistent with his positive, genial personality, he was upbeat to the end. As his brother Joe told me, "For Paul, every day was a gift; the glass was always half full."

Mr. Weiler was made an officer of the Order of Canada in 2016 — a great and honourable Canadian and an inspiration to many people including, if I may say, Senator Gold and me. Thank you.

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

[Translation]

THE LATE MARIE-CLAIRE BLAIS, C.C., O.Q.

Hon. Diane Bellemare: Esteemed colleagues, “there is no hurry, one always gets there in the end.” That’s what Marie-Claire Blais wrote in *A Season in the Life of Emmanuel* in 1965.

Today I would like to pay tribute to Marie-Claire Blais, the great Quebec novelist, playwright, screenwriter and poet, who died on November 30 at the age of 82. I wish to extend my sincere condolences to Ms. Blais’s family and friends.

At the age of 20, she published her first novel, *La Belle Bête* — *Mad Shadows* in English. A rising star, she was awarded a bursary from the Guggenheim Foundation and set to work writing *A Season in the Life of Emmanuel*, which won the Prix Médicis, a French literary award, in 1966. A prolific and speedy writer, she produced many novels, five plays and several poetry collections.

She made her mark on French-Canadian literature for over 60 years, a mark that will certainly endure for years to come. She was a champion of the Francophonie as well.

She was awarded many literary prizes for her body of work and won the Governor General’s award several times.

• (1410)

She was honoured with many awards and distinctions, including, for example, the Order of Canada in 1975, the 125th Anniversary of the Confederation of Canada Medal in 1992, and the National Order of Quebec in 1995.

Over several decades, she managed to put Quebec’s sometimes very difficult realities into words and poems, exploring themes like poverty, the “great darkness” and the Quiet Revolution.

A December 2 article in *Le Devoir* had this to say about Ms. Blais, and I quote:

A visionary well ahead of her time, she wrote about homosexuality in the late 1960s in Quebec and was among the first to take an interest in racism, the struggles of the LGBTQ+ community, the homeless, and the oppressed of all kinds.

In an interview, she once said the following:

I believe [that my characters] all believe they’re moving forward, not looking to the past, but forward toward a rebuilding, to a social redemption based on peace. They believe in it, they hope.

Her work has been translated into many languages. She may have left us, but her work remains, and anyone can consult it to better understand key aspects of Quebec’s history.

I urge you to do just that, colleagues, and to discover this great French Canadian author.

Thank you.

[English]

ACCESS TO HIGH-SPEED BROADBAND NETWORKS

Hon. Robert Black: Honourable senators, I rise today to speak about the digitization of agriculture.

We know that technology is playing an ever-growing role in our world. However, for many years, agriculture has remained stuck in the past, largely due to connectivity issues.

I recently met with representatives from Telus Agriculture, a new business unit within Telus looking to innovate and explore technological opportunities to better support rural communities, digitize agricultural data and create a better flow of information across our food system.

It is clear that digital technologies — from the most basic internet connections to the most advanced artificial intelligence — are changing agriculture and the food system. Examples of this can be seen at every step of the food supply chain, from laying of seed to getting the final product on retail shelves.

As a nation, we must embrace the potential that technology holds to enhance and strengthen one of our oldest and most important sectors. The world will face many challenges in the future to maintain food security as the population continues to grow. Canada has a better chance of continuing to feed families around this world if we support a digital transformation of agriculture that is enabled by connectivity.

Honourable colleagues, the future of farming is smarter, more innovative and more connected. But that won’t come unless the government steps up to support agricultural and rural communities in getting reliable internet access. If we are to see our agricultural sector continue to be a global leader, we need shovels in the ground now to get our rural, remote and northern communities connected.

Thank you.

[Translation]

2021 QUEBEC MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

Hon. Éric Forest: Honourable senators, I would like to take a moment to talk about the Quebec municipal elections that took place in November.

We can certainly say that the winds of change were blowing in Quebec municipal politics, since many women and young people won seats in many of Quebec’s big cities.

With regard to women, 5 of the 10 largest cities in Quebec now have a woman as mayor. In the 22 cities in Quebec that have a population of over 50,000, 10 women were elected mayor. That is 45%, which is very encouraging.

If we look at how things have changed in Quebec since 2005, we see that the number of women on municipal councils has risen from 2,000 to 2,909, which represents a 46% increase.

Although we are far from achieving gender parity in mayoral positions in Quebec, given that only 23% of these positions have been filled by women this year and that 52% of municipal councils do not meet the minimum threshold for parity, the November 2021 municipal elections represent a significant step forward toward gender parity, particularly in the big cities.

With regard to young people, I am also encouraged by the fact that these municipal elections brought in a blast of youthful energy. Three of the ten largest cities in Quebec — Laval, Longueuil and Sherbrooke — are now led by an elected official who is under the age of 35. That sends a very strong message.

It's worth noting that this year, by electing Isabelle Lessard, who is only 21, the town of Chapais in northern Quebec voted in the youngest mayor in the history of the province. Bravo, Isabelle.

Even though progress is being made mostly in the mid-sized and large cities, we can expect that these powerful images will have an impact and we will do even better next time. The more visible women and young people are in positions of power, the more this will fuel the aspirations of these demographic groups.

The election of Valérie Plante to lead our city in 2017, at the age of 43, certainly has a lot to do with the sense of renewal we felt in November 2021.

In closing, I would like to commend the organizations that work to improve the representation of women and young people in municipal politics. I am thinking about the Union des municipalités du Québec where, as president, I created the Francine-Ruest-Jutras award to recognize exceptional contributions made by women in politics. I am also thinking about the Chief Electoral Officer and the Commission Femmes et gouvernance, which developed a mentorship program and launched various initiatives to encourage young people and women.

I also commend the associations that actively work on improving representation on municipal councils, especially the Groupe Femmes, Politique et Démocratie, led by Thérèse Mailloux and Pascale Navarro.

Thank you.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

[English]

REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT—ALBERTA ORGANIZATIONS

Hon. Paula Simons: Honourable senators, I know that I am just one of many Canadians who has been deeply concerned about the dangerous plight of refugees from Afghanistan who are fleeing or trying to flee the Taliban regime.

I know that many of us have been frustrated that things are not happening more quickly, even while we understand the challenges involved.

Today I am happy to celebrate a small victory. This week a group of 184 refugees arrived in Canada from Afghanistan. They are destined for new homes in Edmonton, Calgary and Airdrie, a bedroom community just outside of Calgary. Today I would like to celebrate the work of two of Alberta's largest refugee settlement agencies: Catholic Social Services in Edmonton, and the Calgary Catholic Immigration Society in Alberta.

Despite the impression their names might give you, these are truly ecumenical organizations in the best sense of the word. For decades, they have been contracted to offer settlement services to refugees in Alberta. Those refugees have come from many places over the decades: Vietnam, Ethiopia, Iraq, South Sudan, Myanmar and Syria to name a few.

When refugees arrive, staff and volunteers do everything possible to help them adapt to life in Canada and help them to find apartments, jobs, schools and teach them about dressing for the Alberta winter, and how to use transit systems and grocery stores. It is difficult, vital work and a gift to all Albertans.

They have been preparing for months for the arrival of these Afghan refugees, raising funds, organizing housing, balancing the need to prepare for the newcomers with their responsibility to settle other refugees arriving from places such as Yemen and Eritrea.

Fariborz Birjandian of the Calgary Catholic Immigration Society Alberta has been leading the efforts to bring and settle Afghan refugees here. I want to thank him and his team for all of their work.

As an Albertan, I am proud of these organizations which do such essential work to help some of the most vulnerable new Canadians adjust to life here. I am proud of all the Albertans who are doing so much to make Alberta a welcoming refuge for people.

And if you will allow me, as an Alberta senator, I want to welcome these 184 newest arrivals to the most remarkable, open and exciting of provinces. I welcome you in the name of my grandmother and mother, who came to this country as refugees themselves. I am very proud that you have chosen to make your home with us. We want to bless you with our generosity just as you have blessed us with your trust.

You may think you are lucky to be here, but I think we are lucky to have your courage, your determination, your passion and your wisdom to enrich our province and our country in every sense. Thank you. *Hiy hiy.*

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

TAXPAYERS' OMBUDSMAN

2020-21 ANNUAL REPORT TABLED

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the 2020-21 Annual Report of the Taxpayers' Ombudsman, entitled *Adapting and Delivering in Unprecedented Times*.

• (1420)

BANKING, TRADE AND COMMERCE

REPORT PURSUANT TO RULE 12-26(2) TABLED

Hon. Pamela Wallin: Honourable senators, pursuant to rule 12-26(2) of the *Rules of the Senate*, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Senate Committee on Banking, Trade and Commerce, which deals with the expenses incurred by the committee during the Second Session of the Forty-Third Parliament.

(For text of report, see today's Journals of the Senate, p. 179.)

[Translation]

ENERGY, THE ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES

REPORT PURSUANT TO RULE 12-26(2) TABLED

Hon. Paul J. Massicotte: Honourable senators, pursuant to rule 12-26(2) of the *Rules of the Senate*, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Senate Committee on Energy, the Environment and Natural Resources, which deals with the expenses incurred by the committee during the Second Session of the Forty-Third Parliament.

(For text of report, see today's Journals of the Senate, p. 180.)

TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS

REPORT PURSUANT TO RULE 12-26(2) TABLED

Hon. Leo Housakos: Honourable senators, pursuant to rule 12-26(2) of the *Rules of the Senate*, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Senate Committee on Transport and Communications, which deals with the expenses incurred by the committee during the Second Session of the Forty-Third Parliament.

(For text of report, see today's Journals of the Senate, p. 180.)

THE ESTIMATES, 2021-22

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES (B)—SECOND REPORT OF NATIONAL FINANCE COMMITTEE TABLED

Hon. Percy Mockler: Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the second report of the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance entitled *Supplementary Estimates (B) for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2022* and with leave of the Senate and notwithstanding rule 5-5(f), I move that the report be placed on the Orders of the Day for consideration later this day.

The Hon. the Speaker: Is leave granted, honourable senators?

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(On motion of Senator Mockler, report placed on the Orders of the Day for consideration later this day.)

CRIMINAL CODE
CANADA LABOUR CODE

BILL TO AMEND—SECOND REPORT OF LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE ON SUBJECT MATTER TABLED

Hon. Mobina S. B. Jaffer: Honourable senators, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the second report (interim) of the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, which deals with the subject matter of Bill C-3, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Canada Labour Code.

(Pursuant to the order adopted December 2, 2021, the report was placed on the Orders of the Day for consideration later this day.)

BILL TO CHANGE THE NAME OF THE ELECTORAL DISTRICT OF CHÂTEAUGUAY—LACOLLE

THIRD REPORT OF LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE PRESENTED

Hon. Mobina S. B. Jaffer, Chair of the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, presented the following report:

Thursday, December 16, 2021

The Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs has the honour to present its

THIRD REPORT

Your committee, to which was referred Bill S-207, An Act to change the name of the electoral district of Châteauguay—Lacolle, has, in obedience to the order of reference of December 9, 2021, examined the said bill and now reports the same without amendment.

Respectfully submitted,

[*English*]

MOBINA S. B. JAFFER

THE SENATE

Chair

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, when shall this bill be read the third time?

(On motion of Senator Dalphond, bill placed on the Orders of the Day for third reading at the next sitting of the Senate.)

[*English*]

NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR A GUARANTEED LIVABLE BASIC INCOME BILL

FIRST READING

Hon. Kim Pate introduced Bill S-233, An Act to develop a national framework for a guaranteed livable basic income.

(Bill read first time.)

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, when shall this bill be read the second time?

(On motion of Senator Pate, bill placed on the Orders of the Day for second reading two days hence.)

[*Translation*]

CANADIAN ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION ACT, 1999

BILL TO AMEND—FIRST READING

Hon. Claude Carignan introduced Bill S-234, An Act to amend the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999 (final disposal of plastic waste).

(Bill read first time.)

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, when shall this bill be read the second time?

(On motion of Senator Carignan, bill placed on the Orders of the Day for second reading two days hence.)

[Senator Jaffer]

NOTICE OF MOTION TO RESOLVE THAT AN AMENDMENT TO THE CONSTITUTION (SASKATCHEWAN ACT) BE AUTHORIZED TO BE MADE BY PROCLAMATION ISSUED BY THE GOVERNOR GENERAL

Hon. Brent Cotter: Honourable senators, I give notice that, at the next sitting of the Senate, I will move:

WHEREAS section 43 of the *Constitution Act, 1982* provides that an amendment to the Constitution of Canada may be made by proclamation issued by the Governor General under the Great Seal of Canada where so authorized by resolutions of the Senate and House of Commons and of the legislative assembly of each province to which the amendment applies;

NOW THEREFORE the Senate resolves that an amendment to the Constitution of Canada be authorized to be made by proclamation issued by Her Excellency the Governor General under the Great Seal of Canada in accordance with the schedule hereto.

SCHEDULE

AMENDMENT TO THE CONSTITUTION OF CANADA

1. Section 24 of the *Saskatchewan Act* is repealed.
2. The repeal of section 24 is deemed to have been made on August 29, 1966, and is retroactive to that date.

Citation

3. This Amendment may be cited as the *Constitution Amendment, [year of proclamation] (Saskatchewan Act)*.

BANKING, TRADE AND COMMERCE

COMMITTEE AUTHORIZED TO STUDY MATTERS RELATING TO BANKING, TRADE AND COMMERCE GENERALLY

Hon. Pamela Wallin: Honourable senators, with leave of the Senate and notwithstanding rule 5-5(j), I move:

That the Standing Senate Committee on Banking, Trade and Commerce be authorized to study matters relating to banking, trade and commerce generally, as described in rule 12-7(8); and

That the committee submit its final report no later than June 30, 2023, and that the committee retain all powers necessary to publicize its findings until 180 days after the tabling of the final report.

The Hon. the Speaker: Is leave granted, honourable senators?

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

The Hon. the Speaker: Is it your pleasure, honourable senators, to adopt the motion?

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to.)

QUESTION PERIOD

EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

DISABILITY INCLUSION ACTION PLAN

Hon. Leo Housakos (Acting Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, my question is for the government leader in the Senate. Senator Gold, in the Speech from the Throne in September 2019, the Trudeau government promised to create new Canadian disability benefits. Unfortunately, it was only at the eleventh hour that the bill was finally brought forward last June, just one day before the end of the parliamentary session and eventual dissolution of Parliament for the Prime Minister's unnecessary election. And then two months following that election, last month's Speech from the Throne contained no such promises and no mention, nor was there a single mention in Tuesday's economic and fiscal update.

• (1430)

Leader, if the needs of disabled Canadians are important to the Trudeau government, why hasn't there been a piece of legislation put forward, instead of actually being shuffled aside and disregarded?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for your question, senator. The concerns of disabled Canadians are being taken very seriously by this government. As I've mentioned on other occasions when questions of this nature have been raised, and I'll repeat again, the government is committed to and is engaged in working with various groups and members of the disabled communities across this country in order to come forward, as it will in due course, with a program that has the buy-in and the support of those communities.

[Translation]

Senator Housakos: Leader of the Government in the Senate, the Order Paper from the other place has no mention of this bill. If you ask your parliamentary secretary, Mr. Gerretsen, I'm sure he could confirm that. The Trudeau government introduced this bill at the last minute last spring, without leaving time for debate, and it does not seem like the government will introduce the bill again this year.

The Liberals unfortunately seem to have a habit of doing things like this. During the pandemic, you tried to withdraw the funding allocated to accessible reading materials for Canadians

who could not read printed documents. The recipients of the disability tax credit received COVID benefits long after many other groups received their emergency support. Leader of the Government in the Senate, what happened? When will the bill be introduced?

Senator Gold: Thank you for the question. As I just said, the government is reviewing this important issue and is working with the groups in question. As soon as I hear anything about a new bill I will let the chamber know right away.

[English]

LABOUR SHORTAGE

Hon. Rose-May Poirier: Honourable senators, my question is for the government leader in the Senate. While most small businesses across Canada are experiencing labour shortages, New Brunswick is one of the hardest hit provinces, with 60% of small businesses unable to find enough staff. Employee shortages are found across many sectors in New Brunswick, most especially in construction, health care and transport.

Leader, last month's Speech from the Throne did not mention the severe labour shortages in Canada, and Tuesday's fiscal update only promised to bring forward a strategy next year. What are you doing to help businesses across New Brunswick which are dealing with labour shortages and need help now, not many years from now?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for your question, Senator Poirier. The problem of labour shortages is acute in many provinces and regions within provinces. The government has a number of different measures that it has brought forward and is working with its provincial and territorial partners to address this question. Some of these include reforming economic immigration programs to expand pathways for permanent residency for temporary foreign workers, working with communities and employers to welcome skilled refugees to fill labour shortages and establishing a trusted-employer system to streamline application procedures so that temporary workers can get full-time work.

With respect to more specific groups within the labour force, again, government initiatives like child care should, as the experience in Quebec demonstrated in a spectacular fashion, increase the number of women able to join the workforce, therefore also addressing the labour shortage and helping bolster our economy.

CITIZENSHIP, IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEES

REFUGEE PROCESSING BACKLOG

Hon. Rose-May Poirier: Leader, on Tuesday, my colleague Senator Ataullahjan raised with you the backlog of almost 1.8 million applications at Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. As of October, this backlog contained over 775,000 applications for temporary residence including work permits. Businesses in New Brunswick and across Canada are asking the Trudeau government for help in filling their labour needs by improving and streamlining this process.

Leader, Tuesday's fiscal update promised \$85 million next year to process more applications but gave absolutely no details on how many applications are expected to be processed through this funding.

How long will it take to clear the current backlog in work permits, and how will the government simplify the approval process for temporary foreign workers?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for your question and for referring to the government's additional investment in this area and commitment.

As I think I've mentioned in response to earlier questions, the government is working hard in support of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada's operations. Canada is on track to meet its target of 401,000 new permanent residents this year. As I mentioned before, it has already welcomed 325,000 new permanent residents.

With regard to your other question, the government will continue to seek ways to improve and streamline the processes that are in place for work permits and the like.

JUSTICE

CHARTER OF RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

Hon. Ratna Omidvar: Honourable senators, my question is for the representative of the government in the Senate, Senator Gold.

Senator Gold, the Senate and the Government of Canada has an obligation to protect minorities across Canada. Yesterday, we heard from our colleague Senator Ataullahjan about the impact of Bill 21 in Quebec on one particular teacher, Fatemeh Anvari, who was removed from her teaching job because she wears a hijab.

As we all know, Quebec has invoked the "notwithstanding" clause on Bill 21. At the time the Charter was negotiated, then minister of justice Jean Chrétien said in the other place that the intention of the "notwithstanding" clause was only to be used to correct absurd situations.

Senator Gold, this is not an absurd situation. As we see, it has a real-life impact on individuals. What is the Government of Canada going to do to protect the rights of minorities no matter

where they live, and what is the government planning to do to challenge this potential overreach of the use of the "notwithstanding" clause?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for your question. My personal views on this bill are well known to this chamber. I spoke to this in a Senator's Statement some years ago, but in my capacity as Government Representative, I'll answer your question.

Prime Minister Trudeau, alone amongst leaders of federal and provincial parties, has stated on many occasions that he reserves all rights to intervene at the appropriate time in the litigation that's currently under way in the courts of Quebec. The Government of Canada has also made it clear that it disagrees fundamentally with the provisions of Bill 21 that deny someone the right to work just because of what they wear. The Government of Canada remains committed to following the litigation closely and will take whatever decisions are deemed appropriate at the appropriate time.

Senator Omidvar: Senator Gold, I'm going to quote you from your statement that you delivered in May 2019. You said:

... as senators, we are not the agents or representatives of our provincial governments. We were also not appointed to simply channel the opinions of the public, even if the public takes a strong stand. . . . we have the responsibility to act in the national interest, and it is in the national interest that we defend the rights of religious minorities when they are targeted by discriminatory legislation.

Senator Gold, are you repeating these words to your cabinet colleagues in government?

Senator Gold: Thank you for quoting me in this chamber. As I said in my response to your first question, I stand by what I said in my personal capacity as a senator, as a citizen, as a Canadian and as a Jew. As Government Representative, I can only repeat that the government will take the steps it deems necessary at the time that it deems appropriate and necessary.

• (1440)

As for my conversations with my cabinet colleagues, you will please understand that I'm not at liberty to disclose those.

ONLINE HARM

Hon. Julie Miville-Dechéne: Honourable senators, my question is for the Government Representative.

The Trudeau government has repeatedly promised to act against what it calls online harms. That promise was in the Liberal Party's last electoral platform. It was also reiterated when the government recently indicated that its online harms legislation would be a priority. In this context, here's a quote from 20-year-old pop singer Billie Eilish from this week:

I started watching porn when I was like 11. I think it really destroyed my brain and I feel incredibly devastated that I was exposed to so much porn.

The first few times I, you know, had sex, I was not saying no to things that were not good. It was because I thought that's what I was supposed to be attracted to.

She said porn "destroyed my brain." I think we should all reflect on that tragic sentence.

Senator Gold, as the government contemplates online harms legislation, could you please let us know if the obvious harm online — pornography for minors — will be included in the legislation? If not, why not?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Senator, thank you very much for raising this issue.

I've been assured that the government intends to introduce new legislation in a timely manner, and that legislation will take action that will require even news media programs to take action against illegal content like child-exploitative sexual content and remove it.

In regard to more specific questions relating to the harms of pornography to minors, allow me to relay the concerns and your question to the government, and I will report back with a response.

[Translation]

Senator Miville-Dechêne: Senator Gold, I appreciate your prudence, but please note that some countries have already taken action to protect children from online pornography or will be doing so in the months to come. Germany has started blocking sites that do not have age verification, France is heading in that direction, and Great Britain will most likely be taking action soon. I introduced a bill about this in the Senate. Unfortunately, Canada has not done anything.

Here's my question: Is the government prepared to support Bill S-210 or to introduce its own bill to ensure that online harm does not destroy children's brains?

Senator Gold: Thank you for your question, senator. I will add that question to the previous one and get back to you with an answer as soon as possible.

[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

ACCESS TO COVID-19 TOOLS (ACT) ACCELERATOR

Hon. Peter Harder: Honourable senators, Canada has so far promised 51 million doses out of its own surplus of stock to COVAX and through bilateral donations, but as of today, I'm informed that only about 10 million of those vaccines have been delivered.

So I again ask the Government Representative the following: What is the government doing to accelerate the delivery of the doses committed, and is it considering increasing that commitment? As everybody knows, only 7% of the people in low-income countries have received even a single shot.

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for your question, Senator Harder, and for your ongoing advocacy for and support of this important issue.

As I have perhaps stated at an earlier occasion but which I will repeat, the government has disbursed \$2.5 billion to support the global fight against the virus. That includes a total of \$1.3 billion to support the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator to ensure that not only vaccines but therapeutics and diagnostics are available around the world.

During the G7 leaders summit this past June, the G7 leaders announced a collective commitment of more than 2 billion vaccine doses. Canada's portion will be 100 million doses, but the government has committed to donate the equivalent of at least 200 million COVID-19 vaccine doses to the COVAX Facility by the end of 2022.

Canada continues to work with international partners to address barriers to equitable access to vaccines. I've also been advised that the Prime Minister announced an investment up to \$15 million to COVAX manufacturing task force partners in support of establishing a South African technology transfer hub. The government will continue to work diligently to do its part to address this global pandemic.

Senator Harder: I recognize that Canada has been an early and strong supporter of the ACT Accelerator and COVAX, as Senator Gold has indicated, but the fact is that the pandemic is far from over, and the ACT Accelerator partners have identified new additional funding — beyond that which has already been committed — that is urgently needed for 2022, so that tests, treatments, PPE, oxygen and further vaccine procurement can proceed. Developing countries will need urgent financial support to help deliver those vaccines.

Is the Government of Canada planning on providing further additional support to help end this pandemic everywhere, because as we all know, we must act urgently as, ultimately, Canadians are safe only when the whole world has access to vaccines. More needs to be done.

Senator Gold: Your comment that more needs to be done is clear, and the government is aware. The government is working with international partners and will look seriously at requests for additional support.

I'll make those inquiries to the government, Senator Harder, and I would be happy to report back when I get an answer.

CANADA MORTGAGE AND HOUSING CORPORATION

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Hon. Vernon White: Honourable senators, my question is to the government leader in the Senate.

Last June, I asked about the housing price explosion and how the government would help. It's now been six months and things are not improving. Yesterday, in the government's fiscal update, the Minister of Finance said it would take years of work to tackle the challenges, making Canada's housing market unaffordable. Canada has seen a record spike in home price appreciation during the pandemic. National average home prices are up 18% from October 2020 to October 2021.

Can you advise what specific measures the government will offer to help grow the housing availability for those in need?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for your question and for raising this important issue.

Since coming into office, this government has helped over a million families get the housing they need. That's not enough; the government knows more work needs to be done.

In the Throne Speech, as colleagues would know, the government outlined its continued commitment to making housing more affordable. That includes bringing in a \$4-billion Housing Accelerator Fund, working to end chronic homelessness, and providing a more flexible first-time buyers incentive and a rent-to-own program to help renters become owners.

In this mandate, the government would also strengthen federal oversight of the housing market by establishing a national law enforcement agency solely dedicated to investigating and combating all forms of major financial crime, including the presence of money laundering in the housing sector.

Senator White: Thank you very much for that response, senator.

While the minister spoke about the years of work, that work wasn't specifically identified, but it would suggest that there was an analysis done as to what we've seen over the last year, in particular. Was there an analysis provided to the leader's office that he could share with the Senate?

Senator Gold: I'm not aware of an analysis, Senator White. I'll make inquiries and report back.

HEALTH

COVID-19 PANDEMIC—RAPID TESTING

Hon. Michael L. MacDonald: Honourable senators, I have a question on the important issue of rapid testing.

In response to the Omicron variant, many provinces are rolling out rapid tests. The federal government has allocated \$1.7 billion this fiscal year for those tests, but in November 2020, Minister Freeland was asked about the use of rapid tests to support the reopening of businesses, and she responded by stating:

... We cannot peddle snake oil to Canadians ...

Senator Gold, why would Minister Freeland compare the provision of rapid testing to peddling snake oil?

[Senator White]

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Senator, thank you for your question. Without being fully apprised of the context within which the question has been asked and the answer given, I'm reluctant to speculate on why the minister answered that way.

• (1450)

It is clear that rapid testing is one of the important tools to help us cope with the ongoing pandemic. We know that rapid tests are not a substitute for the molecular tests, but they are an important tool. That's why the federal government has invested significantly and made them available to all provinces and territories.

How they are used by the provinces and how they are understood or misunderstood by the population is a separate matter, but I'm afraid I cannot answer your question without really knowing the context in which it was posed and answered.

Senator MacDonald: Senator, I appreciate your serious approach to this question. I find it hard to believe that a minister of the Crown would make such a flippant remark about such an important issue.

Are you not concerned that the Government of Canada has put out such a poor communication strategy with this type of rhetoric on such an important health issue?

Senator Gold: It's the position of the government that the work done to make rapid testing kits available to all provinces and territories was a significant and positive step forward.

Again, I am confident that the Government of Canada and the ministers responsible take this important issue very seriously and will continue to do so.

CROWN-INDIGENOUS RELATIONS

CONSULTATION WITH INTERESTED ORGANIZATIONS

Hon. Dennis Glen Patterson: Honourable senators, my question is for the Leader of the Government in the Senate. Senator Gold, as you know, a large concern raised during our debate in the last Parliament on Bill C-15, which focused on the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, was the issue of consultation. Particularly, sitting chiefs representing historical treaty nations raised the issue of rushed, inadequate or, in some cases, non-existent consultation during the drafting of Bill C-15. As a result of these clear deficiencies in consultation, rights holders from various parts of the country denounced and/or outright rejected Bill C-15. Ministers Lametti and Bennett were then quite explicit in their promise to be inclusive when consulting Indigenous peoples on the creation of the action plan and vowed to improve upon the terrible process used to develop Bill C-15 going forward.

Senator Gold, I'd like to ask you: What efforts have been made by the Department of Justice and/or the Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations to engage meaningfully with those rights holders who raised these concerns? These rights holders include, but are not limited to, Treaty 6, Treaty 7 and Treaty 8, the Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians, Manitoba Keewatinow and the Mohawk Council of Kahnawà:ke.

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): The Government of Canada is, of course, aware of the concerns that were expressed and to which you refer. The position of the Government of Canada, however, is not that it was a terrible process — I don't remember the exact words — imperfect though it was, as all processes are. The Government of Canada is proud and grateful to both the Senate and the Parliament of Canada, as well as to the committees that studied this and its sponsors in both places, for passing this historical piece of legislation. The work and the implementation plan now begin. The government remains committed to meaningful consultation with all relevant stakeholders.

Senator Patterson: Senator Gold, perhaps I should have said, "the imperfect process of consultations." However, in discussing the issue of consultation on Bill C-15, we also heard that grassroots organizations such as Idle No More, Defenders of the Land and Truth Before Reconciliation felt cut out of the conversation completely. I'd like to ask if efforts have been made to engage with these and other grassroots organizations to date.

Senator Gold: Thank you for your question, senator. I will have to make inquiries about the specific groups to which you referred, and I will certainly report back.

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

DISABILITY INCLUSION ACTION PLAN

Hon. Chantal Petitclerc: Honourable senators, my question is for the Government Representative in the Senate. Senator Gold, my colleague, Senator Housakos, read my mind. I would like to follow up on the extremely important question he posed.

[English]

Let me begin with a quote:

COVID-19 has disproportionately affected Canadians with disabilities, and highlighted long-standing challenges. The Government will bring forward a Disability Inclusion Plan, which will have:

A new Canadian Disability Benefit modelled after the Guaranteed Income Supplement for seniors . . .

This statement, you may remember, is from the September 2020 Speech from the Throne. Since then, no action has been taken.

Last June 22, one day before the summer recess, Bill C-35, the Canada Disability Benefit Act, was introduced and obviously didn't make it past first reading. Since then, there has been total silence. Then, just days ago, the most recent economic and fiscal update was presented with information about support for Canadians. Once again, mention of people with disabilities was absent. Not one word in it for them.

Senator Gold, I realize, as you told my colleague, that you don't have the complete answers ready, but, as we're having this conversation on building back better, I need to know — in fact, the 6.2 million Canadians with disabilities need to know — when we are going to see not words but actions, commitments and results? Because frankly, it feels as if they're being left behind once again.

Senator Gold, will you make sure that we get those answers?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you, senator. I really do understand the frustration that has been expressed and to which you are referring. I certainly will make every effort to get an answer quickly as to the government's plans. I'll do my best to communicate that to this chamber as soon as I can.

JUSTICE

CHARTER OF RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

Hon. Mobina S. B. Jaffer: Honourable senators, my question is also to the Leader of the Government in the Senate. Senator, back in May 2019 you spoke so passionately about your strong opposition to Bill 21, An Act respecting the laicity of the State. Senator Omidvar also covered it this morning. At that time, you said, "Bill 21 infringes on the fundamental rights of all citizens who choose to publicly express their religious beliefs."

Although the bill applies to many religious minorities, including practising Jews and Sikhs, its main focus is a Muslim woman who wears a hijab or veil. Senator, at that time you made me proud that you were one of my colleagues.

You said to Senator Omidvar that the Prime Minister will intervene at the right time. Senator, we know there is an increase in Islamophobia across Canada. We know that the Muslim community is in fear. We know that the Muslim community wants the Prime Minister to take action as he did in 2015. When will the Prime Minister stand up for the Muslim community whose rights are being eroded in Quebec?

Hon. Marc Gold (Government Representative in the Senate): Thank you for your question. The Government of Canada is very concerned, as are all Canadians, with the rise of Islamophobia, anti-Semitism and other forms of unacceptable discrimination, prejudice and hatred in this country.

• (1500)

To be clear, senator, what I said was that the Prime Minister has made it clear that he is keeping the door open to possibly intervening, if and when it is deemed appropriate. I want the record to be clear about that.

With regard to the situation you describe, again, the government's position is that no one should be denied the right to work simply because of what they wear or their religious beliefs. It is gratifying to see the community of Chelsea come together to support the teacher and to stand up for their neighbour. That said, the government is following this situation — which is playing out not only in the courts in Quebec but also in Quebec society and, indeed, beyond — and has not closed the door to intervening or making representations on this matter in the future.

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, the time for Question Period has expired.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

THE ESTIMATES, 2021-22

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES (B)—SECOND REPORT OF NATIONAL FINANCE COMMITTEE ADOPTED

The Senate proceeded to consideration of the second report of the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance, entitled *Supplementary Estimates (B) for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2022*, tabled in the Senate on December 16, 2021.

Hon. Percy Mockler moved the adoption of the report.

The Hon. the Speaker: Is it your pleasure, honourable senators, to adopt the motion?

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to and report adopted.)

[Translation]

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

MOTION FOR ADDRESS IN REPLY—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Gold, P.C., seconded by the Honourable Senator LaBoucane-Benson:

That the following Address be presented to Her Excellency the Governor General of Canada:

[Senator Gold]

To Her Excellency the Right Honourable Mary May Simon, Chancellor and Principal Companion of the Order of Canada, Chancellor and Commander of the Order of Military Merit, Chancellor and Commander of the Order of Merit of the Police Forces, Governor General and Commander-in-Chief of Canada.

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR EXCELLENCY:

We, Her Majesty's most loyal and dutiful subjects, the Senate of Canada in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Excellency for the gracious Speech which Your Excellency has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.

Hon. Mary Coyle: Building a resilient economy, a cleaner and healthier future for our children.

[Editor's Note: Senator Coyle spoke in an Indigenous language.]

[English]

Honourable senators, I rise today to respond to the Speech from the Throne. On November 23, our new Governor General — Mary May Simon, the first Indigenous Governor General in the history of Canada — delivered the Speech from the Throne, officially marking the opening of the First Session of the Forty-fourth Parliament of Canada.

Governor General Simon, an accomplished Inuk woman from Nunavik, has decades of organizational leadership, diplomatic, journalistic, political, public service and life experience. I have admired her for years and I was greatly moved when I heard her deliver the Speech from the Throne in Inuktitut, French and English.

Thank you, Governor General Simon, for shining a light for all Canadians to see on the original language of the peoples of Nunatsiavut, Nunavik, Nunavut and the Inuvialuit region and highlighting the importance of all Indigenous languages in Canada.

In her speech the Governor General reminded us:

Our Earth is in danger. From a warming Arctic to the increasing devastation of natural disasters, our land and our people need help.

[Editor's Note: Senator Coyle spoke in an Indigenous language.]

Honourable senators, this is not news. In his October 1970 Speech from the Throne, then-governor general Roland Michener noted that:

All our efforts for a stable prosperity and for a humane community will be of little value to us, however, if we do not quickly and determinedly grapple with the threat to our well-being and the well-being of future generations of Canadians which is represented by environmental pollution.

Colleagues, next year will mark 30 years since Canada ratified the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro; it will mark 25 years since the adoption of the Kyoto Protocol and 22 years since the Copenhagen Accord. Canada did not meet the commitments it made at those landmark gatherings and neither did the international community.

It was the failure to meet those commitments that led us to the critical Paris climate summit of 2015. At COP 21 in Paris, the Government of Canada stated its commitment to stopping a global temperature increase at 1.5 degrees Celsius, phasing out fossil fuels, financially supporting clean energy and assisting developing countries to meet their targets.

The most recent report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which came out this past August, noted that:

Global surface temperature will continue to increase until at least the mid-century under all emissions scenarios considered. Global warming of 1.5°C and 2°C will be exceeded during the 21st century unless deep reductions in carbon dioxide (CO₂) and other greenhouse gas emissions occur in the coming decades.

Honourable colleagues, Senators Galvez, Pate, McCallum, Forest, Mégie, Miville-Dechéne, Griffin and Gagné have all, in recent days in their debate on Senator Galvez's climate emergency motion, spelled out, in unambiguous detail, the clear and present danger that our planet, our future generations and all species face at this time. As United Kingdom Prime Minister Boris Johnson said at COP 26, "It's one minute to midnight and we need to act now."

"All right," you might say, "surely Canada has made some strides." Yes, of course we have. Since the Paris summit, Canada has taken steps towards addressing climate change. Senator Gagné mentioned some of these in her intervention on Tuesday.

Colleagues, allow me to provide you with highlights of both our actions and our stated commitments.

Canada has committed to cut our emissions by 40% by 2030. The government has increased the carbon price and is escalating it by \$15 a year until it reaches \$170 per tonne in 2030. It has moved forward the goal of achieving a 100% sales target for zero-emission passenger vehicles from 2040 to 2035. It has committed to establishing new targets for the reduction of methane emissions and to plant 2 billion trees over 10 years.

Budget 2021 proposed to provide \$17.6 billion towards a green recovery to create jobs, build a clean economy and fight and protect against climate change.

Canada's newly released Hydrogen Strategy set an ambitious framework cementing hydrogen as a key part of Canada's path to net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 and to make Canada a global leader in hydrogen technologies.

Canada has plans to reduce methane emissions in the oil and gas sector and advanced regulations related to its Clean Fuel Standard.

Just days before the Speech from the Throne, Canada's official delegation of 276, as well as many other Canadians, participated along with 40,000 registered participants and 120 world leaders at COP 26 in Glasgow, Scotland. In Glasgow, Canada pledged to end deforestation by 2030; reaffirmed its support for the Global Methane Pledge; reiterated its call for a global standard on pollution pricing; committed to protecting 25% of its lands and oceans by 2025; committed \$5.3 billion for developing countries, earmarking 20% for nature-based solutions; and committed to ensure that 80% of this climate finance contribution will target gender-equality outcomes.

Canada committed to financially support developing countries in climate change adaptation; signed the Global Coal to Clean Power Transition Statement; reiterated its support for the 12 recommendations of the International Energy Agency's Global Commission on People-Centred Clean Energy Transitions; committed to reducing carbon pollution from transportation; committed to invest \$10 million over five years towards the Climate and Clean Air Coalition Trust Fund; and signed on to co-lead a carbon dioxide removal — or CDR — mission.

Colleagues, even with all of these commitments — and it is very important for all of us to know what those commitments are — we are not where we need to be.

• (1510)

According to the Climate Action Tracker, targets for 2030 remain totally inadequate. The current targets put us on track for a 2.4-degree temperature increase by the end of the century. Colleagues, we know what the 1.1 increase we are experiencing now is doing.

Honourable senators, as our colleagues in the Senate Prosperity Action Group highlighted in their recently released report:

Canada has enormous assets and strengths, given its status as the 10th largest global economy, its membership in the G7 and its consistent ranking as one of the best countries in the world in which to live.

We prosper. But we cannot take this for granted. Prosperity is linked to our ability to mitigate and adapt to climate change. Canada ranks within the top three greenhouse gas emitters worldwide per capita— this is not a podium we want to stand on.

Mark Carney reminds us:

The dialogue has shifted from viewing climate change as a risk, to seeing the opportunity, and really translating that into a single objective, which is to move our economies to net zero as quickly as possible.

What does this mean, to move to net zero as quickly as possible and why should we? The why is obvious. The flames from the heat scientists have been telling us about for decades are nipping at our heels. They have literally set our houses on fire, flooded us out, flattened our communities and businesses, melted the land our northern homes sit on, destroyed our vital infrastructure and caused large migrations of people. The threats have become out of control threat multipliers.

The other side of the why coin is the one Mr. Carney and our Prosperity Action Group are focused on: the opportunities. We all know the expression “If you snooze, you lose.” Well, colleagues, getting to net zero is an economic imperative and the quicker we focus our choices and efforts in that direction, the better off we will all be.

Honourable senators, I don’t have time today to get into the answers as to how we will get to net zero. I would argue that the imperative is for all of us to focus our attention and efforts on figuring that out and getting on with it — with even more urgency, innovation and collaboration than what we have witnessed with the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Let’s take a page from the successes of that playbook. Colleagues, the Senate has well-resourced committees that can conduct quality studies. We can improve and initiate legislation. We can convene experts and the public. We can work together through our new Senators for Climate Solutions group and collaborate with our fellow parliamentarians in the other place and in other countries.

Barack Obama said at COP26 in Glasgow that saving the planet isn’t a partisan issue. Nature, physics and science don’t care about party affiliation. Honourable senators, it’s our job to hold the government to account. With the passing of the Canadian Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act this past June, we have a powerful instrument to ensure both the targets set out by the government and the plans to meet the targets are transparent and that they are met and implemented. The Minister of Environment and Climate Change has recently extended the deadline to establish the 2030 Emissions Reduction Plan to March 29, 2022, so let’s all be on high alert on that date.

Honourable senators, as I conclude my remarks, I would like to quote Sir David Attenborough, who summed up the crux of the issue at COP26 in his compelling manner when he asked the audience present:

Is this how our story is due to end? A tale of the smartest species doomed by that all-too-human characteristic of failing to see the bigger picture in pursuit of short term goals?

Colleagues, I would like to answer Sir David by quoting one of my favourite authors, Dr. Seuss, from his book *Oh, the Places You Will Go*:

You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself any direction you choose.

Honourable senators, let’s choose the quickest and smartest direction to net zero. Governor General Mary May Simon said in the Speech from the Throne, “. . . we must go further, faster.”

[Senator Coyle]

Honourable senators, fellow Canadians, let’s strap on our fastest running shoes, or wheels, adapted for both a sprint and a marathon, and let’s get on with this race against time.

Thank you, *Wela’liog, Nakurmiik*.

(On motion of Senator Gagné, debate adjourned.)

BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

Hon. Raymonde Gagné, Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate: Honourable senators, with leave of the Senate and notwithstanding rule 5-5(j), I move:

That the sitting be suspended until 5 p.m. to await the Committee of the Whole, with the bells to ring for 5 minutes before the Committee meets.

The Hon. the Speaker: Is leave granted, honourable senators?

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(The sitting of the Senate was suspended.)

(The sitting of the Senate was resumed.)

• (1700)

[Translation]

BILL TO PROVIDE FURTHER SUPPORT IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19

CONSIDERATION OF SUBJECT MATTER IN COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

On the Order:

The Senate in Committee of the Whole in order to receive the Honourable Chrystia Freeland, P.C., M.P., Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, accompanied by no more than four officials to consider the subject matter of Bill C-2, An Act to provide further support in response to COVID-19.

(The sitting of the Senate was suspended and put into Committee of the Whole, the Honourable Pierrette Ringuette in the chair.)

The Chair: Honourable senators, the Senate is resolved into a Committee of the Whole on the subject matter of Bill C-2, An Act to provide further support in response to COVID-19.

Honourable senators, in a Committee of the Whole senators shall address the chair but need not stand. Under the Rules the speaking time is 10 minutes, including questions and answers, but, as ordered, if a senator does not use all of his or her time, the balance can be yielded to another senator. The committee will

receive the Honourable Chrystia Freeland, P.C., M.P., Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, and I would now invite her to join us, accompanied by her officials.

(Pursuant to the Order of the Senate, the Honourable Chrystia Freeland and her officials joined the sitting by video conference.)

The Chair: Minister, welcome to the Senate. I would ask you to introduce your officials and to make your opening remarks of at most five minutes.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland, P.C., M.P., Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance: I am accompanied today by Mr. Nick Leswick, Associate Deputy Minister, and Mr. Trevor McGowan, Director General, Tax Legislation Division, Finance Canada.

[English]

I am also with Employment and Social Development Canada officials: Elisha Ram, Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Skills and Employment Branch, Employment and Social Development Canada; and George Rae, Director, Policy Analysis and Initiatives, Employment Insurance Policy, Skills and Employment Branch, Employment and Social Development Canada.

I will make some opening remarks and then, of course, I look forward to hearing your questions and seeking to answer them.

Honourable senators, as Omicron has reminded us, we're still living in a pandemic and, as we are learning, this is an even more transmissible version of the virus.

On Tuesday, our government released an economic and fiscal update that outlines targeted investments that will allow us to finish the fight against COVID.

[Translation]

We know that vaccines are our best line of defence against the virus. That is why we have invested more than \$7.3 billion in buying vaccines for all eligible Canadians, including pediatric vaccines. That amount also includes the purchase of booster shots.

[English]

Omicron makes boosters more important than ever. I urge all Canadians listening to us to please go and get your booster as soon as you are eligible. We have enough for everyone. The federal government is ensuring that third doses and booster shots are free for all Canadians.

We are also committing \$2 billion to buy therapeutics, including antiviral medications. These will save lives. If and when these medicines are approved by Health Canada, we have agreements for 1 million courses of treatment from Pfizer, and an initial 500,000 from Merck, with the option of an additional 500,000.

Rapid tests are also important. In the Economic and Fiscal Update 2021, we announced that we are investing \$1.7 billion to procure and distribute an additional 180 million rapid tests.

We have also introduced measures to enable public health authorities to make the right — albeit sometimes difficult — decisions and, if necessary, to put in place restrictions to control the spread of the virus. We know that putting in place federal government support for workers and businesses will help public health officials to make these decisions where needed.

That brings me to many of the specific measures laid out in Bill C-2. One of them is the proposed Canada worker lockdown benefit. This is a new income benefit that takes into account the fact that the public health situation is still uncertain and unpredictable.

[Translation]

The Canada worker lockdown benefit will provide \$300 a week to workers who are directly affected by a COVID-related local lockdown and will be available to eligible workers retroactively to October 24, 2021.

We are taking this step because we want to make sure that no one is left behind, including vulnerable workers.

The bill also proposes to extend eligibility for both the Canada Sickness Benefit and the Canada Caregiving Benefit until May 7, 2022.

We understand that certain travel restrictions will have an impact on tourism businesses, which have already gone through 21 very difficult months. That is why the new tourism and hospitality recovery program will deliver wage and rent subsidies of up to 75% to employers such as hotels, restaurants, travel agencies, and tour operators. The bill includes details of the types of businesses that would be eligible for the program.

[English]

For businesses in all sectors, the proposed hardest-hit business recovery program will provide support through wage and rent subsidies to employers who have experienced deep and enduring losses with a subsidy rate of up to 50%.

The local lockdown program is especially important right now. This program will be there to provide employers facing temporary new local lockdowns with a subsidy rate of up to 75% through the wage and rent subsidy programs. This means that local authorities and public health officials can continue to make the right public health choices knowing that support will be there for workers and businesses.

As our government continues to work to control the spread of Omicron, we know we must also focus on our economic recovery. We want businesses to continue to grow and recover. That's why we're proposing to extend the Canada Recovery Hiring Program until May 7, 2022, and to increase the rate of support to 50%. This will encourage businesses to hire back workers, increase workers' hours and create new jobs.

Honourable senators, fighting COVID-19 has required extraordinary government spending in Canada and around the world. Canadians supported that extraordinary spending because they understood it was not only the compassionate thing to do, but it was the right thing to do economically. We know that Canadians work hard to earn a living and they expect us to be careful with their money. We know we have a duty to do the right thing for today and for tomorrow.

Our government will continue to be a responsible and prudent fiscal manager. This bill is about pivoting from broad-based support programs to more targeted, less expensive measures that will continue to deliver support where it's needed and also support strong public health policy.

[Translation]

When we introduced these programs in October, we projected they would cost \$7.4 billion, but with the growing threat of the Omicron variant, we decided to set aside an additional \$4.5 billion for these programs, along with other measures needed to control the spread.

• (1710)

[English]

In conclusion, Omicron is not something any of us want to be dealing with just before the holidays, but I think we all understood, after 21 months of fighting this virus, that making hard decisions quickly and behaving carefully pays off in the long run. Our government has —

[Translation]

The Chair: Minister, thank you very much for your presentation. We must now move on to the question and answer period, which will be divided into 10-minute blocks.

[English]

Most are shared with two senators. When shared with two senators, it will consist of five minutes each for questions and answers.

We are starting the first block of 10 minutes with Senator Housakos.

Senator Housakos: Welcome, minister, to the Senate. We appreciate you taking the time.

Minister, the organizational chart for Finance Canada indicates that you have 10 assistant deputy ministers, one acting assistant deputy minister and one senior assistant deputy minister. *The Globe and Mail* reported this week that you haven't met with some of your assistant deputy ministers in months. Can you tell us which assistant deputy ministers did you fail to meet with during the preparation of Bill C-2 before us today, and why did you not choose to meet with them? After all, as we all know, assistant deputy ministers provide valuable information in crafting legislation and we rely on them heavily to make sure legislation is executed.

[Ms . Freeland]

Ms. Freeland: Thank you for the question, senator. It is always good to hear the Conservatives support and endorse the important role that our public service plays. Certainly, as a minister, I rely heavily on the excellence and professionalism of the public servants in the Department of Finance.

Of course, my Deputy Minister Michael Sabia, whose extensive background in both business and the public service is a huge benefit to Canada, is my most important official and I work extremely closely with Mr. Sabia. I think it would be fair to say I speak with Mr. Sabia on the phone four, five, maybe six times a day — some days more than that.

I work very closely with many of the other officials in the Department of Finance. In fact, we have with us today Nick Leswick, an official who I work with very closely. He has been deeply engaged in the work of that legislation. He is the number two in the Department of Finance and was very closely involved in this legislation.

I'm not going to go through, name by name, each of the officials I work with. Let me just say for the record that I'm very grateful for the hard work and dedication of the officials in the Department of Finance. Of course, being careful as we are about COVID — and in fact I'm appearing before you virtually today for that reason — most of our conversations are over the phone or over video.

Senator Housakos: Minister, COVID doesn't prevent us from consulting senior officials and our staff. You didn't really answer the question in regard to the news story where many assistant deputy ministers, current and former, say they have not been heard by you.

Minister, *The Globe and Mail* reported this week that you rarely take part in departmental briefings, preferring political outreach instead.

Minister, the question is very succinct and important. How many briefings have you received from your departmental officials in 2021? How many did you receive from them with respect to this very important bill? And yes, minister, we Conservatives and all senators in this chamber are very respectful of the important role of our public service, particularly senior officials who are so important in, like I said, putting forward the legislation that this Parliament passes.

Minister, to what do you attribute — and I'm concerned about this — the low morale in your department and the excessive high turnover of experienced staff as recently reported in *The Globe and Mail*?

Ms. Freeland: Senator, I speak many times a day with officials in the Department of Finance, starting with our outstanding Deputy Minister Michael Sabia. Truly, I would be surprised if I had fewer than half a dozen conversations a day with officials in the Department of Finance, and that includes weekends, early mornings and evenings. I often ask them to prepare briefing notes for me, which I read, and then I call them and ask them questions about those notes. Let me assure you that the Department of Finance officials work very hard and talk to me a lot.

But I do want to say, senator, that I have never been a person who believes that Ottawa has a monopoly on good ideas. So I absolutely do also very intentionally devote a considerable amount of time talking to Canadians across the country, to talking to business people across the country, to talking to labour leaders across the country and to talking to independent economists in Canada and around the world.

In the past two weeks alone, I had a meeting with leaders of the auto parts sector, with a group of women business leaders brought together by Rona Ambrose and I had very good conversations with Stephen Poloz, a former governor of the Bank of Canada and a fine economist. I do speak with economists from around the world because I think that having an international perspective is really important.

Senator Housakos: Minister, the fact that you speak many times to your deputy ministers is reassuring, but what's really concerning is, as I mentioned in my question, the high turnover of senior officials in the finance department, which you haven't answered. The fact that you consult with outside economists doesn't change the fact that we've had an unusually high turnover of senior officials in your department.

Minister, the economic and fiscal updates show our gross domestic product, or GDP, came in about a percentage point lower than expected in the budget. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development recently predicted that Canada will have the lowest gross domestic product growth in the G20 between 2020 and 2030. As *The Globe and Mail* pointed out earlier this week in its report on your department, you don't have a growth agenda and you haven't reined in spending. How is your government going to pay for all its spending, including the spending contained in Bill C-2? Some of it is very necessary, but at the end of the day you must have the funds to be able to execute the objective.

Ms. Freeland: Senator, with the greatest possible respect, I disagree very much with the premises and the tendency of your questions.

Let me talk about Canada's economic policy through COVID, what we've done, why we've done it and what we have achieved. Let me start by reminding all of the senators that when COVID hit, Canada experienced the deepest recession since the Great Depression. Our economy shrank by 17% and we lost 3 million jobs. Many economists, quite rightly, were very concerned by what lay ahead. So our government acted. We put in place extraordinary programs to support workers and to support businesses.

Senators, those programs have worked. Canada has now recovered 106% of the jobs lost to COVID. That compares to 83% recovered in the U.S. Our gross domestic product in the third quarter grew by 5.4%. That is faster than the U.S., the U.K., Japan and Australia.

Let me also point out that we have retained our AAA credit rating from Standard & Poor's and Moody's. These were reaffirmed in the fall. We continue to have the lowest debt-to-GDP ratio in the G7.

Finally, let me quote an economist who no longer works for the Government of Canada, who was appointed by Stephen Harper and who I do consult with pretty often, and that is former governor of the Bank of Canada Stephen Poloz. Here's what he said on "Global News" over the weekend:

Aren't we lucky that the policies worked well to prevent the second Great Depression, which is what many economists were worried about when we first encountered the COVID-19 shock?

I agree with Governor Poloz, senator.

• (1720)

Senator Housakos: Let me spell out some more facts for you, minister. The year 2021 has been an expensive year for Canadian families. You may not have noticed because your government no longer has a Minister of Middle Class Prosperity. Yesterday, Statistics Canada reported inflation remains at an 18-year high, up to 4.7% year over year. Home prices have gone up 25%. The average family will be spending \$1,000 more on groceries next year, minister. Interest rate hikes are widely believed to be coming in 2022, and no economist can deny that. Inflation grew much faster than wages rose over the same period of the past year.

So the only thing that has been accomplished with this inflation is that middle-class and poor Canadians have been taxed to death, and we have seen that in the increasing revenue. That's because they're paying more for gasoline, more for food, more for housing, more for furniture and more for clothing.

Why do you think, minister, that Canadians can continue to pay more than they currently do in order to survive on a day-to-day basis?

Ms. Freeland: Since my time is limited, Madam Chair, let me just urge all senators to do what I do, which is to see Canada in a global perspective.

So let's talk about inflation. In the United States, November inflation was 6.8%, and it increased in November over October. In Germany, November inflation was 6%, also increased over October. In Britain, November inflation was 5.1%, an increase from October. In Canada, inflation is lower than in each of those three countries, our peers, and it did not increase from October to November.

[Translation]

Senator Forest: Thank you, minister, for being with us today. I will come back to the matter now before the committee of the whole, Bill C-2. The Standing Senate Committee on National Finance called on your government several times to better target its support measures. Bill C-2 and the economic and fiscal update are a step in that direction. With regard to the tourism and hospitality recovery program, businesses must demonstrate a revenue reduction of at least 40% to qualify for a subsidy of up to 75% of wages. Concerning this single threshold of 40% in lost revenue, did you consider tailoring this criterion to the size of businesses in order to provide additional support for the smallest businesses, which often have few means or other sources of

financing to get through the pandemic? I will also speak on behalf of Senator Duncan, who posed a question that is often asked by the industry: If Bill C-2 is passed before the holidays, when do you think the money will begin to flow to the businesses that qualify?

Ms. Freeland: Thank you for your question. You are correct. When we announced the measures in Bill C-2, our intent, which I think was the right one, was to take a more targeted approach, rather than the general approach that was needed in the early days of the crisis, but which was expensive. The targeted approach is more appropriate for the current situation and is also more financially judicious for Canada.

As for your question about smaller businesses, most businesses in the tourism and hospitality sector, which will benefit from this assistance, are small and medium-sized businesses. That is one of the reasons why this approach and its measures are so important to us. As you well know, there are other programs that directly target small and medium-sized businesses, such as the Canada Digital Adoption Program and the Emergency Business Account Credit.

Senator Forest: If we pass Bill C-2 before the holidays, when do you think the eligible businesses could start actually receiving the assistance?

Ms. Freeland: Thank you. I'm sorry I didn't answer the second part of your question. We understand that these businesses are in a difficult situation. That is why we announced we had planned to do this at the end of October, to give the government time to prepare. I would also remind you that this will apply retroactively to the end of October. We're doing our best to implement this as soon as possible. We will use the same platforms we used for the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy and the Canada Emergency Rent Subsidy to speed up the process. Let me say that, with the Omicron variant and the additional measures we have put in place at our borders, this was more important than ever. I would like to thank you, honourable senators, for the work you have put into this.

Senator Forest: Thank you. I wish you a heartwarming holiday season with your family.

[English]

Senator Boehm: Thank you for joining us, minister. I know the time is short, and I will try to squeeze in two very quick questions and hopefully not offer too much of a preamble. They are very different questions. The first is on comparisons of economic support measures across various jurisdictions. You've had many meetings with G7, G20, OECD counterparts, and in various countries, different steps and measures have been taken, whether for short-term work benefits in Europe to, in fact, wage supplements, as we have had here in Canada, in Australia and in the U.K.

The stop-and-start provisions have been different in countries, depending on their own jurisdictions but also with respect to the spread of the pandemic.

[Senator Forest]

I'm wondering, have you exchanged best practices? Is there anything that you and your team have learned in this regard, and are these exchanges continuing?

My second question is about the independent travel advisers. The vast majority of those are women who are taking another hit now because of the new variant. They work from home. How would they be supported under the Tourism and Hospitality Recovery Program? I raised this matter before with you when we were discussing Bill C-14 some time ago. I'm committed to continue to advocate for this particular community. Thank you, minister.

Ms. Freeland: Thank you, Senator Boehm, for that question and for all your work on this bill.

In terms of comparison of what people have done and are doing in different countries, it's a great question, and it's something to which I devote quite a lot of time thinking about and talking about. I think it's so valuable for us, as a country, to be in touch with our peers around the world and to understand that we can learn from them and, maybe, sometimes they can learn from us.

I would say that I was very lucky, before he became chancellor, to have some very good conversations with now-Chancellor Olaf Scholz of Germany. We were able to host him for supper at the Canadian embassy during the World Bank/IMF meetings in the fall, and it was really useful to learn about the German experience. We have also spent a lot of time talking with Secretary Yellen and her team at the U.S. Department of the Treasury and with our British counterparts.

I would say, in terms of the international experience, senator — because I know you, like me, find value in comparisons — there was actually a very good piece. I think it was published on December 10 — written by Chris Giles in the *Financial Times*. I was just reading it this morning and shared it with my team. It tried to pull together the comparative lessons of COVID.

• (1730)

One conclusion in that piece, which I agree with, is that a wage subsidy program, like the one that Canada has taken, helps to keep workers connected to their jobs. In countries that have taken that kind of approach, you do seem to see a faster jobs recovery. As we have seen in Canada, 106% of the jobs have been recovered from that 3 million jobs lost, so I'm glad we did it.

From my perspective, losing a job is probably the biggest economic tragedy that can happen to a person and a family, and when we lost those 3 million jobs, I was very worried. I'm glad we were able to put in place measures that have addressed that very effectively.

On the independent travel advisers, I am aware of your consistent advocacy, senator, and I think it's really good that you are advocating for this group of people.

As you know, what we have put before you now are measures to provide direct, targeted support to businesses. Two levels of support to tourism and hospitality business — the highest

level — and then a broader level of support for hardest-hit businesses overall, but you do have to have a business to get this support.

These measures, absent a lockdown, are not about providing direct income support to people. That was an intentional decision because we knew we needed to move from general to targeted support.

In choosing to do that — providing support to individuals rather than businesses in a targeted way — it is just something very difficult to untangle. Of course, as I said at the beginning, we need to support the Canadian economy and Canadian workers.

The Chair: Madam minister, I'm sorry we are now moving to the next 10-minute block.

[Translation]

Senator Bellemare: Thank you for being here, minister. I would like to begin by thanking you for the agreement reached with the Bank of Canada and for recognizing the importance of the labour market.

My question is about how income supports for workers during the pandemic are being funded. The income support in Bill C-2 for people affected by the pandemic and for family caregivers without employment insurance coverage will be funded from general revenue. However, income support for people with employment insurance coverage will be paid for out of the employment insurance fund. As you know, employers and employees pay for employment insurance. That includes additional costs related to so-called simplified, temporary employment insurance. The problem is that the current funding arrangement significantly penalizes workers and businesses.

The premium rate was frozen at \$1.58 per \$100 in insurable earnings, but the break-even rate is \$1.83. That means the employment insurance fund deficit will grow, which could end up costing businesses and workers a pretty penny when premiums are unfrozen.

The employment insurance system is also an economic stabilizer, so would it not make sense for the government to officially become a financial partner, as it was from the time the system began until the 1990s? Will the government cover the additional costs related to measures introduced as part of the simplified program?

Ms. Freeland: Senator, it is clear that as an economist, you take the fundamental principles of our approach to financing very seriously, and the same goes for our economic and fiscal approach. I appreciate the fact that you care about the foundation of our system and that you ask questions about that.

In the first part of your intervention, you talked about the Bank of Canada's mandate, which was announced by the governor and me last Monday. I will start by thanking you for the work you have done on this over the past several years. I read the articles you wrote, during my discussions with officials, economists and

the Governor of the Bank of Canada, and took them into account in making this decision, as I did for previous decisions. Thank you.

As for your question, I must say that currently our efforts focus on three objectives. First, we want to finish the fight against COVID-19. It is a very long battle and it takes a lot of work. We have to focus on this objective. That includes providing the support required to the people who need it.

Second, we are focusing on a prudent approach to public finances. We have spent considerable amounts and we also understand that the fight is not over. We have to be careful about budgetary issues. I think it is very important to maintain Canada's credibility on international markets.

The third objective is to work on a strong, swift and inclusive economic recovery.

Fundamental questions like the ones you have asked are very important. I believe that the COVID crisis has shown the importance and the robustness of the employment insurance system we have in Canada. We are fortunate to have such a system. We also understand that this system needs to be renewed. I think we need to talk about —

The Chair: Minister, I am sorry, but we must move on to the next five-minute block.

Senator Gignac: I am very honoured to speak today in this chamber for the first time, in Committee of the Whole and, what is more, in your presence, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance. Thank you for being here.

Canada's performance from the start of this pandemic was quite different from that of other G7 countries, whether in terms of vaccination or job creation. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate your government and leadership in that regard. However, as an economist, there is one aspect that I am concerned about, and that is the sluggishness or decline in investment by Canadian businesses.

According to the most recent data, non-residential investment in Canada has decreased by 9% compared to pre-pandemic levels and by 24% compared to six years ago. In the meantime, business investment has hit record highs south of the border. As you know, we cannot depend forever on government assistance, real estate or household consumption to bail us out.

My question is the following. Are you concerned about the lethargy we are seeing in business investment? What possible solutions is your government considering to address this?

Ms. Freeland: Thank you, senator. You have asked an excellent question. I know that you often speak with Mr. Sabia. You are therefore well aware that this is a concern for me, as well as for Mr. Sabia.

• (1740)

I would also like to thank the economists at the Bank of Canada for their work on this. This is a question we have had about the Canadian economy for some time now. I also agree

with you that we must continue looking for viable solutions to increase domestic and foreign investments in Canadian businesses, in Canada.

If I may, I would also like to tell senators about how successful our technology sector has been, even in the middle of a pandemic. *The Narwhal List*, which was released in March 2021, listed 50 companies that are on the path to becoming a “Unicorn.” As you know, this refers to start-ups with a valuation of \$1 billion and over. That is a 20% increase over last year.

Also, although we only have the figures for the first three quarters, 2021 was a record-breaking year for Canada with respect to venture capital activity, with \$11.8 billion, over nearly 600 transactions, invested in Canadian start-ups and growing businesses.

Lastly, four Canadian universities placed in the PitchBook ranking of the 50 best institutions in the world for producing start-up founders. Three of our four institutions went up in the rankings this year. There are a lot of very intelligent people in Canada who are also excellent entrepreneurs, and our tech start-up sector is quite active.

I do want to say that the question you asked is a very pertinent and important one. It is something I am concerned about, as is the entire Department of Finance. We tried to present solutions in the budget.

[English]

Senator Quinn: Could you clarify the eligibility for the Canada worker lockdown benefit when considering the various public health measures put in place by New Brunswick? For example, New Brunswick had, until November 19, circuit breakers which restricted movements in certain regions of the province and also asked, but did not legally require, residents of those regions to limit their travel for essential purposes only. Are these regions deemed as lockdown regions under the definitions of the bill, and are the public health circuit breakers by New Brunswick deemed as lockdown orders so individuals who have experienced a reduction or loss of income could apply for benefits from October 24 to November 19?

Ms. Freeland: Thank you very much, senator, for the question.

As you have rightly pointed out, the Canada worker lockdown benefit is an insurance policy that we have on hand in the event that local public health authorities have to impose restrictions. The criteria for a lockdown is laid out in the legislation. If a circuit breaker, similar to those that New Brunswick employed earlier in the pandemic, such as the closure of non-essential businesses or a stay-at-home order, were to be employed, that would certainly qualify for the benefit.

Concerning lockdowns that have happened since October 24, if the Senate will pass this legislation and that benefit were to be in place, we would be very happy to talk with jurisdictions across the country that believe they already have measures in place that would qualify. We are happy to look at those specifics and look at how the law applies. However, let me emphasize that we are seeking your support for this legislation because we think that

there will be jurisdictions in Canada that will need it, and there may be jurisdictions that already qualify retroactively from October 24 going forward, and we're happy to look into that once this law is on the books.

Senator Quinn: Thank you, minister. I have another related question. Tomorrow on Friday, December 17, New Brunswick public health will require restaurants and entertainment centres, like theatres, to reduce their capacity to 50% with spacing of two metres. A couple of examples are the Saint John Imperial Theatre or the Fredericton Playhouse. This will cause an effective reduction of capacity to 21% in some cases. The associated loss of business revenues may impact employees' earnings, or in fact employment. Would reductions in seating capacity in certain situations be viewed by the federal government as a lockdown under the provisions of the bill?

Ms. Freeland: Let me say a couple of things. First of all, even absent the lockdown support, businesses in tourism and hospitality and hardest-hit businesses overall will be able to qualify for support if they, in the tourism and hospitality case, fall into the targeted category and if they meet the revenue loss provisions. So that's kind of protection layer number one.

In terms of the specific lockdown support, the specifics of who qualifies and who does not is laid out in the legislation. This is a fast-moving situation on the ground as we are seeing provinces and territories, quite appropriately, let me say, responding to COVID and to Omicron and putting new restrictions in place.

Let me say to you, senator, and to all the provincial and territorial leaders across Canada, that once this law is on the books I will be very happy to speak with them, look at the measures that they have in place, talk to our public health authorities, and to consider where they do qualify for the lockdown support for workers and businesses.

In putting together the economic and fiscal update, we anticipated that this support would be needed, and we provisioned an additional \$4.5 billion for precisely that reason.

Senator Tannas: Thank you for being here minister. Just on that last exchange with Senator Quinn, you announced the details of this bill before anybody had ever heard the word “Omicron.” Are you satisfied that it meets the situations that could come? As you say, it's moving quickly. It has things that it doesn't appear to be, and things that it appears to be multiple times stronger in other areas.

Are you satisfied that the bill is still relevant, given Omicron? I saw there was a fail-safe where the Minister of Employment can deem any region for any purpose. Is that kind of the fail-safe in the bill?

Ms. Freeland: Thank you very much, Senator Tannas, for that really important question, and you are quite right that we announced the measures contained in Bill C-2 at the end of October before any of us had heard of Omicron.

Let me say to you and to all the senators, I am sure glad that we were prudent and careful and that as we were pivoting from broad-based support to targeted support we thought to ourselves, “You know what? There could be another wave of COVID. Let’s be sure that the federal government retains the tools to support people if that were to happen.”

So that was a moment of prudence, and I described it at the time to officials in the department and to the Prime Minister as like taking out an insurance policy. When we put together these measures, I had very much hoped they would never need to be used, as I think we all did when we read about them. You’re quite right also that with Omicron we will probably have to lean on them more than we perhaps hoped and predicted at the end of October. In view of that, I added the additional \$4.5 billion provision to the fiscal framework in the update. You’re also right, senator, that we did include in the legislation some regulatory authority to adapt to circumstances as they developed.

• (1750)

Senator Tannas: Thank you. I am going to run out of time.

Minister, you’re one of the most senior people in the government, and we are here in a situation where we are apparently getting two bills tonight. My understanding is that the House has already risen. The Senate is constrained in its ability to do the job that it’s supposed to do constitutionally, to say the least.

Could you give us some commitment that you will use your influence with your colleagues to try and plan a little bit better so that we are not backed into a corner and unable to do the job that we were sworn to do on bills? We know that it’s difficult, but we’re tired of this.

Ms. Freeland: Senator, let me say that I hear you. I take the comment that you have just made very seriously. While it’s hard to read a room on Zoom, I see many of your fellow senators nodding their heads. Let me commit to saying to you that I take the point very seriously. It is a reasonable point.

With Omicron here, I’m grateful to all of you for moving with alacrity on Bill C-2. We will need it even more than we had thought, and I look forward to continuing to work with you. I have found working with the Senate that all of you really work hard and pose very substantive questions.

Also, when we’re not in moments like this, many people send me emails with ideas. Senator Bellemare sends me her articles sometimes, and I really welcome that. You have to be a serious person with a life of real accomplishment already to be appointed to the Senate. I accept that, as a government, we need to create the circumstances where that wisdom can be brought to bear on Canada’s legislation.

Senator Tannas: We’ll hold you to it.

Thank you, minister.

Senator Marshall: Welcome, minister. Thank you for mentioning the costs of the program and the revised costs in your opening remarks. Sometimes we don’t realize that these programs come at a great cost. We’ll be looking for the cost information on these programs in the 2022 public accounts, but I want to talk about the 2021 public accounts because they were so late in coming.

It creates a big problem for parliamentarians. We had to review both Bill C-6 and the Supplementary Estimates (B) last week without the benefit of those documents, and we use them. We actually read them, so we really need them on a timely basis, and the tabling this year is the latest. I looked back to 1994. This was the latest tabling since at least 1994.

There are some parliamentarians who would like to see the Financial Administration Act changed because the deadline for tabling public accounts is December 31. October 31 seems like a more reasonable deadline and would provide some assurance that we’ll get the information in time to use it.

Would you be supportive of an amendment to the Financial Administration Act that would change the December 31 deadline to the end of October?

Ms. Freeland: Senator, first of all, I do know that senators read the public accounts and financial documents carefully. I have learned in my appearances before the Senate that you are a senator with real financial expertise, and I know you carefully read all of the documents we publish. I appreciate that, and that’s an important role.

I, however, am responsible for steering the finances of the country through a time that is very difficult and fraught with uncertainty — the uncertainty of COVID, as Senator Tannas just said. In October, when we laid out the main measures in Bill C-2, no one could have anticipated Omicron. But we had to try in our legislation to look around the corner, and I think we did a pretty good job of that. Also the uncertainty of reopening the global economy after a shutdown never happened before in human history, and there is a lot of uncertainty there that we have to deal with. Here I come to the public accounts: there is the uncertainty that every government has to deal with when it comes to judicial decisions about the obligations of the Government of Canada.

In view of all that uncertainty, any government needs to have some flexibility to operate. We take our requirements of tabling legislation and accounts seriously, and we fulfill them and will continue to do that.

Senator Marshall: I realize we’re in the middle of a pandemic. Over the last seven years, three years the public accounts were tabled in December, which is really late. I’ve noticed not just the public accounts but also other documents like the departmental results reports. Last year we received them on December 7. Now we’re not going to receive them — or so we have been told — until January 31. Then you were providing some COVID expenditures — I have mentioned this to you before — and then you stopped and started again and then you stopped.

The impression I'm getting — and I'm hoping you will correct me — is that there seems to be a noticeable decline in the release of accountability documents by your government. A lot of times we're waiting for things and can't get them or you stop producing them. One is left with the impression that it is a deliberate attempt to not provide the accountability documents, or to provide them so late that we can't use them in our reviews. Could you address that issue and concern that I have?

Ms. Freeland: So in 30 seconds let me just say, absolutely not. Absolutely, yes, I can address the issue; and absolutely, no, senator, there is no effort whatsoever to avoid transparency. I used to be a journalist. I believe transparency is really important, and that is how we will continue to behave.

[Translation]

Senator Boisvenu: Welcome to the Senate, minister.

Bill C-2 will add billions to the country's deficit. We know Canadians have been critical of the way the government is spending that money and especially of the lack of scrutiny. *La Presse* recently reported on a criminal organization in Montreal that used CERB money to acquire illegal firearms and the fact that people in jail collected CERB. We also know there is very little oversight in penitentiaries to prevent these people from getting CERB. You promised that only honest citizens, not criminals, would get CERB.

Prime Minister Trudeau swore it was virtually impossible to establish criteria to manage all those billions properly and rigorously, and criminals benefited illegally. Meanwhile, in the Maritimes, Revenue Canada is going after fishers who filled out their applications perfectly honestly. Those people are now being told to pay back millions of dollars, yet your government is doing nothing about criminal organizations.

• (1800)

Do you know how many criminal organizations Revenue Canada will be looking at and charging with tax fraud? Will Revenue Canada be as lenient with the Nova Scotia and New Brunswick fishers as it is with criminals?

Lastly, my House of Commons colleagues called for a public inquiry into the management of CERB funds and inappropriate payments. Will your government launch that public inquiry?

Ms. Freeland: Thank you for your question, senator. I want to start by saying that I am convinced, and I think that all senators will agree, that the vast majority of Canadians are honest, that the vast majority of workers and businesses that have been affected by COVID and received support from the government are honest people who really needed it.

[Senator Marshall]

Senator Boisvenu: Minister, that's not what I asked. I'm sure that Canadians are very honest.

Ms. Freeland: You asked me three questions. Would you like me to answer them?

Senator Boisvenu: Please don't spend five minutes explaining things to me that I didn't ask you about.

Ms. Freeland: Senator, it's important for me to emphasize to Canadians that I trust them to be honest. I also want to emphasize that the integrity of our system is important to our government. I understand very well that the money we spend comes from Canadians, and we must ensure that the money is spent appropriately and is properly distributed to the people who are entitled to it.

I am confident that the CRA is monitoring all of this spending. It was a crisis, a time of urgency, senator. We promised to control spending. We put integrity measures in place, and we will continue to apply them.

However, I disagree with your statement that we're lenient with criminals. That is not true, senator. Our government has zero tolerance for criminals, but we understood that, during the most difficult times of the crisis, it was important that the government be there, and the government is there.

Senator Boisvenu: Then why did Mr. Trudeau tell the students who spoke out publicly about receiving the CERB in error that no student would have to pay it back, when you're forcing honest fishers in Nova Scotia, who are struggling with the bureaucracy, to pay it back? They are working hard to feed Canadians. So why the double standard?

The Chair: Senator Boisvenu, your time is up.

[English]

Senator Pate: Thank you, minister, for joining us. As you've already stressed today, the Canada worker lockdown benefit proposed in Bill C-2, like previous pandemic supports, is geared only to those who previously had paid work. In addition, the government has announced one-time payments for low-income seniors who accessed CERB and are now facing reductions or loss of GIS payments as a result. The effects of clawbacks have been amplified where people who claimed pandemic supports in good faith, then learned they were ineligible, and now are required to make repayments despite having lost their other supports. The worker lockdown benefit will likely cause the same problem. Will the government commit to eliminating and fully compensating all clawbacks of GIS and other vital supports like the Canada Child Benefit, whether caused by CERB or other pandemic supports? And will it waive repayment requirements for individuals below the poverty line for whom repayment could well result in food insecurity and loss of shelter?

Ms. Freeland: Okay. Well, thank you very much, Senator Pate, for those questions, and thank you for, as always, turning our attention to the most vulnerable. I very much agree with the thrust of your concern that there are people who were struggling before the pandemic hit, and the pandemic has hit many of them particularly hard, particularly our seniors.

That's why I was glad in announcing the fall economic update to make a commitment to compensate the seniors who received the CERB, qualified to receive the CERB but who subsequently saw that that counted as income and counted against their GIS. I have heard in my own constituency from people who have been affected by that. I see you nodding, so I think, senator, you probably have, too.

I'll tell you the truth. Those stories really moved me. There was an argument which was made that that calculation was just going by the rules and that that calculation which was made, that the government had been up front, that this would be what happened, that the CERB, like any other income, ought to count against the GIS. You're familiar with the arguments yourself, senator.

There is logic to those arguments, but for me, and for our government overall, what was more compelling was the reality that our most vulnerable people, I think, our seniors — an older person who qualifies for the GIS is a really poor person and a person who I think we should all feel a duty to support.

So these most vulnerable seniors collected the CERB, which was good. It helped them get through the hardest days of the pandemic. Maybe they didn't read the fine print, and then they were surprised to see their GIS reduced.

That's why, at a cost of \$750 million, we did commit on Tuesday to making people whole, and that's a commitment I am glad to have made. When it comes to supporting other vulnerable Canadians, let me say that our government has a track record of having done that with the Canada Child Benefit, with those additional payments we made to people with children during COVID and with the increases we made to the GIS.

You are a person, senator, who is an expert on vulnerable people and poverty in Canada, and you know that under our government, the number of people living in poverty has gone from around 5.2 million to around 3.78 or 3.79 million. That's still 3.79 million people too many, but it is real progress, and that is thanks to investments our government has made. Let me say personally that I look forward to continuing to work with you on ways we can continue that work.

Since you mentioned children, I just have to say a universal system of \$10-a-day early learning and child care will help children across the country very much, including children living in poverty, and I hope I can count on you and all senators here to help me to get the child care deals done with just the two jurisdictions left: Ontario and Nunavut.

Senator Pate: I think you recognize that we —

The Chair: Senator Pate, you are out of time.

[Translation]

Senator Loffreda: Thank you, Minister Freeland, for joining us. I know you've had a very busy week, and your presence here this evening is much appreciated.

[English]

Minister Freeland, I'm an optimist, so I did like some of the great news you shared in your Economic and Fiscal Update 2021. As you mentioned, job creation is well ahead of projections, recouping 106% of jobs lost at the depths of the pandemic; and there is other positive economic news such as the debt-to-GDP now peaking at 48% in the current fiscal year and more. So kudos; well done.

• (1810)

My concern and question is about interest rates and inflation. How many of your programs are inflation-linked, such as those we are seeing in Bill C-2? Are you concerned that we risk seeing spending much greater than forecast because of inflation and interest rate increases? It's a major concern for Canadians, and I'd like to have your thoughts on that. Some expert economists are predicting three major interest rate increases in 2022.

Ms. Freeland: Thank you very much, senator, and thank you for starting with the positives. While I understand that the job of everyone here is to pose challenging questions, I also think that, at the end of the day, we all play for team Canada and confidence is important in an economy. The fact is, Canada's economic recovery is strong and robust, and each one of us has a role to play in reassuring Canadians about that and that we have the balance sheet to continue to fight the pandemic.

You ask an important question. I'd like to point you to pages 60 to 62 in the English version of the economic and fiscal update. That's where you will find an analysis of faster and slower growth scenarios and the impact they will have on the fiscal situation in Canada. There would be an impact, but even in a slow-growth scenario we're in reasonable shape.

Then, if you look at pages 64 and 65, you will see a stress test, which the Department of Finance has traditionally done for some years. This tests all of our assumptions with the view of an interest rate increase of 100 basis points. That is on top of the assumptions about growth, interest rates and inflation, which are currently built into the fiscal forecast. As you know, senator, the basic assumptions around the prevailing economic conditions that we use to build the fiscal framework on — in order to ensure we're not drinking our own Kool-Aid — are based on a survey of a group of economists, and the list is included in the update.

I am confident that the numbers I presented to Canadians and to you on Tuesday already build in a very reasonable and average view of Bay Street economists on where the economy is going, including interest rates and inflation. I'm confident also that we have presented scenarios of both faster and slower growth, and I'm confident that we have presented what a stress test of higher than expected interest rate increases would look like.

I'll stop there. I have one more thing I want to say about inflation, but I will let you go ahead.

Senator Loffreda: Thank you for that — I've seen it. I'm just looking at a global strategy. With the Omicron variant, we've seen that this could be endemic. I'm sure you're discussing strategies with the team, and I want you to elaborate on the

strategies that you are discussing and putting together. If the situation is endemic, where we see more and more variants, how much of this is sustainable going forward?

The Chair: Thank you, Senator Loffreda, your time is expired.

Senator Smith: Thank you, minister, and welcome. First of all, I think all Canadians applaud what was done to get us through that first wave of COVID. I'd just like to develop that subject a bit.

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, expectations were that governments would impose restrictions for a certain period of time until we were able to combat the spread. Today those expectations are vastly different and — this goes to Senator Loffreda's point — references to this disease as endemic are happening more and more often. The idea is that COVID-19 is no longer a one-time threat to society but something we'll have to live with and deal with for years to come.

I say this because it could be perceived that the government is potentially caught in a cycle, to a certain extent, of some form of reaction. When somebody creates an action, there must be a reaction. For example, the *Economic and Fiscal Update* this week quoted "Omicron-centric as the theme" with major items like housing expenditures and health care transfers being relegated to next year.

Minister, if you could give us an idea of what long-term plans the government has to ensure that we move out of this reactionary — and I'm not saying it in a negative way, but it is a reaction; it's a response to a problem — policy making and deficit spending, and implementing more proactive measures to not only get Canadians but the entire economy out of this cycle of restrictions and lockdowns? If you could expand on what the plan is, other than the plan to address the actual issues of COVID one, COVID two, COVID three and this now this new variant, that would be helpful.

Ms. Freeland: Thank you for the question, senator. I think it's actually a very profound one. Let me offer the following.

First, when it comes to the fall economic update, our intention from the beginning was that this would not be a mini budget. We delivered a significant budget in April, and we felt that the right thing to do now was to do what the title says and to provide our legislators and Canadians with an update as to where the nation's finances are. That was the objective here. As you rightly point out, we also included measures to finish the fight against COVID: significant measures on buying vaccines, buying rapid

tests and buying therapeutic medicines. Second, we included the measures that we're here discussing tonight, which are the economic supports for that final leg of the fight.

Now, I am not going to apologize — and I don't think you're asking me to — for putting those measures in place and for including them. Quite the contrary. As we've seen with the rising Omicron wave, I've been very glad that before Omicron was here we were busy buying those therapeutic medicines, rapid tests and boosters. Isn't it great that we have enough boosters for everyone in Canada? I certainly think it is. I'm glad that we have these business support measures in place and this lockdown support. It is the job of the government to try to look around corners. That's what we have sought to do. That's my first answer.

My second answer, senator, is I think the data shows that Canadians are resilient, and, although none of us wants to be dealing with this new wave of Omicron, I feel that we are one of the best-positioned countries in the world. We have a very high level of vaccination and a high willingness to go and get our boosters. We have the actual health tools that we need for this fight. Our economy has largely recovered the losses that COVID first inflicted in March and, perhaps most importantly, what we have seen over these 21 months of COVID is that our economy is becoming increasingly resilient and able to adapt to the restrictions that are necessary to protect our health. I think we've all seen it in our personal lives. It's maybe reflected in the fact that we are here working with each other virtually rather than in person.

Canadians are good at handling this. I think that's what we have experienced in the past and what we are going to experience in —

The Chair: Thank you, minister. We are now moving to the next five minutes with Senator Martin.

• (1820)

Senator Martin: Minister, thank you for being here.

My first question is something related to what Senator Boehm said and regarding your response to him about the independent travel advisers. You said you're moving from general to targeted programs, but in the general program, just so you recall, they were left out of the programs and were not eligible for any support. We just know they are suffering.

Would you take a careful look and see whether there is something outside of what you've already allocated for such groups like the independent travel advisers? I really believe that they deserve our support.

Ms. Freeland: Thank you very much for that heartfelt advocacy.

My colleague, Randy Boissonnault, the Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, is working closely with those entrepreneurs. Senator Boehm pointed out they are mostly women. He is looking to see whether there is anything that can be done to support them.

Senator Martin: Thank you, minister.

Through Bill C-2, businesses will be eligible for assistance under the hardest-hit business recovery program, provided they meet two eligibility requirements, one being to have an average monthly revenue reduction of at least 50% over the first 13 qualifying periods for the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy, with the second being a current month's revenue loss of at least 50%. For the program for the tourism and hospitality industry, the figure is a 40% loss in revenue.

Those are a lot of monthly revenue losses for any business to sustain up to 12 months. We're concerned about what's happening. I'm not sure how many businesses will even be around to collect, having suffered that kind of revenue loss monthly for a year.

Then add that after a 50% drop in revenue, the hardest-hit sector gets just 10% subsidy, and this does not seem to imply that the sector represents any kind of a priority for your government.

Minister, why did you settle on the figures of 50% and 40% losses, and would you explain the insulting 10% subsidy for the hardest hit?

Ms. Freeland: Senator, let me just say I would not consider support offered by the Government of Canada to businesses in this pandemic to be insulting. Certainly, I don't think businesses themselves feel the government support they are receiving is insulting.

In terms of the levels for those two different programs, tourism and hospitality and the hardest hit, we have sought to balance two things. The first is the fact that we identified that there are some businesses that continue to need support. Even before Omicron hit, we could see that some businesses we could identify, particularly in tourism and hospitality, simply were not able to fully reopen, and we felt those businesses did need continued support. That's why we're putting this bill before you.

Senator Martin: Just before —

Ms. Freeland: Hang on. Let me finish my answer, senator.

At the same time, we needed to balance that need for continued support with the reality that we needed to pivot from very expensive broad-based programs to more targeted, less expensive programs.

Senator Martin: Yes.

Ms. Freeland: Bill C-2 is an effort to find a balance between the need to provide support and the need to have a balanced and prudent fiscal approach.

Senator Martin: I have heard you say that in several responses. Do you know how many businesses suffering such a loss have gone out of business in the last 12 months, and do you have an estimate of how many businesses in Canada will qualify for this benefit during the period that it is being offered? How many have actually just shut right down? Do you have any data about that?

Ms. Freeland: Yes, I do. There are fewer businesses that have gone bankrupt during the past 12 months than in the analogous period before the pandemic, and there are 6,000 more active businesses today than in 2019. Businesses have gotten through this very well thanks to their resilience and government support.

Senator Coyle: Minister Freeland, I am from Nova Scotia, a province heavily dependent upon summer tourism. Bill C-2 puts into place supports for the tourism and hospitality industries. Those supports are scheduled to end May 7, with a possible extension to early July. Our very abbreviated tourism season in Nova Scotia really just gets going in early July.

Why was that early date chosen to end these benefits, and what will the government do to help ensure the tourism industry is able to make it through the summer if the new Omicron variant of COVID continues to be a concern or if another variant emerges? Thank you.

Ms. Freeland: Thank you for the question, senator.

In fighting COVID, we have all understood that we need to be agile and flexible, and we need to be humble about the reality, which is that this is a global pandemic and a global economic response, the likes of which we have never experienced before.

In view of that, we think it's important to maintain flexibility in our response. We've extended those programs to a time that we think, today, is the appropriate amount of time, but we have, as you point out, allowed some flexibility to give ourselves the opportunity to respond with agility to potentially changing circumstances.

Senator Omidvar: Thank you, minister, for being with us today. I want to turn your attention to the impact of Bill C-2 on the charitable and not-for-profit sector, a sector that we all know does not simply do good, but contributes close to 8.3% of our GDP and employs close to 2.4 million people across the country.

Minister, my question is about the design of the hardest-hit business recovery program and the tourism and hospitality recovery program under Bill C-2, which does not really consider the business model of the charitable and not-for-profit sector. The problem is this: Charities and not-for-profits do not always receive or earn revenues at the same time each year. This, therefore, makes month-to-month comparisons across two years difficult. For instance, summer camps may operate 12 months of the year, but they're only eligible for support during the months they administer the camp. Similarly, many organizations generate revenue for the year through seasonal fundraising campaigns.

Did the government consider this in the drafting of Bill C-2, and is the government willing to provide greater flexibility in forecasting revenue decline and allow applicants to average revenue decline over a span of 12 months instead of on a month-to-month basis?

Ms. Freeland: Thank you very much, Senator Omidvar, for your hard work. I always appreciate hearing from you. Thank you for your focus on the charitable sector.

I agree with you that it has faced some particular challenges during this time of COVID. Also, many leaders in the charitable sector and the work they do have been particularly important in this time of COVID.

I am aware of the particular circumstances you describe. I could also describe some analogous circumstances for other industries. Capturing the experience of seasonal sectors, which Senator Coyle touched upon, is another similar challenge.

In putting together these two programs — tourism and hospitality — the businesses we could readily identify, target and say “These are definitely businesses that cannot fully reopen yet” — that’s what we were able to do in October. Then we created this extra safety net of the hardest hit, because we said to ourselves that there are going to be organizations, let me say, since we’re talking about the charitable sector, that fall through the net of this specific targeting, so let’s create an additional layer of support for them. Of necessity, that additional layer was always going to be a bit less generous because we were balancing.

And that will be the second part of my answer. All of this effort was in order to provide tailor-made support for specific sectors that have specific experiences, which we have tried to do. It needed to be balanced against two things. One was just the technical challenge of targeting and providing solutions that fit every single business in an incredibly diverse country. The second was the fiscal challenge, which I do take seriously. We approached this with a view to the need to pivot from programs that were very broad-based — that covered everyone to a very generous degree — to a more targeted approach. Inevitably, when you’re more targeted, it’s not going to be perfect for every single circumstance, and I accept that.

• (1830)

Senator Omidvar: Thank you, minister.

[Translation]

Senator Cormier: Good evening, minister. As you know, the arts and culture sector has been walloped by the pandemic. Many cultural workers have left the sector, while others are struggling and will continue to struggle for many years to come.

Bill C-2, which we are studying today, does not provide for any CRB-type support for self-employed workers, including those working in the cultural sector. Your recent economic update could hold the solution, with \$60 million allocated in 2022-23 to establish the new Canada performing arts workers resilience fund. However, many artists and cultural workers do not appear to be directly covered by this one-time relief fund, especially those working in visual arts, literary arts and audiovisual production.

Minister, how and when does your government plan to help cultural workers who are not covered by the Canada performing arts workers resilience fund, and why didn’t you just carry the CRB over into Bill C-2?

Ms. Freeland: Thank you for that very important question.

First, I would like to say that I agree with you, Senator, that the cultural sector is particularly affected by COVID restrictions. I would also like to mention that I appreciate the special role of the cultural sector and the workers in that sector. It is important for all Canadians to have people who enrich Canadian culture. It is especially important for Quebec, and I appreciate that.

Second, many businesses in the cultural sector will receive help through the measures announced in Bill C-2. Therefore, it is good news for that sector.

Third, our government believes that it is necessary to have direct supports, not just for the businesses impacted by Bill C-2, but also for self-employed workers in the cultural sector. As you just mentioned, in Tuesday’s economic update, we announced that \$60 million will be allocated to that end. We tried to target the workers who are particularly affected because they just can’t work as a result of health restrictions.

I believe you ended by asking me why the government didn’t just continue with the CERB. The answer is that that measure is very costly. The CERB in general was no longer necessary for the Canadian economy. Our economic results are very strong, especially with respect to the level of employment in Canada.

Senator Cormier: I was actually referring to the CRB, minister. Thank you.

[English]

Senator Bovey: Welcome, minister. You won’t be surprised that I’m going to, unknowingly, follow up on my colleague Senator Cormier’s question.

First, I want you to know the gratitude, throughout the whole arts sector in every discipline, for the support that your government has given during these last almost two years. It has been much appreciated. The pandemic hit all artists and arts organizations hard.

Minister, I know you’re well aware how important arts and culture are to the tourism industry. Indeed, without the galleries, museums and theatres — and I could go on, but won’t — art tourism wouldn’t be nearly as strong as it has been. Therefore, we need the arts organizations to be strong, and we need the artists to be healthy so they can work in that arts sector for tourism.

Can you tell us a little bit more? Can you elucidate the breadth of the assistance that this bill will provide for all the arts and culture sector, which, of course, is the soul of our nation?

Ms. Freeland: Thank you very much, Senator Bovey, for the question.

As I said to Senator Cormier, I very much agree with both of you that arts and culture is important as an economic driver in Canada. As you pointed out, it's important for our tourism industry. It's also important because this is how we tell ourselves the stories of who we are. I'm sure all of us in this conversation disagree about a lot of things, but I feel comfortable and confident in saying we are all proud Canadians and we need to tell our stories.

Senator, are you a senator from Manitoba?

Senator Bovey: Yes.

Ms. Freeland: I hope that, like me, you're very proud of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet. I had a great conversation with some people from the Royal Winnipeg Ballet over Zoom during COVID, and the dancers talked about how hard it was to stay in shape during COVID — having to rehearse in their kitchens and such. What they did was very impressive. Important organizations that are the soul of Canada, like the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, have received essential support from the government throughout COVID, through to the end of October, with our very generous broad-based programs. I'm glad they were there.

The people, like the wonderful dancers, received direct support, and they told me how important that was for them too.

In this measure, we offer two levels of support. One is the support that goes directly to organizations. Organizations that can't fully reopen should qualify for the maximum level of support, and I'm glad of that. That's why it's there. Then, as we discussed with Senator Cormier, we are putting in place specific targeted support for culture workers in the live culture industry that will go not only to the organization, but also directly to the people. We recognize that what they do is particularly restricted and that they have very particular skills. We want them to continue to devote those skills to creating great culture for us. That's why those programs are there, and I believe that they will help our culture get through this pandemic.

• (1840)

To conclude on a positive note, one thing I have been struck by is the creative ways that many of our culture workers, including the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, have turned to new media and have found ways to tell our story during COVID. Let us all support them in that effort and be avid appreciators and beneficiaries of Canadian culture, even if we are consuming it digitally.

Senator Bovey: And they tell our —

The Chair: I'm sorry, Senator Bovey. Your time is up.

Senator Black: Thank you, minister, for appearing today. Thank you to the government for all your hard work over the past 21 months helping Canadians weather this pandemic. I have two questions, and I hope we can get to both.

As you know, I am an advocate in this place on behalf of the agricultural industry, rural communities and youth. Canadian agricultural fairs and exhibitions have been a substantial and integral part of the fabric of Canadian life and rural communities for centuries. Many have been in existence since prior to

Canada's Confederation. These time-tested organizations host premier Canadian events and recreational infrastructure that have helped establish and continue to maintain our national identity. There are 743 organizations across Canada that host more than 17,000 events each year. They are undoubtedly some of the hardest hit groups through this pandemic. Not only do they rely on mass gatherings to generate revenue, but the majority of that revenue also has a seasonal window. They will be the last to be able to fully open and recuperate.

These organizations support rural tourism, volunteerism, mental health, youth engagement and economic development. While the list of eligible organizations in your bill is long, there is no mention of fairs and exhibitions. Historically, when federal funding programs have not explicitly included fairs and exhibitions, they have fallen through the cracks, especially throughout the pandemic. Therefore, minister, could you please clarify whether these organizations will be eligible for the proposed program?

Ms. Freeland: Thank you for the question, senator, which is a really important one. The proposed regulations state that eligibility would apply to organizations for which more than 50% of their pre-pandemic revenues were earned from carrying out eligible activities. That includes organizing, planning, promoting, hosting or supporting conventions, trade shows, festivals, weddings, parties or similar events.

Agricultural fairs and exhibitions would generally be entitled to this program, provided they meet all the eligibility criteria, including the two key revenue eligibility tests, which we have discussed already in some of the other questions today.

Of course, in this general conversation, I can't speak to the eligibility of any particular enterprise or organization. A lot more information would be necessary. It would be wrong of me to make a spur-of-the-moment judgment, and Canada Revenue Agency is best positioned to confirm the eligibility of these businesses. That's my best high-level answer.

Senator Black: Thank you, minister. I'm pleased to hear you mention fairs and exhibitions.

Over the course of the pandemic, we've seen supply chain disruptions across the globe. This week, the Ontario Agricultural Commodity Council highlighted numerous issues, which are also Canadian issues, that impact our food system. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation featured one issue mentioned in a report from Trucking HR Canada that indicated a current vacancy of 18,000 trucker jobs. This lack of truckers is going to be exacerbated with the increased COVID vaccination requirements coming into effect in mid-January. Other matters are container shipping costs, port congestion issues and growing input shortages regarding fertilizer, crop protection products and other materials that impact the supply chain.

It is critical that these issues are quickly addressed to ensure that threats of food insecurity and shortages in combination with the already rising food costs are mitigated. Could you, as minister, please clarify whether the government will be addressing these matters and providing support to ensure the food supply chain remains strong?

Ms. Freeland: First, let me say thank you. I am a person who is focused on Canada's great farmers.

In the update, you will find specific support to help farmers who have been hit by the droughts that affected our prairies so significantly this summer. You also mentioned ports, senator, and let me point you to the specific support that we provided in the update to help our ports deal with supply chain congestion. When it comes to truckers, we do have specific support to create additional apprenticeships and partnerships in place. Of course, through the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, we are welcoming more truck drivers when there aren't Canadians to fill these jobs.

[Translation]

The Chair: Honourable senators, the committee has been sitting for 95 minutes. In conformity with the order of the Senate, I am obliged to interrupt proceedings so that the committee can report to the Senate.

Minister, on behalf of all senators, thank you for joining us today to assist us with our work on the bill. I would also like to thank your officials.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

The Chair: On behalf of all senators, we wish you happy holidays and a happy 2022.

Ms. Freeland: I also want to thank you and thank all the senators for their hard work. I wish you happy holidays and I hope that you will all get a booster shot.

Thanks again for your work.

[English]

The Chair: Honourable senators, is it agreed that I report to the Senate that the witness has been heard?

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, the sitting of the Senate is resumed.

[Translation]

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Hon. Pierrette Ringuette: Honourable senators, the Committee of the Whole, authorized by the Senate to examine the subject matter of Bill C-2, An Act to provide further support in response to COVID-19, reports that it has heard from the said witness.

[English]

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, pursuant to the order of December 14, 2021, I am obliged to leave the chair until 7 p.m. unless you do not wish to suspend. Anybody who wishes to suspend please say so.

The sitting will continue.

[Translation]

FIRST READING

The Hon. the Speaker informed the Senate that a message had been received from the House of Commons with Bill C-2, An Act to provide further support in response to COVID-19.

(Bill read first time.)

[English]

SECOND READING

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, when shall this bill be read the second time?

Hon. Peter M. Boehm: Honourable senators, with leave of the Senate and notwithstanding rule 5-6(1)(f), I move that the bill be read the second time now.

The Hon. the Speaker: Is leave granted, honourable senators?

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

Senator Boehm: Honourable senators, I rise today to speak to Bill C-2, An Act to provide further support in response to COVID-19.

As the Senate sponsor of this legislation — and I thank Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance Chrystia Freeland for entrusting me with the responsibility — I, of course, support it strongly.

I do have 45 minutes to speak as sponsor, but as we approach the holiday season, my gift to all of you is that I will be brief — relatively, anyway.

• (1850)

Canada has made incredible strides in combatting the COVID-19 pandemic, thanks in large part to a high national vaccination rate — which will hopefully extend to children now that they are eligible — and public health mandates, from masks to vaccinations, including for all federally regulated employees.

Of course, we now have the Omicron variant taking over, and it is scary and frustrating after nearly two very long years. We are all feeling it, colleagues.

Some jurisdictions have fared better than others, but none have been spared the tragedies of this pandemic. Along with the heartache and devastation felt by too many Canadian families who have lost loved ones to the coronavirus — including our own Senate family — many have been hard hit financially, having lost jobs and entire businesses.

Continuing to support individual Canadians and business owners is what Bill C-2 seeks to do.

[Translation]

As Minister Freeland announced on October 21 and as indicated in the Speech from the Throne on November 23, the government believes that the time has come to bring in more targeted programs than the ones that were offered at the height of the pandemic last year.

As you know, the general income and business support programs, such as the Canada Recovery Benefit, ended on October 23, 2021.

However, even though public health and the economic situation have vastly improved, in large part because of these temporary lifelines, many Canadians and businesses still need targeted support.

To that end, Bill C-2 amends the Income Tax Act to enshrine into law the programs that came into effect on October 24, namely the tourism and hospitality recovery program, the hardest-hit business recovery program and the local lockdown program.

The bill also introduces the new Canada worker lockdown benefit, which, as its name suggests, provides benefits to workers in the event of a lockdown.

Furthermore, Bill C-2 amends the Canada Recovery Benefits Act and extends the Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit and the Canada Recovery Caregiving Benefit beyond November 20, a date that has already passed.

Lastly, the bill would improve and extend the Canada Recovery Hiring Program.

[English]

Now for the exciting part, colleagues, where I explain the ins and outs of the elements I just highlighted and what they will do if this bill passes.

The first new benefit, the tourism and hospitality recovery program, would provide support via wage and rent subsidies to businesses, including hotels, tour operators, restaurants and travel agencies. The subsidy rate for this highly targeted group would start at 40% for applicants with a 40% revenue loss and would increase in line with their losses, to a maximum of 75%.

Second, the hardest-hit business recovery program, which would also provide support via wage and rent subsidies, would be available to employers who are able to demonstrate that they have faced deep and enduring losses of revenue. The subsidy rate for this group would start at 10% for applicants with at least a 50% revenue loss. For employers with revenue losses of 75%, the subsidy would increase to a maximum of 50%.

Eligibility for these first two programs will consider two points: first, whether the employer has faced a significant revenue loss over the course of the first 12 months of the pandemic; and second, current month revenue loss.

The last new benefit under Part 1, the local lockdown program, acknowledges that temporary lockdowns in some areas of the country are still possible for the foreseeable future. As we enter the winter season, which drives people indoors, and with the emergence of new variants — the latest being Omicron — unfortunately, this is not outside the realm of possibility. As it did in March 2020, the government announced on December 15 that it is again urging Canadians to avoid all non-essential international travel because of the rapidly spreading Omicron. Much uncertainty lies ahead, colleagues. The local lockdown program would provide employers whose businesses are impacted by new temporary local lockdowns with up to the maximum amount available through the wage and rent subsidy programs.

After Bill C-2 passes, these new programs will be available retroactively, from October 24, 2021, to May 7, 2022. From March 13, 2022, to May 7, 2022, support rates will decrease by half to reflect the government's intention to prepare for a full recovery and the subsequent end of pandemic-related benefit programs.

Part 2 establishes the Canada worker lockdown benefit through the creation of a new act. This targeted benefit, delivered by the Canada Revenue Agency, will provide income support to workers — including the self-employed — who cannot work due to restrictions mandated by regional COVID-19-related lockdowns in place between October 24, 2021, and May 7, 2022. Eligible workers in this situation would receive income support of \$300 per week. This benefit is critical to ensuring that regional health and safety is paramount while also ensuring that workers do not suffer further financial hardship during necessary lockdowns.

I will not list every eligibility criterion for the lockdown benefit, but there is one I will highlight, given that vaccination mandates for employees in various sectors, including our own, are in force.

To qualify for the benefit, applicants must attest that their loss of employment or self-employment, inability to work or income reduction are not due to a failure to adhere to a workplace

vaccine policy or other vaccination mandate. This is an important point, colleagues, and one that gained much attention when a vaccination mandate for federal employees was announced.

[Translation]

Bill C-2 would also amend the Canada Recovery Benefits Act and its regulations to extend the Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit and the Canada Recovery Caregiving Benefit until May 7, 2022.

The amendments would also add an additional two weeks to the maximum benefit period. More specifically, the caregiving benefit would go from 42 weeks to 44, and the sickness benefit would go from four weeks to six. More than a million Canadians have already used this program.

Lastly, Bill C-2 would extend the Canada Recovery Hiring Program until May 7, 2022, for eligible employers with current revenue losses above 10%. The subsidy rate would also increase to 50%.

This extension would help businesses continue to hire back workers and create the additional jobs Canada needs to fully recover from the losses incurred because of the pandemic.

[English]

From October 24, 2021, through May 7, 2022, the government estimates that the total cost of the measures outlined in Bill C-2 will be \$7.4 billion. That is a drop in the bucket compared to the \$289 billion the government has spent through the extraordinary broad-based income and business supports since the start of the pandemic last year.

At this point I had in my notes a disquisition on inflation. However, that discussion took place between Minister Freeland and Senator Housakos, so I will not repeat what they have discussed. Of course, inflation is cause for concern. The simple truth is that inflation is not a result of politics or partisanship — though how it is discussed and portrayed certainly might be — nor is it due to much-needed benefits programs that have helped people through a once-in-a-century global crisis. Inflation is global in nature and reflects many factors. In my view, Canada is in a strong recovery position, largely as a result of spending on extraordinary temporary benefits programs.

Honourable senators, we are by no means out of the woods. We will likely have a difficult winter. However, there is light at the end of the tunnel. Mixed metaphors aside, the fact is that while many Canadians and Canadian businesses still need support, Canada is now at a point where it is appropriate to target that support to those who need it most.

• (1900)

Getting here has been hard, and Canada and the entire world have suffered dearly. There is no doubt about that, colleagues.

It has been nearly two years since the emergence of COVID-19, and more than 20 months since the World Health Organization declared the pandemic. Everything has changed in that time, including the very basic societal norms and routines we

all took for granted. From how and where we work, to how we gather with family and friends, we have all experienced a fundamental shift.

Birthdays have been missed, weddings postponed and the opportunity to say goodbye to departed loved ones lost.

Despite the pain wrought by the pandemic, we have also seen the very best of humanity; from how communities across our great country and the globe have come together, to truly remarkable advances in science that have led us to the vaccines that are keeping us safe and which will get us to the end of this.

The targeted supports for individual Canadians and businesses outlined in Bill C-2 cannot change the past, colleagues. What it does do, though, is to offer hope and help to people who need it and a strong sign that we are finally in the home stretch of this pandemic.

All of us are receiving mail from concerned Canadians to this effect.

Colleagues, let us pass this bill now and make that final push. Thank you.

The Hon. the Speaker: Is it your pleasure, honourable senators, to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Senators: Agreed.

An Hon. Senator: On division.

(Motion agreed to and bill read second time, on division.)

THIRD READING

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, when shall this bill be read the third time?

Hon. Peter M. Boehm: Honourable senators, with leave of the Senate and notwithstanding rule 5-5(b), I move that the bill be read the third time now.

The Hon. the Speaker: Is leave granted, honourable senators?

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

Hon. Marty Deacon: Thank you very much.

Honourable senators, this evening I rise to speak to Bill C-2, and I won't be long.

Over the past 21 months, we have become very familiar with the various emergency COVID relief bills and the essential importance they play for Canadians. Bill C-2 recognizes the continued support as we navigate life with an unpredictable and highly contagious virus.

Through the bill and the Committee of the Whole presentation by Minister Freeland this evening, we are reminded of a suite of programs this bill introduces or builds on such as an extension of

the Canada Recovery Hiring Program, targeted support to particularly hard-hit industries like hospitality and tourism, and the establishment of the Canada worker lockdown benefit.

This evening, I would like to focus on another, perhaps unintended consequence of this bill, as it follows others over the past 21 months.

The pandemic has impacted businesses in a variety of ways, but tourism, hospitality and event industries have been hit the hardest and for the longest, and as we have seen in recent days, continue to face a future full of uncertainty.

Folks that represent these sectors are not the people who usually follow the day-to-day processes — surprise, surprise — or the content and decision making made in the Senate and the other place. They are not in the habit of tuning into parliamentary proceedings. A bill going to first, second or third reading or being sent to committee is not part of the procedural language and their daily business.

The pandemic, however, has changed this. Out of pure economic desperation, many sectors are following the minutia of Parliament to see exactly when they can be assured of continued financial support and what that support will look like.

To quote just one of the many inquiries about Bill C-2 I have received:

Senator Deacon, I am reaching out to you again to see if you have any information regarding the Tourism and Hospitality Recovery Program. We are trying to follow all the Bills; we think this is C-2. We learned today the bill was being “tabled.” Does that mean it is in the Senate already? We are trying to understand 1st, 2nd Readings, committees, tabling, it is all very confusing for myself and my staff, but we and our clients are trying to track this bill as it is urgent for us. Because of the gap between ending the wage and rent subsidy and this new program we are really struggling. We have adjusted, pivoted, regrouped so many times and want to continue in our local business. We are following this daily, but we would really appreciate to know when ultimately this bill will be done, when it goes through or when you may have more information. Thank you in advance, Robin and Bill.

Every senator hears this desperation I’m sure every day. It’s a reminder that we are being watched, listened to and scrutinized like never before. We need to leverage this opportunity to show Canadians who and what we are, and that we are learning from and listening to every Canadian.

We need to keep in mind that there is no playbook for what we’re facing as a country. People are looking for deadlines or limits to what we will spend as a country to support Canadians; all Canadians. But we need to be flexible and understand that all we can do is take this a day at a time and do what we can to help those affected the very most. I believe that’s what we have before us here in Bill C-2 and why I’m looking forward to its very quick passage. Thank you. *Meegwetch*.

Hon. Yonah Martin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Your Honour, Senator Housakos does intend to speak, and he is our critic. Perhaps I can ask a question of Senator Deacon at this time.

The Hon. the Speaker: Senator Deacon, will you take a question?

Senator M. Deacon: Yes, I will.

Senator Martin: Senator Deacon, I feel like my head is spinning. We have had a fluid situation all day. This is such an important bill, and yet we heard earlier, one of our experts in the chamber — a former auditor general, Senator Marshall — talking about the effort that she has to put in to gather information that senators should readily have. You just expressed your frustration; the challenge that you and your staff have had to prepare for this time.

I understand the importance of this bill for Canadians. Do you have anything to add in terms of some of the frustrations that you have encountered or what you wish you had before you? Is it just more time? I’d love to just get your insights on the process.

Senator M. Deacon: Thank you, senator, for the question. Perhaps to clarify, two things I’m thinking about. Number one is how we can continue to make sure that we are representing and reflecting the interests of all Canadians and that the dial is turned up. The dial is turned up on their desire for more information, their desire to understand the process, policy, products, bills, legislation from what we almost call a consumer, from all Canadians, on that pathway to how we do work.

I can say to you candidly that I am in awe of Senator Marshall. I have sat with her on the Finance Committee, and we have continued and will continue, on or off the committee, to change and push for processes that make sense, and timelines that connect and dovetail, and bills around budget and finance and estimates that look a little more connected and seamless.

It’s a big job. It’s a big challenge, but I do recognize it because ultimately wouldn’t it be great that all senators have a good, clear understanding of all of this and we’re able to articulate it well to our users, Canadians?

Senator Martin: Yes. I absolutely agree. Thank you so much. Thank you and all of the senators who have served on the committee doing some of the heavy lifting.

In any event, thank you very much for your speech and to, of course, the sponsor and all senators who served on both committees, Social Affairs and as well as on Finance. I’m getting my bills mixed up. But in any event all the work that you have done.

• (1910)

Hon. Leo Housakos (Acting Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, I rise to speak at third reading of Bill C-2 — of course, we're moving very quickly — Bill C-2, An Act to provide further support in response to COVID-19.

It seems to me these days that nothing is as certain as death, taxes and acts to provide further support in response to COVID-19. This is, I believe, the seventh such act by this government. If at first you can't get it right, try, try again, and again and again, and so on and so on. It's déjà vu all over again. And just as familiar, I think we can all acknowledge, is the government's refrain that we need to do this post-haste.

This is from the same government that unnecessarily dissolved Parliament to call an unnecessary election just two years after the last one — costing Canadians upwards of \$600 million — to end up with an almost identical minority Parliament situation that we had prior to the election.

Then after that urgent election, which the Prime Minister tried to pin on Canadians by saying they demanded it, he then waited another leisurely two months — Tofino was calling, of course — before reconvening Parliament so he could introduce this urgently needed legislation that we have to rush through just a few minutes to midnight before Christmas.

I am reminded of one of my favourite expressions: Lack of preparation on your part does not constitute an emergency on my part.

Remember that the bill arrived in the House on November 24. It arrived in committee in the House on December 6. They were expected to go clause-by-clause on the bill on December 10: a mere four hearings later and only a few hours after hearing from the minister. That, of course, changed when the opposition members of the committee in the other place insisted on more time to scrutinize the legislation, as is their right and, colleagues, their duty.

It arrived here a few minutes ago — not very long ago. Now we're being told we have to get it done in record time. Have we heard that before, colleagues, from this government? There are many good reasons for it.

[Translation]

Colleagues, I have been a member of the Senate for quite a while now; it will be 13 years next month. Every December and every June, we are pressured to pass legislation before we go on break for the holidays.

Usually, when a bill includes \$7 billion in spending over seven months, we have enough time to go over it with a fine-tooth comb before we amend it or pass it as is. We would have had plenty of time to deal with the bill before us today, even factoring in the time wasted due to this summer's unnecessary election. However, as I said, Justin Trudeau's government decided not to recall Parliament for eight weeks, even though it knew all along that it would have issues to deal with, such as this bill.

[English]

To quote columnist Don Martin:

... tardiness in ... inaction, has achieved an Omicron-level contagion inside this government, which framed the fall election as a cry for action only to hit the ground running at a sloth-in-slow-motion speed.

Martin opines, "Trudeau has elevated foot-dragging to a dark political art."

And, as in almost everything else with this Prime Minister, what is good for him is not appropriate for the rest of us. So while there was foot-dragging in reopening Parliament, he tells us we must rush this legislation through Parliament when he finally does open it — legislation that looks suspiciously like that which was introduced in the last Parliament.

He told us the reason for the election was to give Canadians their say on government decisions that will last, not just for the coming months, but for the coming decades. What do we have before us, colleagues? We have a \$7 billion spending bill that will only last for the coming months. Meet the new boss; the same old boss.

It is an orchestrated effort to avoid scrutiny. It is calculated. It is premeditated. It is now standard operating procedure for this government to conduct business in the shadows when they can get away with it, of course. Colleagues, they have been getting away with it now for a very long time.

In this place, how many times have we heard over the last 18 months, "We need to do it, colleagues, because of the urgency of the situation, but it should never happen again?"

Independent, Trudeau-appointed senators have been rising in this house over dozens of billions of dollars over the last 18 months, and on each occasion they rise and they say, "We'll get it done this time, but let this not become a habit." Colleagues, this is beyond a habit. This has become an addiction for this government.

A government that ran in 2015 on being open and transparent by default has established a pattern of being anything but. This effort to avoid scrutiny is only the latest, as I said. It began barely six months into the Trudeau "transparent by default" government.

Many of you will recall Motion No. 6 introduced in the spring of 2016 — let's not forget, since it wasn't that long ago — rightfully drawing outrage from the opposition, as it would have eliminated many of the procedural tools at its disposal to hold the majority Trudeau government to account.

We've heard many times, in their attempts at modernization, about their desire to change rules and procedures because Parliament is archaic. Yes, it's archaic all right: It expects government to be accountable. It gives impetus to the minority voices in this country to hold their government to account.

[Translation]

These procedural tools, which were also available to the Government Representative in the Senate at the time, exist to protect the majority. It's a crucial aspect of our parliamentary system. Motion No. 6, which *Maclean's* magazine described as a draconian measure, was met with such outrage from the opposition that the government was eventually forced to withdraw it.

Far from admitting defeat, the Liberals made another attempt in the spring of 2017 to evade the scrutiny of the House by proposing to eliminate Friday sittings and set aside one day a week to put questions to the Prime Minister, meaning that Mr. Trudeau would not be required to be present in the House of Commons on the other sitting days during the week to answer questions.

[English]

All of this and other measures in the name of what the government called efficiency. But as the *Victoria Times-Colonist* put it, the changes proposed:

... seem to be less about efficiency than with reducing the opposition to and scrutiny of the government's agenda.

So many think it uncharitable to suggest that, when the pandemic hit, the government took advantage of it to further avoid scrutiny. Colleagues, these types of proposals by any government might be good political strategy, but it's bad government. It's not transparency. It's not respect of Parliament.

But having established a pattern of "doing things they would have excoriated Stephen Harper for," as one columnist put it, it is hard to avoid coming to that conclusion; even harder when coming out of the gate in March 2020, the same month the World Health Organization, or WHO, declared a pandemic, the Trudeau government tabled emergency legislation intended to grant itself the unilateral power to tax and spend for nearly two years without any scrutiny from Parliament — taxation without representation, which is contrary to the core of the Westminster system of Parliament. Colleagues, this was just a while ago they attempted to do this in the dark of night.

Even the Liberal-friendly *Toronto Star* was shocked. "The extraordinary measures ... went far beyond what Prime Minister Justin Trudeau or Finance Minister Bill Morneau have publicly discussed," they wrote.

Again, they were forced to back down amidst a great hue and cry, but not for lack of trying, colleagues. The pattern continued, and continues today.

The House committee investigation into the SNC-Lavalin scandal was stifled by the PMO, as was that of the Ethics Commissioner who, despite being denied access to certain witnesses, as he bemoaned in his report, found the Prime Minister guilty of breaking the ethics laws.

Similarly, the House committee's investigation into the WE Charity scandal was obstructed by the Liberals at every turn until the Prime Minister went so far as to prorogue Parliament —

something he promised Canadians he would never do. It's his constitutional right, but he promised, if you remember, in black and white, in the 2015 Liberal election platform, the same platform that promised an independent, transparent and more effective upper chamber.

• (1920)

What is more galling than the lack of transparency, however, and the seemingly inexhaustible efforts of the Trudeau government to avoid accountability, is their blatant cynicism, their contempt for Canadians and for the work of Parliament, including in this place, to hold them to account on behalf of Canadian taxpayers. That, too, is in black and white in the form of a tweet from Liberal MP and former house leader Bardish Chagger last Friday after the Conservatives in the house proposed that the committee studying Bill C-2 there split the bill so that the hospitality and tourism industries could get their much-needed support before Parliament rises, while the committee did its job and studied the rest of the bill.

In response to this prudent proposal, Ms. Chagger pleaded:

I'm in the House today — it's sad to see that rather than advance much-needed supports for [Canadian] businesses, workers, tourism industry, and others, the Conservatives are slowing the passage of Bill C-2 — which would provide this assistance — by using delay tactics in the [House of Commons].

I'm glad to hear, colleagues, that Ms. Chagger was in the house that day, but there were any number of days over the previous two months when all MPs could have been in the house to ensure smooth passage of this suddenly much needed support, but they chose not to be. The Prime Minister chose to go on vacation. And the Conservatives, by acting like responsible parliamentarians doing the job they were elected to do, get accused of delay tactics.

Now we have a new \$7-billion spending bill before us. The Senate, the chamber of sober second thought, is expected to pass it with barely a glance. How many of you have scrutinized that bill before it got here just a few minutes ago? Is it too much to ask that we not be treated with such contempt by the government of the day? Is it too much to ask that Canadians not be condescended to in this manner?

Colleagues, as I said, we have stood up in this chamber time and time again. We have told the other side and told this government — particularly over the last few months, but other governments as well — that this chamber shouldn't tolerate this, that this chamber is an important institution in holding the government to account.

So it seems we talked a big game of making this place more relevant, more independent, less partisan, holding the government to account, but it always seems to be the same small group of senators in the chamber who are always asking the difficult questions.

This government, only this week, tabled the public accounts regarding the \$600 billion it spent last year. The public accounts provide a detailed breakdown of how public funds are spent. We've heard Senator Marshall go at the government leader in this chamber. It's been months she's been asking for them. Again, I haven't heard many more, except for this small, little caucus on this side of the chamber, who have been adamant about this on behalf of taxpayers.

That means that more than eight months after the 2020-21 fiscal year ended, and while Bill C-2 asking for \$7 billion of new spending was being reviewed at committee in the house, we still have had no details of how the money allocated for last year was spent.

Colleagues, we get paid a lot of money to be here. Yeah, we're not elected, and it's becoming harder and harder for this institution to be accountable because many of the groups in here have cut their links to the accountable house. But we should look in the mirror and ask ourselves what were we brought here on behalf of taxpayers to do. If we're going to be a rubber stamp, one can question, of course, the legitimacy of this place going forward. And it's going to come. If we continue to be an echo chamber, Canadians are going to start saying, "What are we getting for our \$130 million a year?" Actually, that's not only where it ends.

Let me point this out. China Mobile and other Chinese state-owned companies received some of the pandemic wage supports that were intended for hard hit Canadian companies. We've been asking questions of the government leader in this chamber. Again, these are only the questions that have been coming from a small, select group of partisan senators who want to go back to the old ways in this place, which is holding the government to account. But yet we still haven't received from the government a clear answer.

China Mobile, for those of you who haven't heard of it, had earnings of a paltry \$152 billion in 2020. It has also been sanctioned in the United States for collaborating with the People's Liberation Army. We know it has partnered with Huawei, and we know it operated in Canada from 2015 until this year without a security review having been conducted, which is required by the Investment Canada Act.

The findings of that eventual security review were that China Mobile's presence in Canada could result in Canadian companies being leveraged for non-commercial purposes. It was ordered to close its businesses in Canada, but not before operating for six years unbeknownst to this government and not before receiving pandemic wage support that was put in place to help Canadian businesses. It gets better — or worse depending on whether you were one of the fraudulent recipients of pandemic support or if you're a Canadian taxpayer.

[Senator Housakos]

We know, as I mentioned in a question to the Leader of the Government in the Senate a few weeks back, that organized crime defrauded the Canada Emergency Response Benefit, or CERB, program by filling multiple applications using stolen identities. Yet this government is unable or unwilling to tell us how much CERB money organized crime received.

[Translation]

We know all this because of a recent decision by a Quebec Superior Court judge, who found that a Montreal street gang fraudulently claimed over \$100,000 from the Canada Emergency Response Benefit program and used it to finance illegal weapons smuggling operations. According to an article in *La Presse*, another street gang exploited a loophole in the CERB provisions to collect tens of thousands of dollars that it no doubt used to buy weapons on the black market. This all coincides with a dramatic increase in gun crimes in Montreal, as Pierre Paul-Hus, my colleague in the other place, wrote in a letter to the minister.

[English]

It is in this context that the Trudeau government has made their poor planning — and let's be clear, it was intentionally poor planning of our emergency — so that a bill allowing for \$7 billion to be shovelled out the door was introduced in Parliament while the last fiscal year's \$600 billion in spending had yet to be accounted for, colleagues. This should be outrageous to every single senator in this place, regardless of your partisan leanings or your political colours or whatever. Everybody should, as a taxpayer, be outraged.

Of course, the Trudeau government will categorize my complaints. "Again, there is that partisan opposition party in the Senate harping and complaining." But even Kevin Page — is he partisan, too? — the former parliamentary budget officer under Stephen Harper, who was many times the bane of Mr. Harper's existence, has been equally critical of this government's failure to table the public accounts until this week.

The Globe and Mail, prior to their release, cited Mr. Page as saying:

... he doesn't see a reason why the government appears to be waiting to release key information, such as the public accounts and a fall fiscal update.

In a direct quote, Mr. Page said:

"They should be at the front end [of the current four-week sitting] That is the standard practice and a good practice and I'm not really sure there's any reason not to have that. I'm sure that the work is done on the public accounts and there's no reason not to table it. Finance [Canada] has had plenty of time."

Mr. Page said knowing how money was spent last year can help inform debate over the government's request for more funds. "It's all information that can be used to shape the debate and hold the government to account," he said.

Tabling them on Tuesday is too late, too late for our deliberations. That's what Mr. Page said. He also added that "... committees should also be sitting to review spending requests."

Sober second thought, honourable senators, is practically our mantra. It is something that we should all be interested in. We should be asking these questions, demanding answers and we have the constitutional right because this chamber is modelled, of course, after the House of Commons in Westminster.

As I said many times, we might have the burden of not being an elected body, but we have the responsibility to add value for taxpayers in this country. So if there's one thing we should engage in, it is accountability of the public accounts. That's not a partisan exercise. That's an administrative exercise if I ever saw one. That is making sure that our administration across this government is using taxpayers' funds in the most efficient manner and being able to report back to the House of Commons on indiscretions or inefficiencies. That is really part and parcel of one of our main mandates this year. Unfortunately, colleagues, over the last few years, we've been negligent in that mandate.

While in the first days of the pandemic the government could be excused for rushing out these much-needed supports, we're now in month 20 and that is no longer the case. We were very patient, as an institution, over the first dozen months. We came on demand; we shovelled out billions on demand. But we have also seen the abuses that have taken place, and we should be given the time to do our jobs to make sure that those abuses stop.

• (1930)

A request to give \$7 billion in spending for a bill of this nature should be scrutinized by senators who were appointed for this purpose. There should be no hesitation on our part. A procedural attempt to delay the much-needed support for our businesses, especially those hit hard like the tourism and hospitality industry — we should be addressing them.

But there is another more ominous context in which this bill has been tabled. It is something *The Economist* magazine recently characterized as a "danger ahead." That is inflation. It's a word we've been hearing in this place over the last few weeks. I will assure you, because of a lack of action by the government, we will be hearing a lot about it for many years to come.

The Economist didn't mention the Trudeau government's freewheeling spending habits, but it did mention that Joe Biden's similarly excessive fiscal stimulus overheated the economy causing consumer prices in the United States to rise by 6%.

Our own government's runaway spending has contributed to a 4.7% inflation rate, the highest rate in 18 years.

We had the minister before us a few minutes ago. Her rationale and justification is that there are three other countries in the G7 that have worse inflation than we have, so we should be happy. Wow, that's the standard. So, believe it or not, we're happy and our Minister of Finance is happy because there are three other countries with worse inflation rates than Canada.

To be honest with you, that doesn't jibe. It doesn't make any sense. It doesn't jibe at all and it's completely irresponsible. I'm old enough to remember one of the most existential economic crises we went through in the mid-1980s that ended up saddling Canada with debt that took us three decades to deal with. It took successive governments, Liberal and Conservative alike — Mr. Jean Chrétien, Mr. Paul Martin, Mr. Brian Mulroney and Mr. Stephen Harper — all to deal with what they were left with by another Trudeau in 1984, which again was a massive debt.

I remember in the early 1980s the same argument and the same justification: Well, inflation is an international phenomenon. I heard our honourable colleague here in the house make that statement earlier in his speech in favour of the bill. Well, you know what? I don't think it's entirely an international phenomenon because at the end of the day, Senator Boehm, a nation like Canada has the capacity through its monetary policy, through our spending habits, through our taxing habits and, more importantly, through our efficiencies, which currently are lacking.

When you're starting to send out programs that are being capitalized on by organized crime and fraud, and this Parliament is not taking the time to do its due diligence, obviously it's going to create inflation. It is going to create a whole other host of problems.

Honourable senators, we're all aware, thanks to his own clear admission during the recent unnecessary election, that the last thing on Justin Trudeau's mind is monetary policy. He said that. I couldn't believe it. He said that was not what he was preoccupied with.

Justin Trudeau's lack of interest in fiscal policy was confirmed as recently as the beginning of this week in an article in *The Globe and Mail* that said that not only is Mr. Trudeau not particularly interested in the Department of Finance, but neither is his Deputy Prime Minister. According to an article from *The Globe and Mail*, Minister of Finance Chrystia Freeland rarely takes departmental briefings and hasn't spoken to some ministers for months.

In my responsible line of questioning today, I asked Ms. Freeland how many briefings she has had on inflation from her deputy ministers, and she went on to tell me that she speaks many, many, times by telephone to the deputy minister. Well, the associate deputy ministers have roles to play in the Department of Finance. The truth of the matter is that there has been an unprecedented, record-high turnover in that department. And all I received from the Minister of Finance is talking points.

Chrystia Freeland is not a minister like any other, where they show up to our committees and they're used to giving us political talking points of the day. She is the Minister of Finance and has big shoes to fill. The ministers of finance that I'm used to are people like Joe Oliver, Paul Martin and Jim Flaherty, who took

responsibility for the economic figures we were presented with and the challenges of the day. Making excuses and saying there are three countries with worse inflation rates than us and just passing the buck won't cut it. We need a concrete plan. We need recognition. We need a fiscal anchor. This is what we need when it comes to our financial house.

The Prime Minister's lack of interest and that of the minister in charge has resulted in his star Deputy Minister of Finance Michael Sabia being unable to rein in public spending, which was one of the reasons he accepted the job in the first place. Mr. Sabia is a very competent, capable man. He needs to be able to do his job.

Scott Clark, a deputy minister under Paul Martin, was considered one of the ablest Liberal finance ministers. I think all of us have respect for Paul Martin and the service he provided to our country. I will quote his deputy minister at the time:

You have a Prime Minister who is not really interested in the Department of Finance. If the Prime Minister is not interested, if your Minister of Finance is not interested, it doesn't matter who you bring in. You are not going to be successful.

According to *The Globe and Mail*, Chris Ragan, Director of McGill's Max Bell School of Public Policy, said he "... doesn't hear Ms. Freeland talking enough about limits to government spending." Mr. Ragan added that, "It looks like they just don't think there is any reason to worry. And that is what worries me."

Canadians too are worrying. This runaway government spending is ballooning the cost of living with no end in sight.

How many of us have gone to a gas pump lately? How many of us have gone to a grocery store to buy a quart of milk, toast or clothing? Inflation hurts most middle-class and poor Canadians. Inflation is only good for wealthy Canadians. So we can't have a government saying they're so concerned about the middle class and the poor in this country but don't worry about inflation. It's just some kind of international phenomenon that will take care of itself. Don't worry about it.

The Financial Post recently predicted that Canadians would feel the bite even more in 2022. The price of everyday essential goods is skyrocketing. The twelfth edition of *Canada's Food Price Report* published by Dalhousie University, the University of Guelph, the University of British Columbia and the University of Saskatchewan estimated that food prices would jump by \$1,000 this year. I've said this over and over again — \$1,000 for many families in this country is a lot of money.

The cost of shelter is up 4.8%. The cost of energy is up a whopping 25.5%. We live in a cold country. It costs Canadians a lot of money to heat. The price of gasoline is up an astronomical 41.7%.

Of course, the Minister of Finance is happy. Her revenues are up. But her revenues are up when these things happen at the expense of poor middle-class Canadians who can't afford it.

It is simple, honourable senators: More dollars chasing few goods means higher prices — *Economics 101*. I'm not an economist, but it's common sense. Half a trillion dollars of deficit is competing for scarce goods and driving up costs.

The much-revered U.S. economist Thomas Sowell once wrote an article that outlined how various taxes affect others far beyond those who write the cheque to pay the government. Taxes on business can get passed on to consumers. Payroll taxes or government-mandated employee benefits may be paid by the employer but reduce the value of any employee to the employer. It was so well written.

The idea that you can single out one segment of society to be taxed or mandated, for the benefit of the rest of society, is reminiscent of a San Francisco automobile dealer's sign: "We cheat the other guy and pass the savings on to you."

Thomas Sowell continued:

The economy is not a zero-sum game where someone gains what others lose. The whole economy can lose when ill-considered policies gain political popularity and stifle economic growth.

Sowell argued that one of the biggest taxes is one that is not even called a tax. It is called inflation. To my point, colleagues, inflation makes poor Canadians suffer, it makes middle-class Canadians poor and has the rich laughing all the way to the bank.

When the government spends money it created, it is transferring part of the value of all our money to themselves. It is quiet taxation but very often taxation falling on everyone no matter how low their income might be.

Honourable senators, this government has stifled the man who thought he was hired to rein in public spending and create economic growth, and that is Deputy Minister of Finance Michael Sabia. As *The Globe and Mail* pointed out, the Trudeau government's preference is to tax corporations and wealthy Canadians to fund new public spending. The whole economy and all Canadians are losing because of these ill-considered policies. The ones who benefit are the rich. The losers are the poor.

Let me make it clear: Since the beginning of the pandemic, Conservatives have supported help for Canadians who couldn't work due to government restrictions. Today we support the tourism and hospitality workers hit by travel restrictions. That's why Conservatives introduced their motion to split the bill so those who need it can get that much-needed support more quickly.

• (1940)

What we don't support is runaway spending, overkill, out-of-control inflation, benefits going to organized crime and to Chinese state-controlled enterprises when that country is committing genocide, not to mention holding two Canadian hostages as prisoners at that time. What we don't support, colleagues, is a lack of control, checks and balances, oversight, scrutiny.

In that regard I will conclude by referencing the testimony of the Auditor General this past Monday to the House of Commons Finance Committee, where they were studying the bill. She was talking about the office's efforts to audit the CERB, which was designed with a heavy emphasis on delivering payments quickly and relying on post-payment verification processes to ensure those payments got to whom they were supposed to go to. But even that doesn't seem to have taken place. The Auditor General testified:

Based on our audit work on the original design of the programs, both will need to rely heavily on post payment verification, which will be time consuming and costly.

She went on to say:

The post-payment work on these 2 programs was expected to be the subject of an audit from my office to begin in early 2022. However, we have been informed by the agency that it has deferred or delayed its work and that it is highly unlikely that a significant amount of post-payment work will be completed by 2023. Given that there will be little for us to audit, we have postponed our work.

In other words, as our critic on the bill in the House made clear, in spite of the fact that the Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Centre of Canada, or FINTRAC, found that people not living in Canada received the CERB; that some people received two or three CERB deposits in less than a week; and a legitimate courtroom in the province of Quebec has confirmed criminal organizations received CERB payments, still the CRA has not gone back and verified whether people who got the CERB were eligible to receive it, and they are unlikely to do so for a significant portion of those people even by 2023.

Honourable senators, again, it has nothing to do with partisan politics. It has to do with the reason we all got summoned to this place — to represent our regions, our people, our taxpayers, who expect their government to operate in an efficient and effective way.

Honourable senators, given all these issues I have outlined, we should be giving this bill a thorough vetting, committee study, debate, cross-examination, witnesses, to make sure there are adequate safeguards to prevent fraud, to protect taxpayers and to ensure the return of economic prudence to this country. Being asked to serve as a rubber stamp is really an affront once again to this place, and every senator in here, regardless of political stripe or group, should be outraged.

I would point out to my colleagues that have come to this place recently that this is not new; receiving a bill on the last day of a sitting and having a government in the House of Commons on the other side say to us, "We have to get this out, because if we don't, it's going to hurt more people than it will benefit." At the end of the day, it's called law building or legislation building with a gun to your head, not prudent sober second thought. It's being cajoled, arm twisted, as we very often are. That's partisan politics. That's what they do on the other side. Public pressure, cajoling, threatening and so on. We pride ourselves on being the sober second thought, on taking a step back. We've really been priding ourselves the last few years on being independent.

Do colleagues know where our independence comes from? I say it all the time. It comes due to the fact that you have tenure here, which is a huge privilege we have. It doesn't matter who appointed you, if it's a Liberal or Conservative prime minister. It doesn't matter which side or group you choose to sit with. I will say this in closing. We're putting out the door with this bill and this vote tonight — and it will pass. We know that. We are passing it because of the pressures we are facing, and we're not going to give consideration to legitimate amendments that deserve to be given legitimate consideration.

Senator White and others who have legitimate concerns to make the bill better or more efficient, they're under the pressure of, "Well, we can't bring the House of Commons back if we amend it. We can't do this. We can't do that." At the end of the day, colleagues, we're putting out \$7 billion, like it's Formula 1 style, without giving it the due diligence it deserves. When I buy something in my home, when I change the air conditioning system or when we buy a new stove or fridge, we actually do more shopping around, more due diligence, more procurement interest — my wife is very good at shopping around — and give more consideration, as all of you in this place would, than we are giving consideration today for what we're buying for \$7 billion. We have now done this \$400 billion of times, and that is one reason inefficiencies take place, because we have not done our due diligence, and it has led to inflation, and it's just the beginning.

Honourable colleagues, like I said, we say all the time that it should never happen again, and it keeps happening. I call upon everyone to eventually find the political will to correct this. The Canadian people need it. If we want this institution to remain relevant going forward and to become more relevant, it's not about being partisan or independent or following one political agenda in the House or another. It's about us exercising our constitutional duty to hold the other place and the government to account in an appropriate fashion.

Thank you, colleagues.

The Hon. the Speaker: Are honourable senators ready for the question?

Hon. Senators: Question.

The Hon. the Speaker: It was moved by the Honourable Senator Boehm, seconded by the Honourable Senator LaBoucane-Benson that the bill be read a third time.

If you are opposed to the motion, please say "no."

Some Hon. Senators: No.

The Hon. the Speaker: I hear a no. All those in the chamber who are in favour of the motion will please say "yea."

Some Hon. Senators: Yea.

The Hon. the Speaker: All those in the chamber who are opposed to the motion will please say “nay.”

Some Hon. Senators: Nay.

The Hon. the Speaker: In my opinion the “yeas” have it. I see two senators rising.

And two honourable senators having risen:

The Hon. the Speaker: Do we have an agreement on the bell?

An Hon. Senator: Fifteen minutes.

The Hon. the Speaker: The vote will take place at 8:01. Call in the senators.

• (2000)

Motion agreed to and bill read third time and passed on the following division:

Francis
Gagné
Galvez
Gerba
Gignac
Gold

Tannas
Wetston
White
Woo
Yussuff—57

NAYS

THE HONOURABLE SENATORS

Ataullahjan
Batters
Boisvenu
Carignan
Housakos
MacDonald
Manning
Marshall

Martin
Mockler
Oh
Patterson
Poirier
Richards
Smith—15

YEAS

THE HONOURABLE SENATORS

Anderson	Harder
Arnot	Hartling
Audette	Jaffer
Black	Klyne
Boehm	LaBoucane-Benson
Boniface	Lankin
Bovey	Loffreda
Boyer	Marwah
Brazeau	McCallum
Busson	McPhedran
Campbell	Mégie
Clement	Mercer
Cordy	Miville-Dechêne
Cormier	Moncion
Coyle	Moodie
Dasko	Omidvar
Deacon (<i>Nova Scotia</i>)	Pate
Deacon (<i>Ontario</i>)	Quinn
Dean	Ravalia
Downe	Ringuette
Duncan	Saint-Germain
Dupuis	Simons
Forest	Sorensen

Nil

• (2010)

ABSTENTIONS

THE HONOURABLE SENATORS

CRIMINAL CODE CANADA LABOUR CODE

BILL TO AMEND—FIRST READING

The Hon. the Speaker: informed the Senate that a message had been received from the House of Commons with Bill C-3, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Canada Labour Code.

(Bill read first time.)

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, when shall this bill be read the second time?

(On motion of Senator Gold, bill placed on the Orders of the Day for second reading at the next sitting of the Senate.)

(*At 8:15 p.m., the Senate was continued until tomorrow at 10 a.m.*)

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