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Speaker: The Honourable Francis Scarpaleggia



CONTENTS

(Table of Contents appears at back of this issue.)

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, February 3, 2026

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

• (1000)
[English]

HOUSE OF COMMONS

The Speaker: I invite the House to take note that today we are using the wooden mace. This mace is a reminder of the fire that claimed seven lives and destroyed the original Parliament Buildings, except for the library, on the night of February 3, 1916.

Among the items destroyed in that fire was the old mace. The wooden copy that we see today was subsequently made and was used temporarily until the current one was given to us by the United Kingdom in 1917.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

CERTIFICATES OF NOMINATION

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 110(2), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the certificate of nomination with biographical notes for the proposed appointment of Anton Boegman as foreign influence transparency commissioner for a term of seven years. I request that the nomination and biographical notes be referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Jessica Fancy (South Shore—St. Margarets, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of my constituents of South Shore—St. Margarets, more narrowly the municipality of Barrington, and for the visitors and businesses of the municipality. Petitioners are calling on the government to take immediate action to improve cellular service in their community, citing that the government needs to work closely with telecommunications providers to expand coverage in underserved areas.

MENTAL HEALTH

Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise today to table a petition on behalf of Canadians deeply concerned about the worsening mental health and substance

use crisis across our country, a crisis that has only been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Petitioners note that too many Canadians are unable to access timely mental health or substance use supports. They point out that when care is not available in the community, people are left to rely on overcrowded hospital emergency rooms or primary care providers. Untreated or inadequately treated mental illness carries enormous social and economic costs.

The petitioners therefore call on the Government of Canada to take urgent action by legislating parity between physical and mental health in Canada's universal public health care system; ensuring timely access to evidence-based, culturally appropriate and publicly funded mental health and substance use services beyond hospital and physician settings; and, finally, establishing the Canada mental health transfer to sustainably fund these services, including an initial investment of \$4.5 billion to the provinces and territories.

Petitioners are clear: Canadians deserve a health care system where mental health is treated with the same urgency, priority and respect as physical health.

CHARITABLE INSTITUTIONS

Burton Bailey (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition calling upon the Government of Canada to protect the charitable status of religious institutions in Canada.

Religious charities and institutions play a critical role in our country and enrich our communities. Whether it is caring for those in need, fostering community spirit or simply bringing people together, despite conflicting reports coming from the government, petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada to maintain the charitable status of religious institutions and charities so they may continue the important work they do in our communities.

Business of Supply

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Burton Bailey (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would also like to present a petition on behalf of my constituents, calling on the Government of Canada to withdraw Bill C-9 and protect religious freedoms in this country. Petitioners note that the Liberal and Bloc amendment to Bill C-9 that passed at committee would remove the good-faith religious defence clause from the Criminal Code, therefore criminalizing sacred texts like the Bible and punishing and prosecuting Canadians for expressing deeply held beliefs.

Petitioners believe that freedom of expression and freedom of religion are fundamental rights that must be preserved. Freedom of religion and freedom of expression are embedded in our Charter of Rights and Freedoms. They form the bedrock of western democracy and led to the flourishing of societies for thousands of years. We must not drift into the postnational woke Millism of the far left.

• (1005)

The Speaker: I just want to remind members that for the period of routine proceedings, we summarize the petitions rather than make statements.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[For text of questions and responses, see *Written Questions website*]

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—FOOD AFFORDABILITY

Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable—Lotbinière, CPC) moved:

That, given that the finance minister promised in October 2023 that food prices would stabilize "soon" and that the Prime Minister stated in May 2025 that he would be judged by the prices at the grocery store, and that,

- (i) Canadians face the highest food inflation in the G7,
- (ii) food inflation is twice as high as it was when the Prime Minister took office,
- (iii) food inflation in Canada is twice as high as it is in the United States,
- (iv) Canadians made 2.2 million visits a month to food banks,
- (v) food bank use has more than doubled since the Liberals took power,

the House call on the government to immediately introduce a Food Affordability Plan that:

- (a) removes the Liberals' hidden taxes on food, including,
 - (i) the industrial carbon tax on farm equipment, fertilizer, and food processors, that drives up the costs of producing food and are passed onto consumers,
 - (ii) the fuel standards tax, which is seven cents a litre and rising to 17 cents a litre on farmers, truckers, and those who bring us our food,

(iii) the food packaging tax that will cost Canadians \$1.3 billion; and

(b) boosts competition in our overly-concentrated grocery sector.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my excellent colleague from Oshawa.

I will quote the Leader of the Opposition who said, "This Liberal government doesn't just leave people behind. It prices and shuts out youth from homes, workers from jobs, and families from groceries."

That is the theme of today's opposition motion. I will continue quoting Mr. Poilievre, who talks about the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister said that a country that cannot—

[English]

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

The member is not allowed to use names, including his leader's name.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): I encourage the member to use titles.

[Translation]

Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, I was quoting the Leader of the Opposition who was reiterating what the Prime Minister said, and that is that a country that cannot feed itself has few options. Well, food inflation has doubled under his watch, and it is the worst in the G7. Groceries will cost the average family an almost unimaginable \$17,600 this year. That is after-tax money.

As a result, today's motion is absolutely essential to give families a break so that they are not afraid to go grocery shopping. Right now, families are going grocery shopping with a calculator in hand. They are putting products back on the shelves. They are wondering which bills will go unpaid so that the fridge will not be empty.

What is the government doing while Canadians are making impossible choices? It is doing what it has been doing since the election: making promises, holding meetings, making announcements and speeches, and patting itself on the back for measures that merely stick band-aids on problems that the Liberals themselves created, and meanwhile the bill for Canadians continues to rise.

In October 2023, the current Minister of Finance, who held a different position at the time, said and promised that food prices would stabilize soon. He even held a big meeting with the CEOs of Loblaw, Sobeys, Metro, Costco and Walmart. After that meeting, he said he was reassured to see that these people were committed to listening to him and lowering food prices. What has happened since then? The price of food kept going up.

Business of Supply

The Prime Minister himself said that he would be judged by the prices at the grocery store. Well, Canadians are judging him and the verdict is harsh. What are the facts? Canada has the highest food inflation. The numbers are staggering. In December, food inflation in Canada was 6.2%. In the United States, it was 3.1%. That is half as high for our neighbours to the south as it is here in Canada. Worse yet, Canada tops the G7 when it comes to food inflation.

While the Prime Minister makes speeches and holds press conferences, Canadians are footing the bill. It is true and we see it every time we go to the cash register or walk down the grocery aisles. The price of beef has gone up by 16%; oranges, 15%; apples, 10%; lettuce, 12%; coffee and tea, 26%. Even roasted or ground coffee has increased by 41%. Food inflation has doubled since the Prime Minister was elected, so it is up to Canadians to decide whether the Prime Minister gets a passing grade for grocery prices.

There is a problem with that and it has a major impact for a country like Canada. Hunger is becoming normalized. People are getting used to prices at the grocery store that make no sense. What does it mean when the cost of groceries skyrockets? Community organizations have to fill the void. We have heard many stories over the past few months that make it clear that these organizations are overwhelmed by everything going on right now in Canada. According to Food Banks Canada, close to 2.2 million Canadians are using food banks. Once again, 2.2 million Canadians are using food banks every month. It is not because people are not working. One in five people relying on food banks has a job. What does that mean? Unfortunately, it means that working no longer prevents people from going hungry in Canada—a G7 country, one of the world's powerful countries and a country with the greatest resources. This is happening right here in Canada after 10 years of inflationary Liberal policies.

As I said earlier, the numbers have doubled under the Liberals. In 2014, 841,000 Canadians were using food banks every month. Now, that number is 2.2 million. The unthinkable is happening. Hunger is becoming normal. Meanwhile, we hear the Liberals boasting and saying that they have a plan to deal with the cost of groceries.

• (1010)

We hear the Prime Minister say that we should judge him by grocery prices. We are hearing announcements about helping Canadians deal with the rising cost of groceries, but what is the real plan to tackle inflation? For the Liberals, it seems like the plan is to make food banks become the government's policy to help struggling Canadians, and that is unacceptable.

The Prime Minister loves to say that this is a global crisis. If it were global, we would see the same results everywhere. However, that is not the case. Food inflation in Canada is the highest in the G7, and it is twice as high as it is in the United States. What accounts for the difference? Government-imposed costs all along the food supply chain, that is what.

First, there is the industrial carbon tax. It applies to key things like farm equipment, inputs and processing. It drives up the cost of production, which raises food prices down the line. We hear the Liberals say that businesses are paying it. Yes, but in the real world,

businesses are not charities. They pass the cost on to their consumers, their customers.

Then there is the fuel standard. This is another hidden tax on the fuel used by farmers and truckers in the supply chains, and under the Liberals, it will go up to 17¢ a litre. A litre of fuel will cost more. What do members think will happen then? Do they think businesses are going to absorb that cost in the spirit of collaboration and everyone will be happy? They would not be able to make ends meet in those circumstances. They would not have any other choice but to increase the prices of their products and to pass the cost on to consumers, to mothers, to young, single mothers, to parents with children who play sports. These people will all have to make difficult choices at the grocery store yet again.

Finally, the new packaging policy and the ban on certain plastics, which, like it or not, is another hidden tax. This is a tax that will take \$1.3 billion out of the pockets of taxpayers, yet again. What does the government expect when it adds costs to producers, processors, transporters and retailers? Does it expect prices to go down when it increases costs continuously? Well, no, prices will go up. That is basic math.

Moreover, the band-aid solutions proposed by the government will not mean prices will come down and stay down. The government expects people to believe it is taking action when it increases some benefit here, a payment there, but where does all this money come from? It comes from taxpayers. The government will give back a portion to taxpayers, and an amount that is more or less equivalent to \$10 a week a year for a family, and yet families will need to spend \$17,000 a year. They are being offered a weekly \$10 coupon even though data show prices will increase by \$1,000 this year. Metro recently announced a 3% price hike on all its basic grocery items.

I therefore invite all members to support this motion so we do not forget that each of the statistics I just mentioned represents a family forced to cut back on groceries, on what they eat, on nutritious food for children and the whole family.

• (1015)

[English]

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, contrary to the misinformation of the Conservatives, Canada is not broken.

In looking at the food price inflation the member is talking about, has a member ever thought, “Why do we not take a look at the last five years?” If he did, he would find that, cumulatively, Canada is not the worst in the G7.

Business of Supply

Instead, after a challenging year, we have a government and a Prime Minister who have responded. We saw that response yesterday with the groceries and essentials benefit, which is putting tangible dollars into the pockets of Canadians. The Conservatives reluctantly allowed that legislation to pass on division.

Does the hon. member support the Liberal initiative that was presented yesterday?

[*Translation*]

Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, honestly, I am not sure what that means, but that is certainly not how the Conservatives decided to support that measure.

Of course, we are going to support a measure that will give Canadians a little money to deal with a decade of inflation, a decade of rising prices, the worst inflation we have ever seen, the worst inflation in the G7. Of course, Canadians will be grateful to receive this helpful \$10 coupon every week.

Meanwhile, prices keep rising. Government cheques cannot keep pace. This government is forgetting one thing: If it does not address the causes of inflation, inflation will continue. If the government continues to spend, prices will continue to rise and families will pay too much.

• (1020)

Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to know what my colleague thinks about the following point. These last two Parliaments, the Conservatives have devoted almost all of their opposition days to abolishing the carbon tax. The Conservatives said it was driving up food prices. The Liberals took a page from the Conservative playbook and abolished the carbon tax for individuals. However, it has not had any impact on food prices.

Apart from oil, does my colleague see any other factors that could be influencing food prices?

Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, if the carbon tax had not been abolished, food inflation would be even worse in this country.

Indeed, there are other factors that need to be addressed. I mentioned earlier that the current Minister of Finance and National Revenue, while in another position, met with the heads of the major grocery companies. What was the result? Absolutely nothing.

We need to tackle the issue of competition. We need to ensure that competition in Canada is strong enough to help bring prices down. We are certainly not going to see action like that from a government that favours these grocery CEOs.

[*English*]

Carol Anstey (Long Range Mountains, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting that, whenever Conservatives stand up to speak to the issues and concerns, and back it up with statistical data, the members opposite like to say that we are quoting misinformation.

What is more important is what we are hearing from our constituents. Because the Liberals also like to say that they are solving every problem, life is not so bad and they are coming forward with solutions, I would just like to give my colleague an opportunity to talk a bit more about what he is hearing from his constituents on a regular basis on this issue.

[*Translation*]

Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, every week, when I go grocery shopping with my wife, people talk to me about prices. Every time, I am told that it has become so expensive to buy beef for the family that they have to choose something else. Almost every time, I see someone put something back on the shelf because they cannot afford it. We are seeing more and more acts of generosity from Canadians. Some will offer to pay the difference. I saw that at least once. People are doing great things, but unfortunately, it does not seem that the government wants to tackle food inflation. That is why we are asking it to support this motion today to lower grocery costs.

[*English*]

Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague talked about grocery store prices doubling. Well, guess what else doubled: margins from the big grocery stores. They are posting record profits. My colleague talked about the Liberals' bringing the big grocery stores together to have a conversation, but nothing has happened. This requires government intervention and an excess profit tax.

Does my colleague agree that there needs to be a threshold, that the big corporations profiteering on the backs of everyday people need to be reined in, and that an excess profit tax would do just that?

[*Translation*]

Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, I almost agreed with my colleague, but not quite. We will not go that far, but it is clear that the grocery giants must do more to lower food inflation. It is not right that profits of this magnitude are being distributed among the grocery giants while people cannot pay their grocery bills.

[*English*]

Rhonda Kirkland (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as always, it is a privilege to rise in the House on behalf of my wonderful neighbours in Oshawa. My neighbours are struggling today after 1,200 folks worked their last shift, the auto workers in Oshawa, but today I am here to speak to other measures of affordability that should help those folks and to our Conservative motion, which is a solution-oriented proposal. It would provide relief at the grocery store for all Canadians.

Over the course of the last campaign and in every week since, I have had numerous conversations with Oshawa residents that have stayed with me. They begin with concerns about grocery prices, and they often end with something deeper. Canadians are tired. They are anxious. They are worried. They are wondering how a basic necessity such as food has become the heavy burden.

Business of Supply

My neighbours in Oshawa whom I speak with are not asking for luxuries or handouts. They are asking this simple, honest question: How are they supposed to keep feeding their families when prices rise month after month and their paycheques do not?

In Oshawa, this pressure is visible everywhere. Families who once felt stable are now stretched to their limits. Seniors who planned carefully for retirement are making painful choices between groceries and other essentials. Workers who do everything right are discovering that hard work alone is no longer enough to keep up.

Tiffany Kift is the executive director of Simcoe Hall Settlement House, which has a food bank in Oshawa, and she shared with me what she is seeing first-hand. Families who have never needed help before are now walking into the food bank for the first time. These are working families, even dual-income households. They are grandparents raising grandchildren and people who have finally secured housing but have absolutely nothing for food inside it. She also shared something that should concern every member of the House, no matter where they are sitting. The long-time donors, the people who have supported Simcoe Hall year after year, are no longer able to give, not because they do not care, but because they too are struggling just to meet their own basic needs. When even those who have always stepped up to help others are now struggling themselves, it is clear that this is not a short-term problem, but a systemic one.

Food affordability should never be a partisan issue, and it does not have to be. It should be a unifying one. Every member of the House represents people who are feeling this strain. This motion is brought forward in that spirit, with the goal of providing real relief and restoring confidence that Parliament can deliver practical results.

Today, Canada has the highest food inflation of the G7. I have heard some members blame that on climate change. I guess they assume the other six nations do not also experience climate change. Food inflation is twice as high as it was when the Prime Minister took office and roughly double what families are experiencing in the United States. Food bank usage has more than doubled, as we have heard many times, with 2.2 million visits in a single month. These outcomes did not happen by accident; they are the result of policy choices that have been made here in Ottawa by the government. Importantly, and here is the good news, that means they can also be corrected by the government here in Ottawa.

When we talk about correcting course, we are really talking about restoring trust. Canadians want to know that, when a policy is not working, their government has not just the humility to acknowledge it but also the courage to change direction. It is not a sign of weakness; it is a sign of accountability and strength, which is always welcomed in the House of Commons.

Across Oshawa, people tell me they feel unheard. They feel like their lived experiences are being debated away by statistics or delayed by process, but behind every statistic is a real person, and behind every food bank visit is a story of stress, sacrifice and uncertainty. Parliament has a responsibility to meet those realities with action, and that is why Conservatives are deliberately framing this motion in a way that invites co-operation. Food affordability is not

solved by ideology; it is solved by practical steps that lower costs and make markets work better for consumers. Canadians expect us to focus on what works and not on who wins the argument.

● (1025)

It is also important to recognize that this crisis is affecting rural and urban communities alike. Farmers face higher input costs, truckers face higher fuel costs, small grocers struggle to compete, and families, regardless of income or region, feel the impact at the checkout counter. When one part of the system is under pressure, the entire system feels it. That is why this motion takes a comprehensive approach. It recognizes the interconnected nature of food affordability and the need for solutions that support producers, workers and consumers all at the same time.

Conservatives are not interested in trading accusations with other parties in this chamber. We are focused on solutions. That is why this motion calls on the government to introduce a serious food affordability plan aimed at lowering costs and strengthening competition, which will ease some of the relief at the grocery store.

Food prices rise when costs are layered onto the people who grow, process, transport and sell our food. These costs do not disappear. They are, as the member before me said, passed directly on to consumers. These businesses are not charities, so they are going to simply pass the industrial carbon tax cost onto consumers.

This motion proposes removing hidden taxes. They are not imaginary; they are there, but they are hidden. They are not in the line items. They are driving food prices up higher, including the industrial carbon tax on farm equipment, fertilizer and food processing. The fuel standard tax will increase transportation costs. Of course, the food packaging tax will cost Canadians \$1.3 billion. I can promise members that this \$1.3 billion is not imaginary. These are food packaging taxes that are paid by the consumer every time they go to the grocery store. Removing these costs is not ideological. It is practical relief that can make an immediate difference for Canadian families that are struggling.

Affordability also depends on competition. Canada's grocery sector is highly concentrated, and when competition is weak, prices rise and choice shrinks. Strengthening competition means enforcing the rules fairly, encouraging new entrants and ensuring that farmers and suppliers are treated with respect. These are reasonable, balanced measures that would help restore affordability while supporting Canadian businesses.

Business of Supply

Conservatives are ready to work in the House to deliver results for Canadians. This motion does not demand agreement on every issue. It asks us to come together around a shared goal that matters to every Canadian household: Make food more affordable. Canadians are not asking Parliament to be perfect. They are asking it to be responsive. They want co-operation where it is possible and solutions where they are needed, not empty promises that tell them to just keep waiting, because they have been waiting for things to get better for years now.

In Oshawa and across the country, people want to believe their elected representatives can rise above division and act in the national interest. Supporting this motion is an opportunity to show Canadians that we are listening, that we take their struggles seriously and that we are prepared to work together to fix what is not working. Conservatives stand ready to work constructively with our colleagues in the House to lower food prices, support Canadian farmers and businesses, strengthen competition and restore affordability.

Canadians are watching today. They are counting on us to act with urgency, humility and resolve. I urge all members to support this motion and send a clear message to Canadians that their Parliament hears them, respects them, works together and is prepared to deliver real relief.

• (1030)

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is just it. The government, the Prime Minister and, in fact, every Liberal member of Parliament understand the sensitivity of this issue. That is why we introduced Bill C-19 yesterday, which would provide support for groceries and essentials. This is something the government has responded to in a very tangible way. We listened to the Conservative speeches yesterday. Yes, they allowed it to go forward, but, at the end of the day, the government and the Prime Minister understand the issue. We are taking specific actions to support Canadians.

Why does the Conservative Party not act, as opposed to just talking about being sympathetic to Canadians?

• (1035)

Rhonda Kirkland: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite sounds angry. The truth is that he would be angrier if he realized that the simple measure we Conservatives agreed to yesterday is one that should provide some relief for some Canadians, but that relief is about \$10 on a \$300 grocery order.

The truth is that long-term solutions are what we need. Short-term, band-aid help is welcome, but it is not going to solve the problem of higher food prices. It is not making a difference to Canadians in the long run at the grocery store. That is what we are asking for today. We will support short-term measures, but let us get down to it and make some long-term solutions.

[Translation]

Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is far from clear that the taxes aimed at preventing pollution from everything oil-related are actually linked to food prices. However, pollution increases climate change and all its impacts, such as floods and

forest fires. That creates considerable costs for farmers, and the bill is then passed on to consumers.

Has my colleague taken that into account?

[English]

Rhonda Kirkland: Mr. Speaker, I saw a sign a couple of years ago in Ottawa before I was elected, and it struck home with me. It said that as long as the world needs oil and gas, it might as well be Canadian. The truth is that the world is still using oil and gas. Canada has it and can provide it.

How much better would it be for us to provide it, and also eliminate the industrial carbon tax, than for countries like Russia to provide it to Europe? We could potentially even help countries like Ukraine a whole lot more if we were providing oil and gas. We could help Europe get off Russian oil and gas so it can end the war in Ukraine as well.

Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we all want small, medium and large businesses to win. We all want that, but when the only winners, when it comes to groceries and food prices, are the big corporations, and the only losers are everyday people across this country, something has to be done. The member highlighted and claimed that Canada has the highest grocery prices in the G7. Guess what else we have? We have the lowest corporate taxes in the G7. Big grocery stores are posting record profits.

Does my colleague not agree that there needs to be a threshold when it comes to profiteering by big grocery stores? This is a time when we need to work collectively on solutions.

She is right that the government says it brought the big grocery stores together to work on dealing with the inflationary costs happening on food, but nothing has happened. The Liberals got nothing done.

Rhonda Kirkland: Mr. Speaker, there is so much to unpack there. I agree and disagree with different portions of what the member asked me.

I lived in China for a couple of years, and I will always say no to policies that sound quite Communist. I will say yes to increasing competition among our grocery stores. If we increase competition and get rid of our industrial carbon tax, we are going to make groceries more affordable for everyday Canadians.

• (1040)

Carlos Leitão (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my turn to say a few words on this issue. I will try to stick to four topics, and I count on your assistance to keep me on track.

It will not surprise anyone if I say that I do not agree with the motion of the opposition, because it is way off base.

Let us talk about one of the four points I want to talk about. Let us talk about inflation, because that is a theme that keeps coming back among the Conservatives. It is “inflation this” and “inflation that”. “Inflation is out of control, and it is all the fault of the government. The inflationary policies of the Liberals caused inflation to get out of the bag.”

Inflation got out of the bag after COVID. It hit all developed countries at about the same time and at about the same pace. Canada was actually the country where inflation got back to a more normal level ahead of all the other G7 countries. In fact, much to the distress of our Conservative friends, the Bank of Canada did a very good job. We know the Conservatives wanted to fire the Governor of the Bank of Canada. Actually, the central bank in Canada brought inflation back down to the 2% range, way ahead of everybody else, and inflation in Canada has been at around 2% now for well over one year. While the Conservatives like to make comparisons to inflation in the United States, and to how good things are in the U.S., it is not yet back within that range there.

Another aspect that disturbs me a little when we hear about inflation from our Conservative friends is that they pick and choose the numbers they want to quote. They picked this moment to talk about food inflation, which is at 6%. Technically, in December, they were correct, as food inflation in Canada was 6.2%. Of course, Conservatives forgot to mention that it was entirely the result of base effects. I will come back to base effects, because it is important to understand what those are. I know the Conservatives understand them, because they picked the right moment to quote 6%. I wonder what Conservatives will say, for example, in the month of March, when those base effects will have disappeared and, most likely, food inflation will be at about 2%. Then we will not hear a word from them about food inflation. However, I will come back to the base effects.

Having said that inflation is back inside the normal range, it is true that the cost of living is high. As politicians, especially those of us who are economists, we have a duty to make sure our constituents understand that inflation and the cost of living are not quite the same thing. Inflation is the rate of increase in prices; the cost of living is the price level. The price level is affected by the cumulative impact of past inflation. Even though inflation is now back at 2%, the cumulative impact of the last four years has made it so that the price level is indeed very high.

Now our friends are proposing that we bring the price level down. Is the Conservative Party really sure it wants to have a price level drop in Canada? Do members know what that is called? It is called “deflation”. Deflation usually only happens if there is a massive economic depression. Is that what Conservatives want? Bravo, if that is what they want. The Conservatives want to bring down the price level. The Conservatives want Canada to plunge into a deflationary cycle. The Conservatives want a massive economic depression. We do not want that.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Carlos Leitão: Precisely. This is getting a little out of hand, and—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): Order, please.

Business of Supply

I am going to pause for just a second. I would ask the hon. parliamentary secretary to move his cellphone off the desk; it is too close to the microphone for the interpreters.

• (1045)

[*Translation*]

Yves Perron: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

The interpreters are saying that there is too much background noise. I myself was having a hard time hearing. Maybe people could listen first and then respond.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): I thank the hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé. He is right. There is too much noise. The interpreters are having trouble. We have two official languages, and we must have access to interpretation according to procedure.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry.

Carlos Leitão: Mr. Speaker, I apologize for leaving my phone on the desk. I was using it to keep an eye on the time, but I understand. I will also try to be more measured with my remarks because I see that it is causing some commotion.

I was talking about deflation and saying that we do not want to trigger deflation. At the same time, we recognize that the cost of living is very high and that this is affecting different people differently. We are saying, and rightly so, that average wages have increased faster than inflation. That is true. However, average wages vary widely. Not everybody earns average wages. Those at the low end of the pay scale have not experienced these wage increases.

This relates to food inflation because it is particularly problematic when it comes to daily living expenses and essential household spending, including housing and food. Food inflation is very high in Canada, just as it is in all G7 countries.

Let us talk about food inflation. What is driving it, what set it off and what fuels it? Generally, inflation stems from a mismatch between supply and demand. Food inflation in particular is driven by the mismatch between supply and demand. Since 2022-23, it has been primarily due to supply issues. The pandemic and the period that followed caused major disruptions across supply chains. A series of shocks affected markets in developed countries and saw food inflation soar at an exceptionally high rate.

Business of Supply

It is not quite accurate to say that government policies caused these shocks. That is not the case. The Canadian governments public policy has nothing to do with the shortage of coffee on the market. I have never seen any coffee plantations in Saskatchewan. There are none. Canada does not produce coffee, so we have to import it. Global markets are facing a coffee shortage. I mentioned coffee because our Conservative friends always talk about coffee when they list all the items that have gone up by 30%, 40% or 50%. There is a global coffee shortage.

On top of that, our American neighbours decided to put a tariff on Brazilian coffee because they dislike the Brazilian government. Just like that, Brazilian coffee is suddenly subject to a tariff. Much of the coffee we drink in Canada is produced in the United States, so we are feeling the impact of this U.S. tariff as well.

Another very important factor in the rising food inflation seen in North America—in the United States and Canada—is the higher cost of meat.

• (1050)

[English]

Beef prices are very high in Canada and in the United States. It has nothing to do with government policy and everything to do with climate change. Crop failures, forest fires, droughts and all of that have made it so that cattle producers have had to sharply reduce the size of their herds. There is no meat available, which is why prices have gone through the roof. It is supply and demand. Supply has been hit by a sequence of events, and demand has remained relatively stable; therefore, prices go up, and they have gone up very rapidly in Canada and the United States.

One of the solutions would be to open up and import more beef from overseas, but even overseas the quantities available are rather limited, so that is a major issue. Then, as beef prices increase, there is a cascading impact on many other types of protein available in supermarkets as people try to substitute other products for beef, so many other prices also go up. This is a major issue that affects food prices.

Let us go back to those base effects. As for our friends on the other side, I congratulate their strategists because they chose the right time to come up with the 6.2%, which is a real number. It exists, but it is entirely misleading because it is a base effect.

What happened one year ago, in December 2024? There was a temporary three-month reduction in the GST on many products, including some prepared foods, meals in restaurants, etc. That made it so that food prices one year ago dropped sharply, so when we compare December 2024 to December 2025, we have this 6.2% increase.

The Conservatives then say, “It is the highest increase in the G7. My God, it is one of the highest in the world. Look at what the Liberals have done.” They forgot to look at the recent monthly pattern in food price increases. If they had done that, they would have realized there has been a significant slowdown in food prices from month to month. It was something like 0.8% in October, then it went down to about 0.1% or 0.2%, and I suspect in about a week or 10 days, when the next CPI report comes out, we will see that on a month-to-month basis, food prices continue to be moderate, even if,

on a year-over-year basis, January will likely be even above 6%. It will probably be something like 7% or 8%, and the Conservatives will once again cry that this is terrible.

I ask members to please look at the month-to-month evolution of food prices, and they will notice, if they are honest with themselves, that there is a marked slowdown in food prices. It is beginning to work. It is beginning to trickle down, and we are slowly but clearly bringing back food price growth to a more sustainable level.

Let us get back to the motion of our colleagues. I still have some time, but not much. The Conservatives keep coming back with the industrial carbon tax. They say, “If we just eliminate the industrial carbon tax, my God, the world will be so much better. Everything will disappear, and this will be a wonderful world.” This surprises me a lot coming from Conservatives. I have grey hair, so I remember things that happened in the past. I do not understand why our friends do not appreciate, or have ceased to appreciate, market-based mechanisms to resolve problems.

There were those raving lunatics, raving socialists, such as Brian Mulroney and Ronald Reagan, who came up with tough regulations and legislation to control acid rain, which was a huge problem. It was solved because those raving socialists, Mulroney and Reagan, did a bilateral agreement.

• (1055)

An hon. member: He is being sarcastic.

Carlos Leitão: Mr. Speaker, am I being sarcastic? Of course I am. Of course I am.

It worked. Market-based mechanisms worked, and acid rain stopped being the problem it was. The industrial carbon tax is in the same vein of mechanisms. It will be with a robust industrial carbon tax that we will accelerate our transition to a less carbon-intensive economy. It does not mean we will all of a sudden stop producing oil, of course not, but our economy will become a lot less carbon-intensive.

This will not happen by magic or any other way; it will happen if we have regulations and policies in place that provide the necessary incentives, market-based mechanisms, things that Conservatives, true Conservatives, really supported in the past and implemented in the past.

The industrial carbon tax is not going to come down, and the industrial carbon tax does not contribute to high food prices. It has zero impact on food prices. Another thing our friends often mention, and it is in their motion, is fuel regulations. They say we should not have any fuel regulations; let us burn everything in the air, who cares? Let us bring back lead. Let us put lead back in gasoline. Why not?

Business of Supply

We need to have effective fuel regulations, fuel standards, for the benefit of ourselves, of our children, of our grandchildren. This does not lead to higher food prices. This business of food prices in Canada being driven by “hidden taxes”, well, no; those are indeed imaginary taxes because they have no impact on the retail food price.

In closing, because I think I am getting close to that, to address the issues of affordability, we need to make sure citizens have sufficient income to afford essential goods, to afford food. This what the government is doing with our groceries and essentials benefit. It is rapidly and efficiently transferring additional funds, particularly to people at the low end of the income scale, so they can face what is admittedly a tough situation with very high food prices at this time. It is by improving incomes that we improve affordability.

Carol Anstey (Long Range Mountains, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member from across the way for the lesson. I am not sure how he might go to a food bank lineup with that lesson and give that to Canadians who are really struggling right now. One of the criticisms he brought forward is this moment in time that he is criticizing us for, with respect to food inflation rates. The prediction is, however, that over this year we are in right now, in 2026, grocery prices are predicted to go up by another \$1,000, twice as fast as in the U.S.

How does he square that with these criticisms he is coming at us with, on the motion we are putting forward, as we are paying attention to the real needs and concerns of Canadians who do not want a lesson in economics but want the government to be serious about this issue?

Carlos Leitão: Mr. Speaker, there are many things I could talk about, but I do not have much time. I do note the reality of food banks. There is a very important one in my riding, Moisson Laval. During the Christmas holiday period, I visited them. I worked with them. They, with other food banks in the Montreal area, were among the first to suggest to us that we should find ways to increase the incomes of everyday families so they could afford food. To afford food, we need to have the income. We need income support. Conservatives, I think, to this day do not quite understand what income support is.

• (1100)

[*Translation*]

Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I know the parliamentary secretary is an intelligent man with a solid grasp of economic concepts. I would like him to tell me his opinion of the grocery industry. We know that the five major grocery store chains control 80% of the market. They appeared twice in committee last year, but we did not get any information out of them. They are very tight-lipped. They still say that margin percentages are unchanged, yet their profits are skyrocketing before our eyes.

Does my colleague think it might be a good idea to create some sort of price-fixing observatory for this sector? Is his government prepared to consider that? Increased competition is a good idea, but it is only achievable over the very long term. I would like to hear my colleague's opinion.

Carlos Leitão: Mr. Speaker, one of the problems that we have in Canada is that our food distribution industry is highly concentrated.

There are a few suppliers, a few businesses that operate in that sector. These businesses are also large conglomerates that have other much more profitable activities. However, we have found that grocery stores' operating margins do not seem to be out of the ordinary compared to what has happened in the past.

Of course, it is very useful and important to continue monitoring the situation to ensure that there are no unexplained price increases.

[*English*]

Hon. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have been sitting here for 20 minutes listening to a former finance minister of Quebec, who served for four years in that position, try to explain to the House, at a very elementary level, and in particular to the Conservatives, why deflation is not a good thing, and all I could hear was them laughing at him.

The reality is that the Conservatives' suggestions on this will not come to fruition. The member does not have the benefit of having sat here for five years listening to the Conservatives say, day after day, that if we got rid of the carbon tax all food prices would suddenly drop. The carbon tax is now gone and what happened? Did any food prices drop? No. According to the Conservatives, this has been the worst year. That is what they have been saying, and that is what this motion is saying.

Could the member take the opportunity once again to explain why the elimination of these price mechanisms, which he so eloquently indicated the Conservatives believe in, would not work?

Carlos Leitão: Mr. Speaker, obviously, I agree entirely with what my colleague just mentioned.

When we want to change a behaviour, when we want individuals or corporations to behave in a different way, we use policy tools. We use incentives. We use market-based incentives to achieve that goal. That is what we think should happen. Just like the consumer carbon tax had no impact on food prices, removing the industrial carbon tax would have zero impact on food prices, and it would remove a very useful tool that we have to reduce pollution.

Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, there is one part of this motion that I could agree with, which is point (b): that we need to boost competition. When we look at why food prices in Canada are higher, it has to do with the big, giant grocery stores having a much larger concentration of ownership in our market. I grew up in Atlantic Canada, where I belonged to a co-op. The co-op grocery stores across Canada continue to have lower food prices than the big giants: the Loblaws, the Sobeys, the Metros, so on and so forth.

Business of Supply

I want to ask the hon. parliamentary secretary if we could seize this moment to develop a real analysis of our food systems in order to bring down prices and increase nutritional value? Could we not also look at local food and stopping food waste so that people know how to cook and use food well and economically?

• (1105)

Carlos Leitão: Mr. Speaker, it might not surprise the House that I agree entirely with what my colleague is saying.

When I visited Moisson Laval, the food bank in my riding, one of the things it is doing is not just distributing food to people in need but also creating groups or classes, for lack of a better word, to pass on information to the users of the food banks on how they could best maximize their meagre dollars and continue to provide food for their families, but in a more rational way. It is also doing that. Therefore, I think it is important to support local initiatives and smaller grocery stores, which, indeed, have a role to play. We have to find a way to give them enough space so that they can thrive as well.

Sandra Cobena (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a lot of respect for the member, but I was deeply disappointed to hear the opening of his speech where he said that he disagrees with everything that the Conservatives are proposing. Does he disagree with increasing competition in grocery chains?

Every first-year economics student learns that when markets have more competition, it drives prices down, it disciplines profits and it improves efficiency. Monopolies and oligopolies do exactly the opposite. They keep prices artificially high. Does the member disagree with the Conservative proposal to increase competition in grocery chains, or does he disagree with the laws of supply, demand and efficient markets?

Carlos Leitão: Mr. Speaker, obviously supply and demand is the name of the game. Indeed, competition is key in food processing and in food distribution. In any one industry, competition is key.

There are many different ways we can stimulate competition. One of the things that I agree with the previous speaker on is that we have to find enough space for locally owned, smaller grocery stores to be able to operate. There are issues in competition that prevent smaller companies from opening stores. I think we can address that and we should address that.

[*Translation*]

Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there has been talk about supply. I would like to know what my colleague thinks about the following. To improve the supply of imported fruits and vegetables, the government could promote greenhouse cultivation. It could also stop making cuts to agriculture, particularly to research centres. This would enable farmers to adapt and to develop technology to be more competitive.

The government recently announced that it will be closing several research centres, including the one in Sainte-Foy.

Carlos Leitão: Mr. Speaker, yes, greenhouse fruit and vegetable production will be included in our bill, which we will be discussing this afternoon in committee. We are including measures in that bill to promote greenhouse cultivation, vertical farming and urban agriculture. I think all of that is very important.

As for the research centres, I think there was some consolidation going on. The work will continue to be done, but perhaps at fewer physical locations. The important work that these research centres do will continue.

Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak to this issue this morning. I would like to say that I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Repentigny.

I said I was pleased. To clarify, I am pleased to be able to express my opinions, but I am not exactly thrilled with the content of the motion. I will explain why.

Once again, our colleagues in the Conservative Party are very good at identifying a real, serious and significant problem that is concerning to people back home and that is making life more difficult for our constituents, namely inflation at the grocery store. It is appalling.

However, I am not exactly thrilled with the proposed solutions, which are the same as usual. We are being asked to remove all taxes and anything that might prevent our oil industry friends from making money and polluting the planet as much as they want. We are told that this will solve everything, even though the past year has shown that this is not true. The federal consumer carbon tax has been removed in provinces other than Quebec. For about three years, the Conservatives went on and on about how the carbon tax had to be removed and how that would magically fix everything, and yet grocery prices have not gone down.

Unfortunately, I do not think they are going to go down. The focus needs to be on stopping the increases. In the meantime, we need to have buffers while we wait for wages to catch up with prices. The big issue we are seeing is that inflation, which was caused or triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic in particular and also by global tensions, has meant that the cost of food has risen faster than people's incomes. That is why there is an imbalance.

In addition, the same thing happened with housing. Due to the scarcity of housing and the ability to telework, many people moved out to the regions. There are small villages in the regions where housing used to be more affordable. However, prices skyrocketed because everyone was moving all over the place. These are two factors that were very difficult to control during the pandemic.

I am not excusing the government, far from it. However, when people say that eliminating the industrial carbon tax will solve the problem, I am sorry, but that is not true. I am a little tired of these bogus solutions. I would like us to be constructive. Earlier, a Conservative member whose riding name I unfortunately did not write down rose to speak, and I was glad to hear her say things that I do not often hear from the Conservative Party. She suggested that we work together and show that we can be non-partisan and find solutions for our constituents. Yes, but let us propose real solutions.

When a party calls on all members to vote for a motion, it needs to put in a modicum of effort beforehand, talk to the other parties and not draft a motion containing falsehoods that we will not be able to condone, as the Conservatives know full well. Once again, we are debating a Conservative motion that identifies a real problem that people are experiencing, but instead of proposing concrete solutions, they present empty slogans so they can get sound bites, score political points and fundraise on social media. That is what Conservatives do all week long, but it is not what we are supposed to be doing here.

I would like us to raise the level of discourse a little and really look for solutions. To that end, I will try to be quick, although I do not have much speaking time, as usual.

First, the Conservatives say that “Canadians face the highest food inflation in the G7”. That was true in December 2025. I am pleased that there is something good in the motion. Perhaps the date should have been indicated. Historically, what the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry said earlier is also true. We outperformed other countries during COVID-19, but that is no reason to do nothing. When a government tells me that it is worse elsewhere, I say that if things are bad here at home, I do not necessarily want them to be worse somewhere else. I want things to improve for the people here at home. Let us find solutions. That is what I am looking for.

Food bank use is up. That is also true. The bill contains some good things. That is why I am deeply frustrated to have to vote against the motion. It acknowledges real problems, and then it turns around and offers us solutions like eliminating the industrial carbon tax. Come on.

I do not know if we say this often enough in the House, but 60% of our oil industry is foreign-owned. In other words, when we grant this industry subsidies or tax exemptions, despite its huge profits, for problems that they will not even resolve, we are sending money outside the country. Shareholders are receiving dividends outside Canada. We need to be serious and constructive. The motion talks about the fuel standards and the food packaging tax. Can the Conservatives stop calling everything they do not like a “tax”?

• (1110)

When people say that an intelligent approach to minimizing single-use plastics whenever possible would be good for the planet, that is not a tax. Rejecting plastic straws is not a tax. Cardboard straws are not so bad. I do not think it costs industries very much to adapt to changes like that.

People bring up specific examples, such as how long fresh vegetables stay fresh. It is true that plastic packaging for fresh vegeta-

Business of Supply

bles is still very important. It extends the shelf life of broccoli, cucumber, cauliflower and other vegetables by several days, keeping them fresh three or four times longer. If plastic packaging is suddenly banned and no substitutes are available, that will result in food waste and inflation.

They take that kind of things and say it all needs to go. Do members know what I mean? Can people stop generalizing? That is the main point I want to make.

There are things that need to be done in terms of food. I will not address the aspects of the motion that deal with carbon pricing. I think my colleague from Repentigny plans to talk about that anyway, since it is his area of expertise. Instead, I am going to talk about inflation. As I said, inflation has gone up and will go up again. General inflation is 2.5%, whereas food inflation is expected to be between 4% and 6% in 2026.

That is another response that I would prefer not to hear from the government anymore. During question period, we sometimes hear government members saying that inflation is under control and that it is 2.5%. That is true for general inflation, but we need to be careful. Sometimes that can be misleading. It is not true when it comes to food and housing. Those are the areas in which we need to act.

How do we do that? First, in the short term, we must quickly provide support to those who need it. Obviously, the lower a person's income compared to the average, the larger the share of their budget they will spend on food and housing. These are the people who need help, especially seniors on fixed pensions that are not sufficiently indexed.

We in the Bloc Québécois are leading this fight. Ever since I first became a member in this place, the Bloc Québécois has never stopped calling for a decent increase in OAS and an end to age discrimination. That would be one way to help people directly, and it could be done overnight. It would also be a very popular measure. That is what I would suggest. I think it should really be considered. These pensioners could then fill part of the labour shortage in our industries. The labour shortage is driving up costs, because people have to be paid more. It is a bit of a vicious circle. If pensioners were given a bigger clawback exemption and allowed to earn more than the current \$5,000, they could work more without being penalized. The same applies to anyone else in life: Everyone likes to work, but it has to be worth their while. If someone works and it costs them money, it is less appealing.

For young people, down payment assistance programs could be set up for young homebuyers. As for food banks, they could receive direct support. It is not the ideal solution, and it is sad when a government does that, but this is an emergency. Transfers to the provinces should also be increased to make everything work better.

Business of Supply

In addition, alongside all this, the Carney government has chosen to forgo revenue. It rescinded the tax on web giants. It cancelled the changes to the capital gains inclusion rate. It abandoned the countertariffs it had imposed. It scrapped the 15% minimum tax rate, which had achieved a broad consensus around the world. There are meaningful actions that could be taken.

In closing, I will talk about groceries. Earlier, I asked the parliamentary secretary a question about concentration in the grocery industry. I am familiar with the subject because I sat on the committee for years and took part in the studies on this issue. It is a real problem. When we asked the grocery chain representatives to provide us with their sales figures, they told us that that would not be possible because they were competing with each other. As for the parliamentary secretary's answer, I cannot say that he did not tell the truth. He said that the margins are unchanged. However, a profit of 2% of \$200,000 is not the same amount of money as a profit of 2% of \$50. Can we agree on that? It is a question of proportion.

Profits are increasing enormously, yet when we ask questions, we get no answers, particularly when we talk to suppliers, who are being mistreated. I am not going to get into the issue of the code of conduct, which is supposed to be in force and seems to be posing a lot of problems, but something needs to be done. For this reason, I think we need to look into the idea of having some kind of price-fixing observatory to monitor the grocery sector. Oligopolies are always harmful to ordinary people. It is not acceptable for these companies to rake in such huge profits while people are struggling to pay for their groceries.

• (1115)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): I would remind the hon. member that he must refer to the Prime Minister by his title, not by his name.

We will now proceed to questions and comments. The hon. member for Madawaska—Restigouche.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in his introduction, my colleague mentioned that it is important for us to work together constructively and to set aside partisanship in order to find solutions that meet the public's needs. He also mentioned his dissatisfaction with the fact that our Conservative colleagues are seeking to roll back our environmental protection measures.

However, in my book, actions speak louder than words. Last fall, our colleagues from the Bloc Québécois had the opportunity to do something meaningful for the environment by voting in favour of Bill C-241, introduced by my colleague from Terrebonne, which seeks to establish a national strategy for flood forecasting. My Bloc colleagues voted against the bill, even though they had voted for a similar version of the same bill in 2024.

Is that because this is no longer important to them or because something in the political context has changed and is now causing them to be guided by partisanship to the detriment of the environment?

• (1120)

Yves Perron: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I did not realize that I had said the Prime Minister's name earlier, so I apologize for that.

I always appreciate my colleague. He asked a very original question, because it is not often that I am accused of partisanship. I find it amusing, because he answered his own question. He spoke about a national strategy, yet Quebec is already handling these issues quite effectively, thanks very much.

Since I only had 10 minutes, I ran out of time, but in my speech, I talked about the importance of making adequate transfers to the provinces, including in health care, so that the provinces and Quebec can properly manage their areas of jurisdiction. It is a question of encroachment.

There are always nuances in voting. Whenever the hon. member has a question about a Bloc Québécois vote, I will be happy to clarify it for him.

Laila Goodridge (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is a real problem in Canada because food prices are on the rise and continue to rise month after month. We are seeing price increases at the grocery store, and Canadians are complaining about it.

My question is this: Does my colleague not think that we should find the root of the problem and address the issue that is causing grocery prices to rise so quickly in Canada, when they are not rising as quickly in other G7 countries and around the world? The reality is that grocery prices are rising faster in Canada than elsewhere.

Yves Perron: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her excellent and very interesting question. It was all good except the end, because that is not always true. I brought out some of the finer points about that in my speech earlier.

What I was trying to say is that we need to sincerely and seriously examine the root of the problem, as my colleague so rightly said. That is one of the suggestions that I made to the parliamentary secretary. We need to look at price fixing in the grocery sector by creating an observatory because this is an oligopoly that has far too much power.

We also need to continue with environmental protection measures because that also costs a lot of money. If my colleague would like, we can go together to talk to our produce growers who are dealing with drought one year and floods the next. The third year, their insurance payment for their crops is higher than all of their other payments and they are unable to make any more claims because, if they do, their insurance will go up again.

The goal is to provide proper support to farmers and not to cut funding to research centres. I am sure my colleague will agree with me on that.

Business of Supply

[English]

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I had a wonderful discussion with Canadian dairy farmers this morning. We talked about the whole supply management issue. Supply management is a wonderful way for Canadians to appreciate the whole issue of food security and food sovereignty. This is one of the reasons we have the Prime Minister and other members of the Liberal caucus speaking very positively on the whole issue of supply management. There was a motion that was brought forward by the Bloc. It is not very often that I agree with the Bloc, but on that particular motion, I was very agreeable.

Could the member provide his thoughts with regard to—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): The hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé.

[Translation]

Yves Perron: Mr. Speaker, it must be a good day, because there are good people on the Hill. I appreciate my colleague's comments, and I am glad he likes our legislation. He may not like what I am about to say quite as much, but I suspect that, if the law had not been passed in June, the government would have already given away something, since it has given everything away to the U.S. government so far.

However, my colleague is right about the fundamentals. Supply management ensures basic stability across Quebec and food stability for our population. That has been my argument for over six years. Let us use that model and look at the agricultural sectors that are struggling. Perhaps we could incorporate certain elements without changing everything and we could look at how prices are set, because there is a large margin between the farmer and the grocery store and there are things going on that are not right. We would like to see that, so let us get on with it.

* * *

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties and, if you seek it, I believe you will find unanimous consent for the following motion:

That, in relation to its study on trade diversification, six members of the Standing Committee on International Trade be authorized to travel to Brasilia, Brazil; and Buenos Aires, Argentina, in the winter/spring of 2026, during an adjournment period, and that the necessary staff accompany the Committee.

● (1125)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): All those opposed to the hon. member moving the motion will please say nay. It is agreed.

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

(Motion agreed to)

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—FOOD AFFORDABILITY

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Patrick Bonin (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thought that yesterday was Groundhog Day, but it seems to be happening again today. Everyone is probably familiar with the movie where the same day repeats itself over and over again. Once again, we have a Conservative Party motion that, unfortunately, exploits the hardship of Canadians who are struggling to put food on the table to serve the interests of the Conservatives' beloved petrochemical, oil and gas industry.

The Conservatives have spent almost all of their opposition days in the last two Parliaments saying that carbon pricing is to blame for the rising cost of living and the rising cost of food, and now here they are again today spreading false and inaccurate information. Their failure to address the real root causes of the increase in grocery costs demonstrates a blatant lack of diligence and compassion. Not only are the Conservatives once again blaming the government for the meagre measures it introduced to fight climate change, most of which have already been shelved, but they are also calling for even more backpedalling on the environment and the oil and gas issue.

Based on this line of reasoning, now that the Liberals have essentially co-opted the Conservative agenda, caved to oil and gas companies on pretty much everything they want and abolished consumer carbon pricing, we would expect food prices to go down, but that has not happened. Carbon pricing is gone, and it has not happened. It has not happened because carbon pricing did not drive up food prices and the cost of living. The Conservatives are back at it, and this time they want to repeal a crucial regulation on industrial carbon pricing. Regardless of what my Conservative colleagues are saying today, we know that particular carbon price has no impact on food prices. The impact is too small to be measurable, according to the Canadian Climate Institute. The impact is almost nil.

The motion is a manifestation of the populism we have come to expect from the Conservative Party over the past few years. The Conservatives are touching on a real issue that people are angry and worried about. We too are worried about the rising cost of living, but meaningless slogans will not make things better. Giving people real, concrete solutions will.

Business of Supply

The Conservative leader does not seem to have learned anything over the past year. His strategy basically involves continuing to demonize public policy, especially climate and environmental policy, of course, rather than putting forward real proposals that could help people deal with today's serious cost of living crisis. I would even go so far as to say that it is completely out of touch to manipulate households' financial concerns to advance the oil and gas agenda and further line the pockets of shareholders of oil and gas companies in Canada, which are mostly foreign-owned. These profits, not to mention the subsidies, even increase grocery bills. It does not help to tell lies or half-truths to those who are suffering right now, those who cannot afford to put enough food on the table and who have to choose between paying for their housing and paying for groceries.

I think it is important that we review the facts. It has been scientifically proven that if we abandon the fight against climate change, as the Conservatives are proposing and as the Liberals may want to do, food prices will only continue to rise. If we abandon the fight against climate change, food prices will definitely continue to rise. Let us think about how food production, our farmers and our agricultural producers are affected by wildfires, floods and droughts, not to mention other unpredictable weather conditions that are getting stronger, more frequent and even more alarming in scale. This is for real. We also need to think about the pests and diseases that come with climate change and contribute to rising food prices.

• (1130)

Let us look at Canada's Food Price Report 2025, which my Conservative colleagues often mention. That report explains that, in 2024, cocoa prices increased because of high temperatures and extreme weather conditions in West Africa, while orange juice prices spiked because floods and droughts damaged harvests in Brazil. These are examples of international imports that have risen in price and had an impact on the household expenses of Canadians, of our constituents.

In place of these products, we could develop other solutions to achieve greater food sovereignty, increase resilience in agriculture and stimulate, for example, greenhouse cultivation, processing and freezing. These are all solutions that would contribute to food sovereignty and greater resilience.

One of the real reasons for rising food prices is climate change. That is undeniable when we look at the effects of climate change on production everywhere across Canada, even in my Conservative colleagues' ridings. We can read the following in a study on the cost of climate change conducted by the Institut de recherche en économie contemporaine: "Droughts were an important factor in the recent dramatic increase in crop insurance payments in Canada, which surged from \$890 million in 2018 to \$4.887 billion in 2022." That is nearly \$5 billion in crop insurance. The value of these payments increased more than fivefold in five years. Obviously, that has an impact on the cost of food.

In Canada, in practical terms, we are talking about droughts that have affected crop yields. In Saskatchewan, yields actually declined by 47% in 2021. According to Statistics Canada, "While activity was up in most sectors of the economy, those gains were entirely negated by the worst drought in nearly two decades". That was

about Saskatchewan, but Quebec was not spared either. In the Abitibi region, for example, hay producers received a record \$6.8 million in compensation for the 2023 drought. That is more than triple the annual average. They had to bring in hay from the west because they were having a hard time producing it in Quebec, partly because of the drought conditions.

The government needs to develop a climate change adaptation strategy to protect against these crop problems, among other things. Moreover, this strategy should also be concrete and sustainable. That is not currently the case with the federal government's national adaptation strategy, which is underfunded and has been criticized by the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development, among others.

Getting back to the Dalhousie University report, it states that wildfires in the west also affected transportation, such as rail lines, which has an impact on the cost of food.

If we refocus the debate, one real solution would be to make the industries, including the petrochemical, oil and gas industries, pay for their pollution, their impact on climate change and the extreme weather events they are causing. There are many other problems related to the oil and gas industry. An initial report by False Profits, conducted by economist Jim Stanford, showed that the spike in world oil prices in 2022 was the main factor behind the subsequent surge in inflation. The fact is that fossil fuels cause inflation and have a major impact on people's cost of living. Soaring oil prices caused by financial speculation are responsible for a significant portion of inflation and, according to this report, even cost Canadians nearly \$200 billion between 2022 and 2025. That is \$12,000 per household.

We in the Bloc Québécois believe that the rising cost of living in Canada, and also in Quebec, is a major problem that is causing people to suffer. We need to address this issue, but to do so, we need to tackle its root causes, and climate action is not currently on the agenda. This is a major problem. We are talking about inaction. The situation is serious, and doing less will only make the problem worse. Unfortunately, that is what my Conservative colleagues are proposing.

Obviously, we will be voting against the motion.

• (1135)

Carlos Leitão (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I must say that I agree overall with what our colleague just said. Climate change has a very significant impact on the price of food. We have no intention of removing industrial carbon pricing.

Could my colleague talk a bit about the connection, if there even is one, between industrial carbon pricing and food prices?

Patrick Bonin: Mr. Speaker, it is always odd to hear the Liberals say that they feel they are still dedicated to fighting climate change after all the backtracking we have seen and after they basically abandoned the climate plan that was put in place in the previous Parliament.

When it comes to carbon pricing, yes, we are concerned. Negotiations are currently under way with Alberta, and we know that Alberta is backtracking on carbon pricing. The federal government should have stepped in to ensure that the price on carbon is the same across Canada, but it did not. What is more, it could water down carbon pricing even further.

To get back to the question, studies clearly show that industrial carbon pricing has no impact on the increase in the cost of living and food prices. The impact is close to zero. Unfortunately, my Conservative colleagues are using disinformation when they say that carbon pricing has a major impact on the cost of food.

[English]

David Bexte (Bow River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I find it a bit rich that the member is more than willing to demonize one source as biased yet claim the Canadian Climate Institute as gospel and as a reliable source, since it is funded solely by the government.

Could the member comment on the relationship between the cost of energy and poverty, globally? It has been demonstrated by innumerable sources that higher costs of energy in every form are directly related to increased poverty and the cost of living.

[Translation]

Patrick Bonin: Mr. Speaker, when it comes to carbon pricing, the Canadian Climate Institute has put data on the table. It is very, very clear. These are scientific facts, and I would love to see studies that prove otherwise from our Conservative colleagues, who claim that industrial carbon pricing has an impact on food prices. That is not the case. Unfortunately, once again, this is part of their populism and demagoguery.

That being said, obviously the cost of energy is a major issue. It costs Quebec more than \$10 billion a year to import oil and gas. We are sending that money outside Quebec, when we could be using it to electrify transportation, buildings, industries and SMEs. If we hung onto that money, we would not be vulnerable to foreign companies whose shareholders are mostly based in the United States. I am talking about the oil and gas companies.

Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is rather deplorable to watch what the Conservatives are doing. Every time they have an opposition day, every time they have the opportunity to contribute something to the debates in the House and to make everyone in Parliament take a position on an issue, they do the same thing. They always talk about the carbon tax, pipelines or oil and gas. It seems like they cannot talk about anything else.

I would like to know if my colleague thinks there are other constructive issues we could have discussed in order to advance solutions to the problems that ordinary people in this country are facing.

Patrick Bonin: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, my Conservative colleagues do not want to talk about it, but the fight against climate change still matters. Climate change and the climate crisis did not

Business of Supply

go away when the newly elected President of the United States took office and implemented his trade and tariff policies. We still have a crisis. How can we develop the economy without increasing oil and gas production, which is basically what caused climate change in the first place?

We would have liked to talk about ways to fight climate change and inequality. We could have explored ways to address the cost of living problem through climate actions that are fair and equitable for all Canadians. Unfortunately, our Conservative colleagues want to abandon the fight against climate change, but the problem will not go away. The Bloc Québécois wants to work on this problem and on addressing inequality.

• (1140)

[English]

Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from OGGO, the member for Windsor West.

Canadians are once again finding themselves in a Liberal-caused food inflation crisis. We have the highest food inflation rate in the G7. The government repeatedly promised and continues to promise that it will have the fastest-growing economy in the G7. Unfortunately, what it has delivered to Canadians is the fastest-growing food inflation rate in the G7.

The Liberals spend so much time in the House gaslighting Canadians and trying to convince them that it is a new government, not the same government whose policies for 10 years have led to the highest food costs in the G7. They work tirelessly to have Canadians forget that, almost as much as they work to have Canadians forget that the Prime Minister actually stood in the House and said that he should be judged by the price of food in the grocery stores. Well, Canadians have judged him, and the verdict is in: He has failed on that point.

There are 2.2 million Canadians lining up at food banks every month. Twenty per cent of them are reportedly fully employed. Imagine that: fully employed and still having to go to a food bank to feed one's family. Thirty per cent of the people served by food banks are children.

In Edmonton we have the Veterans Association Food Bank, which serves veterans and former frontline RCMP and Coast Guard members, etc. Let us think about that: A country this wealthy, under the Liberals, requires veterans to seek help at a food bank.

Business of Supply

Canada is a country so wealthy that the Liberals have enough money to spread around to give money to Vietnam for gender rights, for the government to pay for sex shows in Germany, and for the government to do a report, paid for by DND, on how space exploration is racist and exploitative. The government spent millions of dollars to study intersectional democratic spaces in Nepal, and it actually gave tens of millions of dollars in corporate welfare to a large international company that funds ISIS terrorists in Syria.

The government has all that money, yet 2.2 million Canadians are lining up at food banks. The number has doubled in the last 10 years. In Edmonton, food bank usage is at its highest point in history, doubling in the last five years. It is higher than in the early 1990s, when there was about 10% unemployment in Edmonton. It is higher than in the early 1980s, when there were 18% to 19% interest rates.

In response to the Liberal-created food inflation crisis, the Liberals reached into their grab bag and pulled out and recycled a Trudeau era policy of bumping up the GST credit. More money in Canadians' pockets is fantastic. I would prefer it to come through tax breaks, but I would support anything that puts more money into Canadians' pockets. However, I wish the government had spent a bit more time and made the benefit more targeted. Just like with the COVID payments, the government threw out the money, vote-buying in some cases, without any oversight or any plan to target the people most in need.

In this program put forward by the Liberals, if someone is married with two kids, with mom and dad both working full-time at about minimum wage in Ontario, they would earn too much to get the added top-up to help out with food inflation. If they have three kids, and with mom and dad both working and earning around \$17 an hour, they would not qualify. With four kids, and with mom and dad working and each making \$17.80 an hour, they would not qualify under the program.

The people who would benefit are single and have incomes below the threshold. About one-third of the 12 million people the Liberals say they would be helping are under the age of 30 and are single. Therefore, if the kids are living at home and going to university, they would qualify, but if someone is living in a cramped apartment with three kids, with mom and dad making \$17.80 an hour, they would not qualify.

• (1145)

We are not arguing about whether the help is needed, but the government should have made it more targeted toward the people needing help. About 10% of Canadians do not do their taxes, most of whom are low-income earners. If someone does not do their taxes, they would not get the help. If someone has low income and has not done their 2024 taxes, they would not get the help. If someone was employed in 2024 and doing very well but got laid off and had no income in 2025 up until now, they would get nothing. The issue is not so much about the help needed for people; the government should have been smart about it and made it more targeted to help Canadians.

Furthermore, again, it is all borrowed money. It is about an extra \$12 billion that would be added to our deficit. In the five years the program would run, it would cost \$1.4 billion in added interest

payments. This comes from the Parliamentary Budget Officer. That \$1.4 billion was not budgeted, so where would the government find the money? It would either cut other services or tax Canadians more in the future.

The program the government has introduced would run for five years. That is basically an admission of failure from the Liberal government that, for five more years, Canadians are going to be in a food inflation crisis.

Instead of five more years of Liberal high costs on food, there are things we can do to help Canadians right now, and that is what we are proposing. We could eliminate the industrial carbon tax, which affects the cost of fertilizer and the cost of food processing. We could get rid of the fuel standard tax. Currently it is 7¢ a litre, and it is going to go up to 17¢ a litre. That 17¢ a litre would come into effect at the same time as the proposed program would sunset. We are going to have higher fuel costs at the same time as the rebate would end.

The government needs to end its insane ideological war on plastics. The plastic ban is going to cost hundreds of millions of dollars; it was actually published in the Gazette. The government's own numbers say \$1.3 billion. The Canadian Produce Marketing Association says that the Liberals' zero-plastics crusade will cost consumers \$3.4 billion and lead to about an extra half-million tonnes of spoiled food, despite the fact that 99% of plastics safely end up in landfills. Instead of an ideological attack on plastics, the government should just end the hidden tax altogether.

It is the same with the industrial carbon tax. The government members will sit here and say it does not exist, that it does not add to food costs. The government would have people believe that input costs somehow never make it through the supply chain and cost farmers more, cost truckers more, cost grocery stores more and cost Canadians more.

I often refer to a study from the Royal Bank of Scotland that I read years ago. It is a report on the flow-through of energy taxes, much like the industrial carbon tax or the previous carbon tax, saying that 100% of energy taxes flow through to the consumer. Why I was reading something from the Royal Bank of Scotland is a different story, but the fact is that every added cost to farmers, to truckers and to grocery stores ends up in the price to consumers.

Business of Supply

Every single time we change packaging rules, it adds costs, like the billions of dollars mentioned, which end up coming out of the pockets of Canadians in the form of higher food costs. Every time we add costs for transportation or for energy, it ends up coming out of the pockets of Canadians. We are in a food inflation crisis caused by the policies of the government. The government needs to take practical steps to end its ideological attack on Canadians and to focus on immediate, pragmatic steps to end the food inflation crisis now, next year and five years from now.

• (1150)

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a flash warning: Conservative ideas just do not work. Quite frankly, I remember how many hundreds of speeches I heard from the Conservatives 14 months ago in which they said that if we get rid of the carbon tax, there will not be any inflation. People can look it up. There are dozens if not hundreds of speeches like that.

We have a new Prime Minister and a new government, and we got rid of the carbon tax. Is it a coincidence that food prices did not go down? We got rid of the carbon tax to give Canadians more disposable income. That is what the grocery benefit is about, the one the Conservatives supposedly voted for yesterday.

Why should Canadians give any credibility to Conservative policy? It turns out to be a disaster all the time.

Kelly McCauley: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite has a rare talent for speaking at length without disturbing the facts. Imagine what our food inflation would be right now with the carbon tax added in. It is Liberal policies that are driving up the food costs. The U.S., Japan and all the other members of the G7 are facing the same issues we are around climate change and everything else, yet somehow only the country led by the Liberal government, the same tired Liberal government of 10 years with the same tired recycled failed policies, has the highest food cost inflation.

Those are the facts. The member should understand that by now.

[Translation]

Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to pass on my regards to my colleague.

I would like to know whether he has considered the impact that the proposed measures will have on pollution and climate change, or the impact that climate change, floods, forest fires and other events have on farmers and food prices.

[English]

Kelly McCauley: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from the Bloc asked a couple of things: one about climate, and one about plastics and pollution. Of all our plastics, 99% end up safely in landfills. A very negligible amount ends up as litter, so that is something of a non-starter.

Climate change is a global issue. The Bloc, the Liberals and the NDP would have us believe that climate stops at our border and that putting a 17¢ tax on gasoline would somehow change the weather around the world. The reality is that climate change is a world issue, caused as much by China and India. The best thing we

can do for climate change is build pipelines to the west coast to get natural gas and other Canadian energy to China and India to get them off coal and onto cleaner-burning Canadian energy.

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, it should be pointed out that Stephen Harper and the member's leader built zero inches of pipeline to the west coast.

The member wants to talk about facts, and he makes reference to the G7. In the last five years, adding total food inflation, Canada is not the worst. In fact, we might be third or maybe fourth. I am not 100% sure of that, but at the end of the day, this illustrates that the Conservative Party of Canada comes up with flash ideas, and it has been demonstrated time and time again that their ideas just do not work. Why should we believe them now?

If the member—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): The hon. member for Edmonton West has the floor.

Kelly McCauley: Mr. Speaker, of course, the member for Winnipeg North never lets the facts interfere with his opinion, and we hear that once again. He talks about how Canadians have never had it so good. I listen to him say we are third-, fourth- or fifth-worst. Canadians have never had it so good, according to the member, but the reality and the facts are that Canadians are suffering.

The member talked about pipelines, but, again, he never lets facts get in the way of his opinion. Four pipelines to tidewater were built under the previous Conservative government, whereas the Liberal government has approved nothing. It has not approved any pipelines, but it has had policies for 10 years that have led to higher food costs that are punishing Canadians now.

• (1155)

Harb Gill (Windsor West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always an honour to rise in the House to speak on behalf of the hard-working people of Windsor.

Today, I want to talk about something that matters to every family in Windsor and to a whole lot of families across this country: food affordability. I am going to speak based on what I witnessed on the front lines of policing a little over a year ago, before I retired. Current evidence shows that the reality has gotten worse, not better. It is right there in front of the everyday Canadians who do see it, except for perhaps the Liberal government.

Business of Supply

When it comes to grocery prices and food affordability, Canadians do not need spin. They need honesty. Let us start with the basics. Across this country, food is now the number one pressure on household budgets. That is consistent across surveys and media reporting on what Canadians are telling anyone who will listen to them. Groceries today cost roughly 30% more than they did five years ago. Wages did not go up 30%, and neither did pensions, disability supports or fixed incomes. When people say, “I do not know how this happened so fast”, they are not exaggerating. They are describing reality. We heard claims that headline inflation numbers are cooling, but food prices keep rising. That is why Canadians do not feel any relief. They buy groceries every week. They see the prices every week. There is no hiding it. There is sticker shock. It is real.

Now let us talk about food insecurity. About one in four Canadians now live in a household that struggles, at least some of the time, to put enough food on the table. This is the part that matters most: Most food-insecure households are not below the poverty line. These are working people, seniors, people on disability or single-parent households. These are people who did everything right, paid their taxes and assumed that the basics would be there for them. Instead, many are making choices they never, ever imagined between food or medication, food or heat, and food or rent. Health researchers confirm what people already know: When food gets expensive, people skip prescriptions, delay refills or stop paying rent altogether. That is not being irresponsible; that is desperation. We do not need a consultant to tell us this. We just need to listen.

Whether someone is browsing online or attending a community gathering in this country, the same stories come up again and again. Seniors are only shopping on discount days. Parents are skipping meals so their kids can eat. Full-time workers are using food banks for the first time. People standing in line at the food bank are ashamed and hope no one they know sees them in that line. Food bank visits are up to 2.2 million every month, nearly double the pre-pandemic level. That tells us something important: Emergency food aid is no longer an exception. It is becoming normal.

That number, by the way, does not include the food supports provided by community centres, churches, mosques, synagogues, temples or gurdwaras across this nation. When we combine traditional food banks with faith-based groups, we are seeing roughly 3 million to 3.5 million food assistance visits every month. That is not a marginal issue; it is a systemic failure. We are just covering it up with charity.

Now I want to talk about something most people do not see firsthand but what police officers and loss-prevention officers deal with at the grocery store every day: retail theft. There is a big difference between organized theft rings and desperation theft. Anyone who has worked on the road as a cop or worked in loss prevention knows the difference immediately.

Loss-prevention staff and cops across the country are reporting more incidents involving basic food items like milk and bread, not electronics or resale items. Increasingly, the people involved are seniors, people on disability or people with no prior contact with the police. Here is what that looks like: an elderly person detained at the door, hands shaking, apologizing over and over again and saying they forgot to scan an item. Meanwhile, everyone knows they did not forget. They are crying not because they were caught but because of the humiliation.

● (1200)

Loss-prevention workers and cops will tell us that these are the hardest incidents to deal with. They can tell us, “This is a normal person, and this is not what they do.” These are not criminals by nature. These are people who ran out of options. The damage goes beyond a police report. Being detained for shoplifting strips these desperate people of their dignity, especially seniors, who often carry deep shame and will not even tell their family what happened. They will often stop going to the store and prefer to go hungry because they are ashamed. Officers themselves feel deeply humiliated, regardless of the outcome of the investigation, because they feel they are being asked to criminalize hunger. That is not right.

Sadly, I have seen that look of shame before. It is the look of someone who feels they have failed. Truthfully, it is the system that has failed them. They did not fail.

Let us talk about why this is happening. Food does not magically appear on the shelves. It moves through a chain, starting with farms, farming equipment, fertilizers, processors, packaging and transportation. Every added cost along that chain ends up at the checkout.

Fertilizer is a good example. It is not optional. Without it, we do not grow enough. Fertilizer production is energy-intensive. Under the current industrial carbon tax system, producers are facing hundreds of millions of dollars in added costs. This will increase over the coming years. When fertilizer costs more, farmers pay more. That is not ideology. That is math. The question we should be asking ourselves is whether our ideology should be costing that senior citizen or single parent their dignity. In my opinion, the answer is no.

Business of Supply

Some studies say that carbon pricing alone adds less than 1% to food prices, but Canadians do not live in a world where costs happen only once. These costs stack up. Fuel, energy, fertilizer, packaging and transportation are individually small, but they are crushing collectively. Experts like Sylvain Charlebois, the food professor, have been very clear: Canada's food inflation problem is now a structural problem, not a temporary one. Prices are not snapping back. They are staying high. A one-time rebate will help people breathe easier temporarily, but it will not fix the structural issue of why groceries cost so much in the first place.

How do Canadians see the Liberal government on this? The common perception is this: The government acknowledges the problem. Canadians hear the PM saying that they ought to judge him by the price they pay at the grocery store. They feel the government is not moving with urgency or owning the outcomes of its own policies, which are dismal, by the way. People hear announcements. They hear that ministers are meeting with the CEOs of the grocery stores. They hear about voluntary codes for grocery chains and short-term cheques being issued, but they do not feel any relief. There is frustration, confusion and a sense that the government is not doing nearly enough to help regular Canadians. I happen to agree with that.

From a Conservative perspective, this is where we draw a clear line. We believe in environmental responsibility, but not by making food unaffordable. We believe in helping families, but not just by talking about it or giving them a one-time cheque that many will not be eligible for.

Food security is national security. When families cannot afford basics, it affects health care, public safety and social stability. I have seen it first-hand. When seniors are having to steal food, when working people are lining up at the food banks and when medication is being skipped so that groceries can be bought, it is not a theoretical debate. It is evidence. As in any good investigation, when the evidence piles up, one does not argue with it. One responds to it in a way in which one is clearly accountable, responsible and transparent. That is what the Canadian people expect of us.

• (1205)

Hon. Kody Blois (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is great to see the Conservatives finally starting to talk about farmers. The member ran on a platform that had absolutely nothing for farmers, notwithstanding he is in southwestern Ontario in the areas around Leamington and Chatham-Kent. I just listened to his 10-minute speech. There was not one, single measure about business risk management, and nothing about controlled environment agriculture or helping to get young farmers into the industry. The Conservatives talk about industrial carbon pricing, which is going to have a negligible impact on the price of food. They do not have a concrete plan.

Is the hon. member sharing, in his own riding, the government's intention to immediately expense greenhouses? There are 4,000 acres of greenhouses in southwestern Ontario and Leamington, all around Windsor West. Is he sharing that with his constituents in the work he is doing, and does he support that measure by the government?

Harb Gill: Mr. Speaker, I happened to meet a gentleman who runs a greenhouse operation, and his comment was, "Knowledge is knowing that a tomato is a fruit. Wisdom is not adding it to a fruit salad."

That is all I have to say about that.

[*Translation*]

Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette—Manawan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am quite surprised by the response that was just given. Rather than competing to see who is the best cheerleader for the oil industry, we should be considering the wide variety of measures that can be implemented to reduce inflation. My Liberal colleague shared a few of them, and I will share some others.

What does my hon. colleague have to say about the labour shortage in the food sector, and what are his thoughts on climate change adaptation measures, which are having a real impact on food production in Canada?

[*English*]

Harb Gill: Mr. Speaker, we have a whole lot of policies that we are going to be addressing or bringing up.

First, we should stop adding costs to food at every step of the supply chain. Conservatives would review and roll back federal policies that directly increase the cost of producing, processing, packaging and transporting food. When government adds costs to fertilizer, energy and transportation, these costs do not disappear; they land on grocery bills. Food is a necessity, and policy must treat it that way.

Second, we should target help to the people who actually need it and make it permanent. Conservatives support targeted, predictable relief indexed to food costs for seniors, people on disability and low-income Canadians, not temporary cheques that expire while prices stay high. Fixed incomes must keep pace with the real cost of living, especially groceries. Ultimately, with the cost of food—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): Questions and comments, the hon. member for Algonquin—Renfrew—Pembroke.

Cheryl Gallant (Algonquin—Renfrew—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a glass jar of the same volume weighs 10 to 20 times more than a similar plastic jar.

Can the member tell us how the new food packaging plastic ban will impact the price of groceries?

Business of Supply

Harb Gill: Mr. Speaker, the simple answer is that prices will go up. The average Canadian is going to suffer because of those policies and regulations. These are hidden in various ways, but we always hear that they are imaginary taxes. There is nothing imaginary about them. We can step outside the House and ask a regular Canadian who has to go grocery shopping how they feel about the grocery prices they are paying right now. They will tell us that they are pissed off. They are not happy. They are absolutely upset about it.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): Order.

That one goes over the line. I would ask the member to not use that phrase and withdraw it when he has a chance.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Cardigan.

Kent MacDonald (Cardigan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite mentioned in his speech the Conservatives' favourite professor, the food professor. I take exception to the food professor. He does not have all the answers on food prices in Canada.

In particular, we can look at prices under supply management, which have stayed in the inflationary range instead of escalating.

Could the member speak to that? Does he support supply management? Does he support the food professor's call to dismantle it? All the dairy farmers in Canada are here this week. I would like to hear—

• (1210)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): I have to give the member an opportunity to answer. The hon. member for Windsor West has about 20 seconds.

Harb Gill: Mr. Speaker, no matter which professor we talk to, they will tell us the same thing: Prices have gone up. We can ask any mom or dad going out to a grocery store. I consider them to be professors too, because they have been shopping their entire lives. They know the price of groceries has gone up. We do not need an expert or a consultant to tell us that the prices have gone up.

Hon. Kody Blois (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with my hon. colleague from Madawaska—Restigouche this afternoon.

I rise today to speak to the opposition day motion on food affordability. I believe that if we were to ask every member of Parliament in this place, they would agree that there is work to be done to address this particular challenge, there are initiatives that have to be introduced to support some of our most vulnerable Canadian citizens and there is work we can do across the supply chain to be able to tackle this persistent issue. However, I think there are differing viewpoints about how best to get there.

When I take a look at the opposition day motion put forward today by the Conservative Party, what I worry about is that it fails to recognize the nuance of the situation. I worry that the proposed measures from the policy shop of the Conservative Party are not going to get us to the tangible goal we need to meet, which is stabilizing food prices and perhaps even lowering them, where applicable, in our global supply chain.

I want to start with industrial carbon pricing. The Conservatives, in the last Parliament, made the case that the consumer carbon price was the ill and that it was causing all affordability challenges in the country. I agreed with the Conservatives on the applicability of how the carbon rebate was structured in rural Canada, but not that it was the ill of all challenges facing Canadians.

Now we are in the 45th Parliament. In the last Parliament, the Conservatives stood up and said that if we listened to them and got rid of the consumer carbon price, everything would be fixed. Now they say, "Let us get rid of the industrial carbon price." The industrial carbon price is recognized by economists, Conservative governments and, frankly, a wide political spectrum as being the most effective way to reduce emissions in the country and globally.

Conservative governments in western Canada were some of the first in the country to introduce industrial carbon pricing. Now the Conservatives would have us believe that just getting rid of that policy is going to solve the challenges that exist in the global supply chain and here in this country. That is a fallacy, and I look forward to talking about that.

I want to highlight a few things. In 2007, Alberta was one of the first governments to introduce an industrial carbon price in the country. It is a policy that is still supported by Premier Danielle Smith.

I would make the connection that there is a fallacy in the way in which the Conservatives are tying the industrial carbon price to food price affordability. In fact, the Canadian Climate Institute says there is a negligible impact in tying industrial carbon pricing to the price of food, so the Conservatives want to throw out one of the most effective climate policies we have to reduce emissions to perhaps get a negligible impact on the price of food. That is important to recognize.

I have said repeatedly in the House that the Conservatives had absolutely nothing in their entire platform for farmers. The member who is heckling me from across the way ran on a platform with nothing for farmers. In fact, when they stand up in question period and mention farmers twice, that is two times more than they did in their entire platform. It is embarrassing for a party that represents so many people. Farmers across this country should know that the Conservatives had nothing to say about them in the referendum we had in April on who was the best to govern this country.

What about the clean fuel standards? My colleague earlier mentioned that this is a similar policy to when we took lead out of fuel, yet the Conservatives are suggesting that we should walk it back. This is the continuation of the clean fuel standard and being able to have measures to help reduce the carbon intensity in our fuels. It is a policy that has very good impacts in rural Canada. A biofuel policy is important for farmers in western Canada. The member across the way continues to suggest that this is a bad policy. He should go and talk to farmers in his own constituency.

The Canola Council of Canada and the Canadian Canola Growers Association consistently highlight that this is an important policy for demand-side signalling. It also reduces emissions and is good for investments, which we are seeing across rural Canada.

Again, the fact that this is not going to demonstrably reduce or stabilize food prices makes it a complete and utter failure of a policy suggestion from the Conservatives.

We agree on the continued need to work on competition reform in the country. I would highlight to members and to Canadians that this work has begun. I agree with my opposition colleagues that if we want to move, we need to move quicker. I agree on that dynamic.

The government has announced a national food security strategy. We have not heard a whole lot in the House, particularly from the opposition, about the opportunity this represents for the agri-food supply chain and farmers across the country.

I am going to put a few thoughts on the table in the time I have remaining, which is about five or six minutes.

- (1215)

When we think about this policy, there are three angles, if we are going to be comprehensive about it. We have to think about the farm gate, our supply chain and agri-food processing, and short-term income measures along with procurement and public initiatives that can help drive demand and support regional processing across the country.

First, there is a national youth strategy to get young farmers into the profession. I would submit to the House that on the cost of capital associated with paying out the retiring farmer, the math on the economic margin in many commodity groups has represented a real challenge in finding access to capital. Even if a young farmer has the opportunity to access the capital, debt management has become a real challenge in terms of that debt cost, where the capital has become quite significant over the last number of decades. It is incumbent on the Government of Canada, along with the provincial governments, and maybe the FCC and the private banks, to identify a financial mechanism whereby we can help smooth the transactional costs. That is an important measure that I would like to see.

On agricultural land trusts, there is a lot of good work happening across this country to identify agricultural land, put it into a trust and make sure that it continues to remain available for farming. That is important, not only in Ontario but across the country, so that young farmers can access and buy land at a price that is comparable to the yields and the return going in. There is a lot of speculation happening in this country around the price of land. That is some-

Business of Supply

thing we could do to reduce the cost of farming, and we should be taking it up more earnestly.

I am a big proponent of an HST input tax credit for farm housing. I represent Kings—Hants. We welcome somewhere between 1,500 and 2,000 international farm workers coming to the Annapolis Valley, particularly in the fruit-growing and horticulture sectors. These workers are extremely important to our food security in this country. They do incredible work. There is a requirement for our farmers to have housing in place. I believe it is important, because right now, the CRA does not actually determine that housing is a foundational piece of the farm business. Therefore, although farmers can reduce the capital costs of building or repairing homes for workers over the lifetime of that home, with an HST input tax credit they would be able to reclaim that cost up front early, perhaps in year one or two, which is important for cash flow. We should have that type of measure. It is something I have spoken about with the Nova Scotia Fruit Growers' Association and Horticulture Nova Scotia. It is something I hope the Minister of Finance will consider.

The Conservatives have said nothing about business risk management tools. It was actually the Harper government that cut these tools quite significantly, walking back the compensation amount and walking back the trigger before farmers could benefit under AgriStability. Our government has consistently brought back the BRM tools to a greater extent. I am proud of the work we have done in this last programming year to increase the compensation amount. We have moved the \$3-million cap up to \$6 million. We have reduced and eliminated the reference margin limits. There is more work that can be done, and I think there is also an opportunity to bring in private sector insurance to complement the BRM programs, which are provincial and federal cost-share programs.

I would like to note that on the cattle industry side, I believe there is an opportunity to create equity in terms of how we finance these risk management tools. Crop insurance has more contribution than the livestock index amount, which is something we could work on.

In my last 90 seconds, I would like to talk about two things. One is controlled environment agriculture. I offered a question to my hon. colleague from Windsor West about the importance of the immediate expensing of greenhouses. We have a competitive advantage in this country around greenhouses in the Leamington area in southwestern Ontario. There is a great opportunity to continue to build upon this with the government's announcement in this domain. I hope Conservative members are at least acknowledging this in their riding, making sure that their stakeholders know about these investments. This is going to be an important measure for competitiveness.

Business of Supply

The last thing is regulatory reform. I introduced a bill in the last Parliament, Bill C-359, which was about using the science and evidence of other jurisdictions around farm inputs. We can think about crop protection products, feed additives and vaccines. We have some work to do. The Minister of Health has been dialed in on this question. This is important for reducing costs on farms and the overall cost portfolio in the industry. All of those things will have benefits.

I wish I had more time, but those are some of the ideas I put on the floor today.

• (1220)

Carol Anstey (Long Range Mountains, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the colleague across the way for his criticism of the solutions the Conservatives have brought forward.

He often gets up and talks about farmers and the agriculture industry. There are several dairy farmers in my riding and in Newfoundland and Labrador who have run into some severe financial trouble over the last couple of years. As a concerned member, I have often visited them and asked what is contributing to this financial pressure they are undergoing. One of the things I consistently hear about is the increased costs on farm equipment, and one of those cost pressures is the industrial carbon tax.

I wonder if the farmers are giving me incorrect information, because according to what we are hearing from the member across the way, everything seems to be going fantastically for dairy farmers in Atlantic Canada.

Hon. Kody Blois: Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed being in the member's riding before Christmas. I had the opportunity to visit with a number of stakeholders, including in Gros Morne and with mayors. I know the member will endeavour to make sure that she is engaging with local stakeholders, because they have not had the chance to actually see her in the time since she was elected as a member of Parliament.

I will say, though, that I hope the member will share the important investment we made in tourism in western Newfoundland. On housing, I will remind her that the Curling investment is extremely important for the city of Corner Brook.

On dairy farms, the number one concern was that the Conservatives are not actually sincere about protecting the integrity of supply management. We do not hear about industrial carbon pricing from farmers in the dairy sector; it is more about whether or not the member for Battle River—Crowfoot will actually stand up and support dairy farmers when it counts.

[Translation]

Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague across the way on his speech today. I would say that he was true to form in that he usually tries to stick to the facts and address the substance of the speeches or arguments presented by members on the other side of the House. He does not really engage in partisanship and is able to rise above it.

With that in mind, I would like to ask a question of my colleague opposite from whom we have come to expect a certain intellectual

proh. Today's Conservative motion, once again, aims to reduce, if not dismantle, everything related to the environment, which would cause us to lose even more ground.

Perhaps my colleague could enlighten us about something. How have Conservative speeches over the past few years influenced his government's policies, and to what extent has his government's backpedalling harmed the climate?

Hon. Kody Blois: Mr. Speaker, since the question was substantial, I will respond in English. That way, I can give a complete answer.

[English]

It is extremely important. I would agree with my hon. colleague that the Conservative proposition before the House eliminates any elements of environmental policy in this country. I think it would accomplish very little in relation to what they are suggesting the results would be.

This government has shown a pragmatic willingness to tackle the issues of affordability and to build major national projects. The view of our Prime Minister and the government is that the way we are going to be able to tackle the environment is by drawing in major investments. That is what we are focused on: drawing major investments, which will increase national energy security and reduce emissions at the same time.

Jessica Fancy (South Shore—St. Margarets, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is always a joy to rise on behalf of my constituents in South Shore—St. Margarets. I am very excited today to ask my fellow colleague from Nova Scotia some questions regarding agriculture.

Since becoming a new member in the spring, I have talked to a lot of agricultural stakeholders in my riding. They were asking for a lot of things, which I feel budget 2025 would deliver. Budget 2025 would invest in domestic food processing and supply chain resilience.

Could the member tell us a bit about how strengthening the Canadian capacity to reduce exposure to global disruptions helps stabilize food prices overall?

• (1225)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, in 30 seconds or less.

Hon. Kody Blois: Mr. Speaker, 30 seconds does not give justice to this question.

Let me do a quick pivot. The member is right that there are important investments in the budget around agri-food processing, but I would like to compliment her on the work she did with this government to remove Chinese tariffs on Canadian lobster. She represents one of the largest fishing ridings in the country, frankly, but certainly in Atlantic Canada. Her effort helped to accomplish that.

The member needs to make sure that she is reinforcing that. We are proud of the work our Canadian fishers and our lobster fishers do. She has been a big part of that effort.

[Translation]

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since the beginning of our mandate, we have been taking meaningful action to strengthen and unify the Canadian economy and make it more competitive and resilient. We started by removing federal barriers to interprovincial trade. We are in the process of developing new international trade partnerships. We are attracting foreign investment here in Canada. In budget 2025, we proposed various tax incentives for investment and innovation.

Our goal is to build a stronger economy, one that works for everyone. We want to give Canadians good job opportunities, more career opportunities and higher wages. We will achieve that result through the various economic policies we are putting in place.

We will not see results overnight, however. There is a bit of a lag until we can see the impact of the transformative changes we are making to the economy. In the meantime, we recognize that many Canadians across the country continue to feel the pressure of everyday costs and need help today. That is why we announced a series of measures to help Canadians.

Let me give an example. Very early in our mandate, one of the first measures we announced was a tax cut for the middle class, which will help more than 22 million Canadians. I am pointing this out again because tax season is upon us. I am pleased to report that many Canadians will be seeing some savings compared to the 2024 tax return. That could mean as much as \$420 a year for a single person and as much as \$840 for a two-income household. This is a concrete measure we are implementing to put more money back in the pockets of middle-class families.

When Parliament resumed in January, we started the Monday morning by announcing the Canada groceries and essentials benefit, which will be based on the current GST credit. People who already had access to this credit will receive a 25% increase starting July 1 and a one-time payment representing 50% of the increase. This is yet another measure to put money back in the pockets of Canadians. I want to emphasize that this measure will target those who need it most, namely low- and modest-income Canadians. We want to help them cope with the rising cost of living.

The rising cost of food over the past few years has been a real source of stress and uncertainty for many Canadian families. We fully recognize that reality. This food inflation, which is affecting not only Canada, but also many other countries around the world, stems from many factors, including the disruptions to the supply chain in the wake of the pandemic, extreme climate events such as droughts and floods, the current tariffs and global monetary pressures.

Even though inflation is starting to stabilize, the cost of living, the cost of food in particular, continues to weigh heavily on Canadian households. That is why we took action and will continue to take action. Through various social measures and by lowering taxes for the middle class, we are providing immediate support to Canadians to give them a bit of relief when they need it most.

However, we also need to tackle the root causes. That is why we are currently developing a national food security strategy. This strategy would help strengthen food production in Canada and im-

Business of Supply

prove access to affordable, high-quality and nutritious food for all communities across the country. I will certainly be following the development of this strategy with great interest in the coming months. It will also include the implementation of unit price labelling to help consumers make informed choices, as well as increased support from the Competition Bureau to ensure rigorous oversight of the food market and its supply chains. Real and fair competition means fairer prices at the checkout for consumers.

We are also supporting our food businesses so they can deal with the challenges caused by the tariff dispute without passing on the costs to consumers. To that end, we will be setting aside \$500 million in the strategic response fund to help businesses handle the pressures on their supply chains.

In addition, we are going to set up a \$150-million food security fund as part of the regional tariff response initiative to help our small and medium-sized businesses and the organizations that support them.

Finally, to reduce food production costs and increase domestic supply, we plan to introduce tax incentives, namely immediate expensing for greenhouses. We know that Canadian summers, when vegetables and other foods are produced, are quite short due to the climate. We want to increase investment in greenhouses so that we can produce more food year-round in this country. The idea is to strengthen our national production capacity and contribute to stabilizing prices for consumers in the medium term.

• (1230)

We also introduced Canada's national school food program. The program was launched in 2024 with a \$1 billion funding envelope over five years. In budget 2025, we announced the good news that we would make funding for the program permanent. That means we will continue to fund meals for children in schools after 2029. The program is essential for helping provinces, territories and indigenous partners expand their existing food programs so that more children across the country get the healthy meals they need. The goal is to serve additional meals to more than 400,000 Canadian children.

Business of Supply

The program benefits both parents and children. It saves participating families about \$800 per year. It contributes to children's well-being, because no child should spend a day at school on an empty stomach. We have agreements with all the provinces and territories. In the province of New Brunswick, which I represent in the House, we are going to invest around \$11.2 million over the next three years. This will provide healthy meals to nearly 57,000 children in over 160 additional schools across the province. That is huge.

I like to point out the various direct assistance measures, but also that we are making investments in critical infrastructure that will have an impact on the cost of living. I am thinking in particular of the investments we are making in housing. We are going to fast-track housing construction across the country. The idea is to have an impact on the supply-demand balance so that prices can come down. We are also going to invest in affordable housing.

Furthermore, in terms of infrastructure, I would like to highlight some investments that have been made through the rural transit solutions fund, because this fund has a direct impact on the constituents of my riding, Madawaska—Restigouche. My predecessor, Mr. Arseneault, had the opportunity to announce \$1.4 million in funding to launch a public transit service under the FlexGo umbrella in the Edmundston and Upper Madawaska region, and last fall I had the great pleasure of announcing an additional \$700,000 investment to expand the service to the communities of Vallée-des-Rivières, Grand Falls, Saint-Quentin, and Kedgwick.

This flexible public transportation service, tailored to the realities of rural areas, will soon be launched in several new communities in my region. It will have a tangible impact on the lives of seniors, post-secondary students, workers and people with reduced mobility. In fact, this will have an impact on everyone in Madawaska—Restigouche. They will be able to benefit from transportation tailored to their needs at a very low cost. Someone who wants to travel from Grand Falls to Saint-Léonard or from Kedgwick to Saint-Quentin for work or a medical appointment will be able to do so for only \$5. I would like to acknowledge the exemplary work that the FlexGo team did on developing the project. I am very pleased that the federal government partnered with them and that we have funded nearly 80% of the capital costs. This is a meaningful investment that will benefit the people in my riding.

I would like to talk about the motion we are considering today, which is somewhat surprising to me. On this side of the House, we believe that words must be followed by concrete action. We talk about helping families cope with the cost of living, and then we put social measures in place to help them. We talk about strengthening the Canadian economy to create better jobs, increase wages and help people cope with the cost of living in the long term, and then we implement the various policies in the 2025 budget.

Unfortunately, the opposition is voting against these measures. When it came time to make Canada's national school food program permanent, the Conservatives opposed it even though it benefits hundreds of thousands of children. When it came time to implement an affordable child care program, which helps families make ends meet, the Conservatives opposed it. When we implemented the Canadian dental care plan, which helps people access essential services, the Conservatives opposed it. When we introduced vari-

ous tax incentives for innovation and investment in the 2025 budget, which have the potential to transform the Canadian economy in the long term, my colleagues in the opposition voted against those as well.

I am kind of disappointed that today's motion just rehashes old ideas. We will vote against it. It would be nice to find ways to work together to strengthen the Canadian economy for the benefit of all Canadians, rather than bringing up the same old ideas every single opposition day.

• (1235)

[English]

Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster—Meadow Lake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will remind the member that we voted against their measures because they are band-aid solutions and they do not actually work. I also want to correct the record. I know the previous speaker, the member for Kings—Hants, made a comment that the Conservatives said the consumer carbon tax was the only issue causing the affordability crisis. This is 100% not true. We know it is the Liberals' inflationary spending, the fact that they print money like it is nobody's business and the fact that they do not respect the Canadian taxpayer. The Liberals seem to be very good at lecturing Canadians, telling them where to spend their money, and then taking their money and saying they can apply for this program and the Liberals will give them a little bit back.

Why is it that the Liberals seem to always tax Canadians and always lecture Canadians, instead of putting in long-term solutions that will make life more affordable?

[Translation]

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: Mr. Speaker, let me just say that we are putting long-term measures in place. These include the national food security strategy, which I just discussed, measures in budget 2025 that will stimulate investment and attract foreign investment and our efforts to diversify our international trading partnerships. All of these measures have the potential to transform the Canadian economy, strengthen it and make it more resilient, which will lead to higher wages and new job opportunities for Canadians.

In contrast, members on the other side of the House always resort to rhetoric and repeat the same arguments. When it is time to be there for Canadians, those members are nowhere to be found. They vote against supporting the school food program, against helping people with modest and low incomes, and against measures to strengthen the Canadian economy.

Members on this side of the House mean business; we translate talk into real action. We do not deliver meaningless speeches and vote against every measure to help people.

Business of Supply

Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette—Manawan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague a question about food production costs and the labour shortage in the agri-food sector. What is his government proposing to address this shortage?

There is also the issue of climate change, which is causing floods, droughts and wildfires, all of which have a direct impact on food production in this country. The government recently backtracked on many of the environmental protection measures taken during Justin Trudeau's 10 years in office.

What could the government do to better protect the environment?

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: Mr. Speaker, there are several parts to my colleague's question. He mentioned the potential impact of floods and droughts on the cost of food. I could not agree with him more.

That is why we need to improve Canada's ability to prevent floods and droughts. Incidentally, my colleague from Terrebonne introduced a private member's bill calling on Canada to adopt a national strategy in this regard. We voted on the bill at second reading last December 3, and I was very surprised to see my Bloc Québécois colleagues oppose it. In 2024, however, Bloc Québécois members voted in favour of the same version of the bill, which died on the Order Paper when the 2025 election was called. I have a hard time understanding that.

We are being told that preventing floods and droughts is important, yet when members on this side of the House introduce concrete measures, such as a bill to establish a national strategy for better flood and drought prevention, Bloc Québécois members vote against it.

Is this or is this not an important issue to them? I am having a little trouble figuring that out.

[*English*]

Jessica Fancy (South Shore—St. Margarets, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Madawaska—Restigouche for being a rural advocate for a lot of the people here in the country.

I would also like to talk today about the \$20 million to the local food infrastructure fund. I wonder if my colleague could speak to that a bit more and how it aims to deliver more nutritious food to families, not only in his riding and my riding but in all of Canada.

• (1240)

[*Translation*]

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her wonderful question. I think increasing funding by \$20 million is an excellent decision. This will help food banks across the country.

The federal government already supports food banks through funding that is sent to regional and provincial organizations, which in turn share the funding equitably with food banks in the communities we represent here in Ottawa. We are aware that the rising cost of living is putting pressure on food banks. This additional \$20 million in funding is certainly welcome.

We are implementing long-term measures to address the causes of food insecurity, but in the immediate term, Canadians need help. I believe this is a measure that will be appreciated on the ground.

I would also like to take this opportunity to highlight the exemplary work of food bank volunteers and employees, who provide an essential service to people in our communities. I thank them for their efforts.

Jim Bélanger (Sudbury East—Manitoulin—Nickel Belt, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the Leader of the Opposition.

I rise today to speak to an issue that affects every single one of us: the rising cost of food in Canada. When Canadians get to the checkout line at the grocery store, they feel it. It is a daily frustration that has grown worse year after year. Food prices are not just numbers on a receipt. They reflect how difficult it has become for many families to put healthy meals on the table.

[*English*]

Let us begin with the facts. By late 2025, and into early 2026, food prices continued their sharp climb. In December alone, food prices were up 6.2%, grocery prices rose roughly 5% and takeout meals jumped 8.5%. Canada has now earned the unfortunate distinction of being the food inflation capital of the G7.

According to Dalhousie University's 2026 Canada food price report, food costs are expected to rise another 4% to 6%. For the average family of four, that means spending more than \$17,500 on food in 2026, nearly \$1,000 more than last year. Over the past five years, food prices have surged by approximately 27%. Staple items, such as beef, saw dramatic spikes, rising nearly 19% in 2025.

Why is this happening? There is no single cause, but there are several forces pushing prices higher. Energy and input costs remain elevated. The costs for fuel for transportation and fertilizer for farmers, as well as for labour throughout the supply chain, feed directly into what Canadians pay at the till. As Conservatives have pointed out for years, when trucks, trains and ships cost more to operate, those increased costs do not disappear; they are passed on to consumers. We cannot debate reality. Higher input costs mean higher grocery bills.

The impact on Canadians is severe. Today, one in four households is facing food insecurity. Families are cutting back on healthy foods. Parents are skipping meals. Even Canadians who are working full time are turning to food banks.

Business of Supply

At this time, I want to give a shout-out to Sudbury Food Bank's friendship house, which I visited in my riding, in my hometown. I was truly impressed by the dedication of the volunteers and the generosity of our local businesses. The food bank is an essential part of our community, and I thank them for making a difference.

Researchers now tell us that grocery prices top the list of financial worries for Canadians. When rising food costs are combined with higher prices for rent, energy and other essentials, many Canadians reach a breaking point.

The government has introduced the Canada groceries and essentials benefit, which would provide one-time top-ups and ongoing increases for low- and modest-income Canadians. We will support this measure. It is a small but welcome step, especially for low- and modest-income earners in my riding of Sudbury East—Manitoulin—Nickel Belt, but band-aid solutions can only go so far. We need to rip off the band-aid and make real changes to make life more affordable.

Conservatives will continue to put forward real, practical measures to make life more affordable for Canadians. Our food affordability plan would remove the hidden taxes on food by ending the industrial carbon tax, the fuel standard tax and the food packaging tax. We have debated these measures in the House for months. The Liberals dismissed them as imaginary or non-existent. We can call them what we want, either direct taxes or indirect taxes, but I want the people of northern Ontario and all Canadians to clearly understand that these are all costs that have been imposed by the government.

● (1245)

The industrial carbon tax increases costs for farmers, who grow our food, and those who transport it. It raises the price of farm fuel, fertilizer, trucking and freight. It increases costs at every stage of the supply chain, and those costs eventually land on consumers. It is not imaginary; it is real, measurable and paid for by Canadians.

Canada's clean fuel regulations act as a hidden tax by requiring producers to reduce the carbon intensity of fuels, raising gas prices by an estimated seven cents per litre in 2026, and that will go up to 17¢ by 2030. This policy increases the costs for consumers and businesses. They are not directly listed on fuel receipts, but are hidden as additional production costs imposed by the government. The Canadian Taxpayers Federation suggests the policy could cost the economy billions and increase household expenses. These costs are a burden to the consumer and are definitely real, not imaginary.

Then there is the food packaging tax, which the Liberals call imaginary and non-existent. It is a play on words. Although there is no stand-alone tax called a food packaging tax, proposed federal packaging and plastic regulations would have tax-like cost impacts. These rules would significantly raise costs for food producers, grocers and consumers. Fresh produce could increase up to 34% and may cost the average Canadian household about \$400 more per year.

Those are real dollars coming out of the pockets of families in northern Ontario and across the country. They are not imaginary. With Canadians simply working to live rather than living well from

the work they do, the government should be making it easier to afford groceries, not harder with hidden taxes.

The Prime Minister often speaks about a team Canada approach. This is an opportunity to put those words into action. The Conservative food affordability plan offers practical, long-term solutions that would relieve pressure on families, lower grocery bills and make life more affordable for all Canadians. These measures are realistic, effective, and can be implemented without delay. By supporting this plan, the government would demonstrate a genuine willingness to work together for the good of Canadians, especially those who are struggling right now. Conservatives stand ready to work with the government to deliver real relief and build a more stable and sustainable food system that works for Canadians.

● (1250)

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I find that Conservative ideas really do not work. Members can think about it.

The Conservatives said we should get rid of the carbon tax. Do members remember the hundreds of speeches they gave on that? That was supposed to get rid of inflation, period. The new Prime Minister of Canada actually made the decision to get rid of the carbon tax so that we could increase the disposable income for Canadians.

Let us take a look at the past year. Over the last five years, Canada has done relatively well on food inflation. When we look at this year, it is a little higher than we would like. That is why we brought in Bill C-19. That is why it will likely pass this week, to support Canadians.

Does the member truly believe his policy is worth the effort?

Jim Bélanger: Mr. Speaker, I give all due respect to the elimination of the carbon tax, its effect on the economy and the price of food. It just goes to show that, although the carbon tax was eliminated, a Canada fuel clean tax has been implemented. It is seven cents now and growing to 17¢ in 2030.

By the way, you eliminated the carbon tax because of the pressure from us. Now it will be transferred to the Canada fuel tax. Ironically, the carbon tax was 17¢ when it was eliminated, and the hidden tax, which you are not showing Canadians, is going to be a 17¢ tax by—

The Deputy Speaker: I have to interrupt the member.

Business of Supply

I would remind the member to speak through the Chair. The Chair is not responsible for government actions.

[*Translation*]

The hon. member for La Pointe-de-l'Île.

Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, who is also a member of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

First, I would like to know how he explains the fact that the Liberals eliminated the carbon tax and yet there has been no impact on the cost of food. Second, does he see a link between climate change and the effects of pollution, like floods and wildfires, which are having an impact on farmers and the cost of food?

Jim Bélanger: Mr. Speaker, let me say that the tax on fuel paid by consumers is not the only factor that influences the cost of food. There are a number of other factors. The Liberal government's spending and the money it is pouring into the system are not helping.

As for the climate, if we believe in the environment and climate, we have to understand that Canada ranks 39th or 40th in the world in terms of population, although it has one of the largest landmasses—the second or third largest. We need to develop our natural resources so we can export them to countries that have a coal-fired economy—

The Deputy Speaker: I must interrupt the hon. member.

[*English*]

Continuing with questions and comments, the hon. member for Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek has the floor.

Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague gave an excellent speech in which he noted that higher input costs mean higher grocery bills.

I am wondering if the member would speak to how these hidden taxes are contributing to the fact that we have the highest food inflation in the G7.

Jim Bélanger: Mr. Speaker, the three factors above us today, the industrial carbon tax, the Canada fuel tax and the packaging tax, are all factors that concern us and contribute to the cost of food. Some people may say that is not true, but as a small business person, I can say that any costs that affect the cost of machinery or the cost to operate machinery affect costs throughout the supply chain.

• (1255)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians deserve to be able to buy enough groceries and to have a full fridge and a full bank account. Unfortunately, that is no longer the case today. After 10 years of inflationary taxes and deficits, the cost of groceries has nearly doubled. The average family will have to spend \$17,600 on food this year. That is a huge increase. Right now, 2.2 million Canadians are relying on food banks every month because they simply cannot afford to pay for food. This is becoming a crisis because too many people are unable to put food on the table.

A few years ago, the Liberals said they had a solution. The current Minister of Finance and National Revenue announced in 2023 that he would stabilize grocery prices by Thanksgiving that year. It is now February 2026, and Canada has the highest food inflation in the G7. That inflation rate has doubled since the Prime Minister came to power, and yet he promised affordable grocery prices. We have reached a point where Canadians can no longer pay their bills.

The solution proposed by the government is to reintroduce a GST credit that was originally put in place by Justin Trudeau a few years ago. The credit will give a minority of families about \$10 per week, while most Canadians will get nothing. A small minority will receive a maximum amount of \$10 per week to pay their \$300 weekly grocery bill. If people are spending \$300 at the grocery store and the government gives them a \$10 voucher, of course they are going to accept it, but that is not going to pay the bills. That is not going to make much of a difference at all.

Worse still, piling another \$12 billion in inflationary debt on Canadians is going to cause further inflation and drive up the price of everything. We know that some people are desperate and need this credit. That is why we are going to allow this measure to pass. However, no one should be saying that this is going to save the world. This is another illusion from this Prime Minister, who has made big promises and big announcements with no results. When he made this announcement, he had the price tags behind him at the grocery store where he held his press conference removed. He was so ashamed of the prices that he is forcing Canadians to pay that he chose to have them taken down. That is another illusion.

Canadians do not live in an illusion; they live in reality. An hour after the Prime Minister left the grocery store, the prices were put back up. He is not a magician who can make prices disappear. In fact, he is making them go up by imposing an industrial carbon tax that applies to the steel used in agricultural equipment, to fertilizers, to factories that process our food and to other things related to agri-food production.

There is also a new tax called the clean fuel regulations. It is not really a regulation; it is a tax that, according to Environment Canada, will increase the price of diesel and gasoline by 7¢ per litre this year and by 17¢ per litre over the next four years. This tax is even worse than the carbon tax that the Conservatives forced the government to abolish, because at least the government was offering a rebate for that and it did not apply to tractors and other farm equipment or to fishers' boats.

Business of Supply

• (1300)

The new tax applies everywhere, including to fishing and farming operations. It is already significantly increasing the cost of food production because the farmers and truckers who bring us our food have to pay it. Lastly, the Prime Minister is forcing Canadians to pay a packaging tax, and the government wants to ban plastics. Phony environmentalists may think it is a good idea to ban plastic, but that will cause food to spoil much faster, and that cost will be passed on to consumers.

Let us not forget the inflationary deficits. Before entering politics, the Prime Minister admitted that deficits increase inflation. Now he is presenting us with the largest deficit in the history of Canada, except during the COVID-19 pandemic. The deficit has doubled since Mr. Trudeau left office. This deficit is obviously causing widespread inflation across our economy. The cost of government is driving up the cost of living.

We are here to offer solutions. We are proposing that the government adopt our affordability plan and remove all carbon taxes to reduce the cost of gasoline and diesel by 7¢ a litre. Let us get rid of the taxes on steel, on farm equipment and on fertilizer. Let us get rid of the taxes on the production and transportation of our food and allow Canadians to use plastic to preserve their food longer.

We need to trim government fat. We need to put the government on a diet so that Canadians can afford to eat. It is just awful that Canadians have to cut back on what they eat in order to feed a government that is morbidly obese. We need to cut back on the bureaucracy, the consultants, cronyism, foreign aid and handouts to bogus refugees in order to reduce the size of the government and lower the cost of living for Canadians.

Our goal is to make Canada affordable. Considering all the land and natural resources we have, our country should be the most affordable in the world. That is our goal. We are prepared to work with the government and with anyone else to achieve that goal.

Let us work together to make life affordable.

[*English*]

After 10 years of the Liberal government, we now have the worst food inflation anywhere in the G7. Food prices are rising faster than in all of those other countries and twice as fast as when the Prime Minister took office.

The good news is that global factors cannot be to blame. It is not tariffs applied by the Americans, because those tariffs do not apply to Canadian-consumed food. Also, we would not have lower inflation in all the other G7 countries if it really was tariffs. It is a home-made inflation crisis caused by Liberal taxes, on fuel, on the metals that go into our farm equipment and on fertilizer, and the new regulations that prevent us from preserving our food with single-use plastics.

We propose to eliminate all of these taxes and costly red tape, to promote more competition in our grocery sector, because our mission is to work with all Canadians and with all parties to make this a country where one can have a full stomach, a full fridge and a full bank account all at once. One should be able to have a good meal for a good price in Canada. This should be the most affordable

country in the world, because we have the most farmland on which to grow food, and we have among the greatest supplies of energy to help in food production.

Let us remove the one thing that is causing the price inflation, which is the costly Liberal government. We can remove those costs and unleash the production of affordable, nutritious, delicious food that will help our people be healthier and stronger but will also ensure that we are more autonomous and self-reliant. A nation that feeds its people is a nation that stands on its own feet and is truly sovereign.

• (1305)

[*Translation*]

Carlos Leitão (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition just said that the government and government policies are responsible for causing inflation in Canada.

How does he account for the fact that inflation is 2.4% in Canada when Canada was one of the first G7 countries to get its inflation rate under control?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, that is not true: Inflation is not under control here in Canada. Just ask the single moms trying to feed their kids. I want my colleague to go visit a grocery store and tell a single mother that inflation is under control as she puts items back on the shelf because she cannot afford them. He will concede that food inflation in Canada is the worst in the G7, that Canadians pay more and that inflation is twice as high in Canada as it is in the United States. This is a direct result of the inflationary taxes and deficits imposed by this Prime Minister.

We judge the government by its results, not by its rhetoric.

Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to know what the Leader of the Opposition thinks about the fact that the government opposite's scrapping of the carbon tax has had no impact on food prices.

I would also like to know whether he believes that rising food prices can be attributed to the industrial carbon tax and environmental laws alone. Do any other factors come into play?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, first of all, the government did not scrap the carbon tax; it removed one tax to raise two others.

Business of Supply

First, on the clean fuel regulations, I have in front of me a document provided by Environment and Climate Change Canada that shows that, this year, it is a 7¢-a-litre tax. It is even worse than the original carbon tax, since it applies to farms and fishing boats. At least there was an exemption from the other tax. It also applies in Quebec, since these are national regulations that bring up the cost of living. The industrial tax applies to fertilizer.

Second, are taxes alone driving up food prices? Inflationary deficits are also increasing the supply of money and inflating the price of everything. That is the inflation tax. Canadians are paying it. The cost of government is bringing up the cost of living. We need to turn that around. Affordable government means affordable living for all Canadians.

[*English*]

Jasraj Hallan (Calgary East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today the Bank of Canada's report clearly says that two-thirds of the food prices we see today have to do with domestic factors and not with anything else.

Could the leader please talk a bit more about those factors, including the inputs that go into food, and what the Conservative plan would be to get us out of this hellhole that the Liberals have put us in, which made Canada's food inflation the highest in the G7?

The Deputy Speaker: Before I recognize the leader of the official opposition, I want to remind members to be careful with the words they use in the chamber. They do sometimes cause a reaction.

The hon. leader of the official opposition.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, the reality is that we have the highest food inflation in the G7. We have heard Liberal members make all kinds of excuses today. They claim it has to do with some storms in other countries or tariffs that do not apply to Canadian food. If that were true, then all of the other countries would be experiencing the same level of food inflation. They are not. They all live on the same planet, they all have the same tariffs, and yet food inflation is lower in the U.K., France, Italy, Germany, the U.S. and Japan. They all have much lower food inflation than we have here in Canada, which means something is happening in Canada that is uniquely driving up the cost of food.

We have identified the problem. The Prime Minister is taxing the entire food chain. He taxes the the fertilizer that goes in the ground, the farm equipment and the food processors. He then makes it harder to store and secure our food.

We must remove the cost of government so that Canadians can afford the cost of food.

• (1310)

Peter Fragiskatos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to address the House on this very important matter. I will say at the outset that I will be splitting my time with the member for Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River.

This is an important debate. My colleagues might be surprised across the way, but I want to thank them for raising it. Though it is interesting how they politicize it, this is exactly the type of issue

that we need to be addressing as parliamentarians: the everyday challenges of our constituents and the everyday challenges of Canadians across the land. In fact, the Prime Minister, in the noted speech that he gave in Davos just a few weeks ago, talked about a rupture. That is where I want to begin my remarks today, by focusing on what that rupture means.

The upending of the Canada-U.S. relationship, which we are seeing take place in real time, is in fact exactly that. It is a rupture for this country. It is a rupture for the world, as the Prime Minister described. What that means for members of Parliament is that we have to work together. We should always do that, but particularly in this moment. As such, I want to thank my colleagues across the way and, in particular, those who work on the federal finance committee. I will be working on that committee in the next few weeks. It is an opportunity to come together and do what is right for the country.

We have challenges. As I said, our constituents certainly are faced with cost of living issues, so the introduction of the Canada groceries and essentials benefit is an important step in the right direction. This would provide a family of four up to \$1,900, once the increase goes through. I have to, first of all, say I was a bit worried on Friday when I was here during question period, listening to colleagues across the way who were throwing cold water, so to speak, on the idea. I was not sure if they were going to support it. This was after the Leader of the Opposition said that it would be supported. In the end, they made the right decision. That was encouraging to see. They gave all sorts of reasons as to why they might not support it, but in the end, they came together and did the right thing.

Tonight, we will look at the matter in greater detail with the finance minister at the federal finance committee, and I look forward to hearing what colleagues have to say, all colleagues, those from our side, from the Bloc and certainly from the Conservative side. However, this is an important moment to collaborate in whatever way possible.

I wonder if this will go one step further, though. Budget 2025 has not yet fully passed. I mentioned the finance committee. We are looking at the BIA, the budget implementation act, at that committee. There is so much good in there that could be done for Canadians as we prepare for the rupture that is taking place across the world and what it means for Canada. I think about, for example, infrastructure. Time and again, I hear colleagues stand up and speak about the importance of infrastructure and communities. I do not blame them. It is a key issue. Whether we are talking about transit, whether we are talking about water systems or whether we are talking about community infrastructure, it is very important.

Business of Supply

Any government worth its salt would get behind infrastructure and support those municipal governments that, admittedly, are under strain so often because they can only rely on the property tax base. As such, they need provincial help and they need federal help. What do they find in budget 2025? They find support for roads, for bridges and for infrastructure of all kinds, particularly the kind of infrastructure that would allow us to get our resources to market.

It is one thing to talk about what Canada has been blessed with: natural resource wealth that can serve and should serve as a foundation for our future success as a country. It is another thing to think about how we get those to market. We need all sorts of infrastructure, roads, ports and beyond, to be built up, so we can diversify in a very meaningful and lasting way.

There are colleagues who come from urban communities, and transit support is there. It is supported by this government, and I urge colleagues to get behind that, as well as outside-of-the-box thinking. It captured a bit of a tension, this focus on community infrastructure from a capital cost perspective. The construction of hospitals can be supported now by the federal government if the budget goes through. That is why I ask colleagues to go one step further, to take that spirit of collaboration that they have shown on the Canada groceries and essentials benefit and support, ultimately, the budget implementation act.

• (1315)

We will see what happens. I do not want to see, certainly the government does not want to see and I do not think any member of Parliament wants to see, and we are all MPs here and we have all seen what has happened in the past, the politicizing and the games playing that has happened in years past with the BIA, particularly at the finance committee. There is no need for that. There is never a need for it, but particularly now, this would be an abdication of our responsibilities. I will just put it that way.

We also find defence in the budget. I come from London, Ontario, in the region of southwestern Ontario. From a defence perspective, that region is an anchor for the country. It is so important that we support defence industries that are directly involved in the manufacture of the equipment ultimately used by the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces, who maintain our democracy and who help to uphold the freedom that allows us to be in this chamber and debate the issues of the day.

I will also say that there is an enormous supply chain. Mr. Speaker, I know you are from Alberta, and I see a number of colleagues across the aisle who are from Alberta. Whether it is Alberta, Saskatchewan, Quebec or any province, the supply chain extends wide and far in this country, from coast to coast to coast. That is why the \$80 billion-plus investment in this budget is so critical to the well-being of communities, whether they are directly or indirectly involved in the manufacture of military equipment.

Now is the time to live up to our defence commitments from a NATO perspective, certainly, but also from the perspective of sovereignty. Canada is doing that. Other democracies are starting to do that. It is absolutely vital that we get behind investments like this. Along the way with an investment like this, we also have the potential for tens of thousands of jobs to be maintained or created as a result of what the government wants to do on defence.

I see the former parliamentary secretary for defence in front of me. I have respect for him as a colleague. I know that he is interested, I would even say perhaps excited, about the government's focus on defence. I would ask him and colleagues who want to ensure the sovereignty of this country to think about supporting the budget, to put politics aside, put the partisanship aside and do what is right for the country.

Today, we are talking about affordability. This budget is about affordability. To maintain or uphold a vision of affordability for Canadians, the government is also cutting taxes for 22 million Canadians. The first thing the government did when it was elected was to place a focus on exactly that. It is something the Prime Minister talked about at length in the election campaign. He committed to it. It was in our platform. I remember talking about it when I went door to door in my community of London, in London Centre specifically, and we acted on it.

We also see the national school food program being made permanent. It is a very important program because the implementation of that policy, which admittedly came under the previous government but has been continued by this government, in the context of the difficult choices that had to be made, was upheld. I think that is so critical. In terms of effects, we see young kids with food in their bellies, not having to worry about breakfast in the morning or lunch, depending on how it is structured at the school. Prior to this, we had this patchwork quilt of programs across the country that were sometimes maintained and sometimes not. What we have now is something more permanent, obviously, and the predictability that comes with that.

I will end by focusing on the importance of young families. Members have talked about young families. The \$10-a-day child care is something that the government has committed to continuing. We see changes implemented in a very positive way at child care facilities across the country. This gives families more options. It is the right thing to do.

For all these reasons, I would ask the opposition, and in particular my friends in the Conservatives, to collaborate with us for the well-being of this country in the present and in the future. I look forward to questions.

• (1320)

Lianne Rood (Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from London for his very thoughtful intervention.

The member mentioned manufacturing in London. What I am hearing from constituents in my riding that manufacture metal components for automobiles, or different implements that go into making some of our military equipment, is that they have really been hit hard with the industrial carbon tax in their manufacturing processes. When we talk about making things more affordable and wanting to keep domestic production here in Canada, it is the Liberal government's policies that have been driving innovation and production out of this country. In fact, recently we saw another 1,200 auto manufacturing jobs leaving the country.

Could the member opposite comment on why the government will not remove the industrial carbon tax to make it more affordable for our Canadian companies to produce goods here in Canada?

Peter Fragiskatos: Mr. Speaker, my colleague represents the area of what was once called London North Centre, north of Fanshawe Park Road, and I look forward to continuing to work with her.

Her point about manufacturing and businesses is interesting. The member said that she hears time and again about the industrial carbon tax issue. I would welcome her to present a single letter from a business that mentions this point because I meet with these businesses all the time across London and across southwestern Ontario, and they have not put this point forward. What people ultimately want is a government focused on the present, yes, and the future, and on helping to diversify and find new markets for those goods and services that they produce.

[*Translation*]

Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette—Manawan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, going by the calendar on the Table, I see that it is February 3, but it sure feels like February 2, Groundhog Day, because this is yet another Conservative opposition day dedicated to talking about the carbon tax, even though the government eliminated the consumer portion.

The motion also deals with groceries, so I would like to ask my colleague about two things. The government introduced measures to address the labour shortage in the agri-food sector and the impact of climate change—which causes droughts, floods, forest fires and so on—on harvests.

Does the government need to do more to adapt, protect the environment and minimize these changes?

Peter Fragiskatos: Mr. Speaker, I have a great deal of respect for our colleague, and it is always a pleasure to take part in a House debate with him.

There is a climate change crisis in Canada and around the world. Every government has a responsibility to respond with serious policies, because it is a challenge for the future. I have a four-year-old daughter, and I am worried about her future. Every government must assume its responsibilities on this issue.

[*English*]

Kent MacDonald (Cardigan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was here all morning listening to the debate, and the opposition members continually brought up the idea that the industrial carbon price is a solution to all the woes with food prices. They particularly mentioned beef going up 19%.

Business of Supply

I also heard comments from the agriculture committee this morning. The president and chief executive officer of the Canadian Meat Council reported to the agriculture committee this morning that we have a coordinated system that depends on constant livestock supply. He said, "On the beef side, Canada's cattle inventory has declined significantly, driven by prolonged drought in key producing regions, producer herd reductions and global supply pressures," which means the American inventory has also dropped.

Would the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship not agree that the groceries and essentials benefit, Bill C-19, would have a large impact on affordability for the Canadians who need it the most?

• (1325)

Peter Fragiskatos: Mr. Speaker, I certainly would agree. I want to commend the member, who is a new member but has not hesitated to delve in. He is doing a fantastic job on the finance committee.

The member talked about food prices. The Dalhousie University report that members in the Conservative Party have quoted frequently in the past few days makes clear that a major contributing factor to meat prices, in particular, is climate change. It is climate change, without question, because it has led to drought, which has subsequently led to a decline in the cattle stocks that are present.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Buckley Belanger (Secretary of State (Rural Development), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am practising my French, but I will be speaking in English today.

[*English*]

I thank members for their patience as I struggle through trying to learn the French language as best I can.

I stand today in opposition to the Leader of the Official Opposition's motion on the affordability matter the Conservatives brought forward, based on two premises. First, in my history in politics, which spans a short time, I remember that, in all the experience I have had in dealing with Conservatives, they talk about low-income people but I have since no evidence in any of their existence that they care about the low-income sector, the low-income families throughout this country. I even dare say I have never seen them do anything about any initiative for the middle-class people of our great country of Canada.

The third point I would make is that, with respect to the plan the Conservatives supposedly have, in my view, they have never developed a plan to address affordability for low- and medium-income Canadians ever. They have never had a plan, will never have a plan and certainly will not address those issues if, heaven forbid, they ever become the Government of Canada.

Business of Supply

We do not take any lessons from the Conservatives on food affordability, especially not from the Leader of the Opposition, because he does not have any proven track record to address those matters. I just want to say at the outset that I oppose the motion on the premise that the Conservatives' history does not lend itself to having any credible argument when it comes to food affordability.

I have been an MP for 10 months, and I can say to the people of Saskatchewan, of which I represent the northern part, that I have seen the incredible amount of work the team on this side of the House has done to address the affordability piece, and it is wide-ranging. We are dealing with the challenge of trade throughout the world, including the fact that there have been all the tariffs put in place for Canadians. These are really tough moments for our country.

I will point out that the government, this team and all the people, including industry players, provincial leaders, producers and all the other folks, have all come together to stand up for Canada. We know, as we look at trade in general, they dictate a lot of prices. As I tour some of the stores back home in my community of Île-à-la-Crosse, I notice that on some of the produce, more importantly the fruit, it says, "product of U.S.A." Really it comes from California. We ship in food to stock at our store in northern Saskatchewan, and it is products of the U.S.A.

We have enjoyed the trade over many decades with the U.S. and we can see that, obviously, the whole world is part of a trading perspective and that trade really does have influence on prices. Back home, what can we as a Canadian government, what can the Prime Minister, cabinet and caucus do to help all Canadians with the affordability issue?

I want to spend a few moments on what we are doing to reduce costs and help families that are struggling. The talking point in rural Saskatchewan is not affordability; it is whether families can stay in the community they love, and the government is making sure they can. Let me go to some of the points we are working on.

Affordability means access to essential services and support for middle- and low-income families. I am also proud to say we are also going to provide support for people who pay a lot of taxes and for people who realize the cost of living is really high. We know the issues are out there, and we want to do something to address that.

I want to go down a list of some of some of the issues I have learned about over the last nine months I have been an MP. The government has delivered a tax break for 22 million Canadians by eliminating the consumer carbon tax. This was done by our Prime Minister, and it was done fairly quickly.

• (1330)

We also spent hundreds of millions of dollars helping the provinces address the challenge of child care. I was in Saskatchewan several weeks ago, where I announced a \$1.6-billion child care package. It is meant to help Saskatchewan families so that moms and dads, caregivers, are able to go to work without having really high day care costs to pay. What did I announce that day on behalf of the Government of Canada for all Canadians? I announced that the \$10-a-day day care support package will remain in place so day care is affordable for working families.

It is working. Men and women are rejoining the workforce because child care is no longer a deterrent. They are building up our economy. They are working. They are making good money. They are paying taxes. Most families that we know are very appreciative of that.

We have also delivered the national school food program, feeding over 400,000 kids every year and saving the average family \$800 annually on groceries. The government is making that happen. We have eliminated the GST for first-time homebuyers on homes under \$1 million, saving Canadians up to \$50,000 on their first home. A home is the grandest purchase most people make in their lifetime.

The government responded and helped, and I have more good news: The Canada groceries and essentials benefit would help invest \$11.7 billion to help over 12 million Canadians afford day-to-day necessities.

Any day of the week, I could name other examples that are really important. We are building the one Canadian economy, attracting investment and also doing work among the provinces and the territories to eliminate any trade barriers. All that effort is meant to make us a cohesive, highly interactive trading nation from within. That action saves consumers a lot of extra costs. That work is continuing, positioning Canada as a world leader in trade, a reliable trading partner, and also helping with some of the ongoing costs of operating Canadian households throughout our country.

I rise today to say that it is important to recognize that Canada is a great country. We are doing a lot of good things. Is there room for improvement? Absolutely there is.

[*Translation*]

I am French, I am indigenous, but above all, I am Canadian.

[*English*]

Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton—Bkejwanong, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the disastrous policies of the Liberals have driven the cost of food up over \$6,000 in the last five years. Yes, the Liberals removed the consumer carbon tax, but then they introduced the industrial carbon tax, which is being charged back to consumers, and then they added on the fuel standard tax, which is increasing the price of gas and the price of food.

Why does the government not recognize the damage it is doing to the price of groceries and to affordability in this country?

Business of Supply

• (1335)

Hon. Buckley Belanger: Mr. Speaker, here we go again with made-up taxes of the Conservatives. Our tax cuts are real. Our impact is real. Have we got more work to do? Absolutely, and we are continuing that particular work.

Canada is a great country. Yes, at this time, we are working to build our reputation to be even greater throughout the world. That work is being led by a very capable Prime Minister and the members of the front bench. All our caucus members help in many ways. Secretaries of state also contribute in many meetings with respect to how to build a great Canadian economy.

The Liberals' incentives are real. We compare any day of the week to your made-up tax situation.

The Deputy Speaker: I remind the member to speak through the Chair and to not use the word “your”.

[*Translation*]

Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting that the Conservatives have decided to put the topic of food prices on today's agenda. I am not sold on their solutions, but I think that the issue of food prices is a relevant topic to discuss, especially since, about a year ago, one of the government ministers, the member for Saint-Maurice—Champlain, was very vocal about the fact that we could judge their work by looking at food prices. A year later, what do we see? Food prices are higher than ever and Canada is the G7 country where they have risen the most.

Here is the question I would like to ask my colleague opposite: How can we say that they have done a good job when the minister himself said that he should be judged on the basis of prices and that prices are still rising?

[*English*]

Hon. Buckley Belanger: Mr. Speaker, it is important to note some of the progress we have made in recognizing the unique challenges we have in this ever-changing world. There are a lot of differences in how we trade among different nations, and this has an impact on Canada.

At the end of the day, there are two things we need to respond to. Number one is how we can strengthen our country domestically, and we are doing some of that. How can we help our families domestically? There are the initiatives I identified earlier. Moreover, if we become a highly interactive and efficient trading nation, it helps us as we trade globally. All of that means lower prices and lower taxes for all Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know that the country's rural regions are important to my colleague and friend. I had the opportunity to discuss the priorities of rural Canada with him several times over the past year.

I would like him to tell us how the different economic and social policies that the government is putting in place will have a positive impact on the rural communities across the country.

[*English*]

Hon. Buckley Belanger: Mr. Speaker, I have explained the benefits that we as a Canadian government have put in front of families today and that are all geared toward safety, the economy and, of course, strengthening families.

What is also really important is that rural Canada accounts for about 13% of the national population and its GDP contribution is 27%. We can see that the incredible resilience and ability of rural Canada to produce those kinds of goods and provide those kinds of services to the rest of the country should be celebrated. There is no question that rural Canada is a big part of what we plan to engage when we talk about the new Canadian economy, and we are just getting started.

Tamara Jansen (Cloverdale—Langley City, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Tobique—Mactaquac.

Early in the morning at Heppell's potato farm in Surrey, before most of us are awake, the work is already under way. The ground is damp, the equipment is running, trucks are being loaded, and rows of potatoes that will end up on dinner tables across this country are being pulled from the soil by people who have done this their whole lives. This is a fifth-generation family farm, the same land and the same work ethic passed down year after year.

Farming is never easy. There are weather, pests and timing, and they live with that. What is new is the pile-on from the government. Every piece of equipment runs on fuel that is more expensive because of federal taxes. Fertilizers cost more, packaging costs more, and transport costs more. There is a threat that their land leased from the government, some of the best farmland in the Fraser Valley, will be paved over in the next few years. None of this is optional, and these threats to the farm all come from the Liberal government.

Tyler Heppell told me something simple: “We don't control prices. We just watch our costs climb and hope we can keep going.” When people who grow our food are worried about whether they can keep farming, that should worry us. We often hear from the government that there are no taxes on groceries. I would like to demonstrate the reality of those taxes and inflationary policies that are forcing food prices to skyrocket in Canada.

Business of Supply

Let us take the example of something as ordinary as a single pound of potatoes from the Heppell family farm. That potato starts in the ground. To plant it, the farmer needs diesel to run his equipment. That diesel now carries a fuel standard tax. Before the potato is even grown, policy has already added cost. Then comes the fertilizer. Fertilizer production is energy intensive, which means it carries the industrial carbon tax. That cost does not stay at the factory. It is built into the price that farmers pay. Again, farmers have no choice. They cannot grow potatoes without fertilizer. Harvest time comes, and the equipment runs again. There is more fuel and more tax. The potatoes are dug up, washed, sorted and stored. Storage requires electricity. Processing facilities face higher energy costs, compliance costs and reporting requirements, all of which are government-imposed and all of which are passed along.

Then the potato needs to be packaged. This is where red tape turns into inflation. New federal packaging and labelling requirements mean redesigning packaging, reprinting materials, changing suppliers, updating compliance systems and, in some cases, slowing production lines. Maurizio Zinetti, owner of Zinetti Foods in my riding, told me plainly that none of these packaging changes makes food safer or cheaper. It just makes it more expensive. Every box, label and adjustment adds a few more cents. When packaging millions of units, those cents add up fast.

Then the potato is loaded onto a truck. The trucker pays higher fuel costs because of the fuel standard tax. Those costs are not absorbed; they are charged forward. Finally, the grocery store receives the pound of potatoes. The store did not cause the inflation, the farmer did not cause it, and the trucker did not cause it, but all of them have been handed higher costs, and there is only one place those costs can go. They go to the price tag. That is how inflation works. It is not through greed or climate change but through a steady accumulation of policy choices that make every step of production more expensive. When government taxes the production of food at every stage, it should not surprise us when food becomes unaffordable. By the time that pound of potatoes reaches a Canadian kitchen, families feel it. Prices are up. When people ask why, the Liberal answer is always the same: climate change.

Let us keep following the potato and see if that excuse holds up. Our potato was grown on the Heppell family farm in B.C. Imagine another potato grown just south of the border in Idaho: same crop, same season, same sun, same rain, same droughts, same heat waves. Climate change does not stop at the 49th parallel. Both farmers deal with the same climate risks. Both wake up early and hope the crop makes it through, but as those two potatoes move toward markets, something different starts to happen. The Canadian potato picks up costs that have nothing to do with soil or sky. It carries higher costs because of federal carbon taxes. It carries higher fertilizer costs because of industrial carbon taxes. It carries added compliance costs from packaging and labelling. It carries transportation costs inflated by a fuel standard tax on top of everything else.

• (1340)

The Idaho potato does not carry those same policy costs, and when both potatoes finally arrive at the grocery store side by side, the Canadian one is more expensive, not because the farmer is greedy, not because the climate was worse, but because our government added more costs to it along the way. That is why food inflation in Canada is now twice as high as it was when the Prime Minister took office. That is why it is twice as high as in the U.S. That is why we now lead the G7 in food inflation.

If climate change were the main cause, our numbers would move together, but they do not. Climate change is global. The inflation is local. The Prime Minister said that he wanted to be judged by the price of groceries. Canadians have done exactly that. They judge him every time they put something back on the shelf, every time they choose beans over beef, every time they are forced to line up at a food bank to feed their family. This is not a mystery. It is the result of choices made here, added step by step, potato by potato.

Let us follow that same pound of potatoes one last step. By the time it reaches the grocery store, it costs more, not because of the farmer or the climate but because of all the costs added along the way. Canadians see the higher price and they feel it immediately. The government's response is not to remove those costs; instead, it sends out a cheque. The Liberals call it help, they call it relief, but what they are really doing is this. After making that potato more expensive to produce, transport and sell, they are borrowing money to give a small portion of that back.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer looked at this plan and told us it will cost billions of dollars over the next few years. That money is not coming from savings or from growth; it is borrowed. Let us think about what that means. We add costs to the potato on the way up, the price rises, and then we borrow money to soften the blow. That borrowed money adds to inflation, and inflation makes the potato even more expensive. It is a loop.

Business of Supply

A family might get a cheque today that might help for a month, but it does not make fuel cheaper for the farmer. It does not make fertilizer cheaper. It does not remove the packaging rules and transport taxes. All of those costs are still waiting for the next harvest. The potato goes through the same process again, only this time the dollar buys a little less because more money has been pumped into the system with nothing done to fix the cause. That is not a food affordability plan. That is borrowing to cover up the consequences of bad policy. Real relief would be stopping the cost increases at the beginning of the potato's journey, not mailing out cheques at the end and pretending the problem is solved.

We have followed a simple pound of potatoes all the way from the field to the family table. We saw how costs were added step by step, fuel taxes, fertilizer taxes, packaging rules and transport costs, until that potato cost far more than it should. We saw how the government blamed the climate, even though the same climate exists beyond our borders. We saw how its final answer was to borrow billions to send out cheques, which only makes the potato more expensive.

Our Conservative motion offers a different path. Instead of adding costs to the potato at every stage, we say that we should remove the hidden taxes that drive up the cost of producing and delivering food. We should stop treating farmers and truckers as problems to be managed and start treating them as partners who feed the country. We should stop trying to buy Canadians off with gimmicks and tricks that will only end up costing us more. Canadians do not want a cheque that disappears in a month; they want food they can afford every week. If we want fewer people lining up at the food banks, we have to stop making food more expensive in the first place. That starts here with this motion. This is common sense. It is time to let Canadians keep more of their own money, one potato at a time.

• (1345)

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have come up with this imaginary food tax. If we were to carry their logic through on this one, it would mean we would take away the taxes on the income of a farmer, a truck driver or a store clerk because they also add to the food costs, no doubt.

At the end of the day, it is all imaginary with the Conservatives. They have clearly demonstrated that their ideas just do not work. They are not feasible. Why should any Canadian give any credibility to the types of silly motions we have before us today in the House of Commons?

• (1350)

Tamara Jansen: Mr. Speaker, I had hoped my speech would help Canadians better understand how these hidden taxes are driving up prices.

Farmers, truckers and grocery clerks do not set prices. Government policy sets prices. We tax fuel, fertilizer, packaging, all these things, the cost of travel for food all the way to the checkout. Our motion says to stop adding costs to the potato and start taking them off by removing hidden taxes and boosting competition so Canadi-

ans can afford to eat. That is what our motion proposes, and I hope our colleagues will support it.

[*Translation*]

Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette—Manawan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, a few decades ago, we had 13 grocery chains and now we are down to three. That number goes up to five if we include Walmart and Costco. In other words, we are dealing with an oligopoly.

In the last Parliament, the government enhanced the powers of the Competition Bureau, not necessarily to bring more players into the sector, but to prevent future mergers or acquisitions. The Governor of the Bank of Canada says that this lack of competition means that all the increases in input prices are passed on to consumers.

What does my hon. colleague suggest we do to ensure that there are more retailers and more competition in the grocery sector?

[*English*]

Tamara Jansen: Mr. Speaker, I think the most important part right now is to focus on our farmers. Giving people a tax rebate, for example, is not a great solution, because it makes our food more expensive. It is not a food affordability plan.

We followed a pound of potatoes from a local farmer and saw where the costs were added. Instead of removing these costs, the government borrows billions to send some of that money back, which adds to inflation and makes the next potato even more expensive.

Canadians require relief, but what they need is food costs to be less every week. A good solution would be to remove the hidden taxes that are making their lives less affordable, the solution found in today's Conservative motion.

Burton Bailey (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have seen over 10 years of the Liberal government in power, and the cost of living is unbearable for too many Canadians. Instead of common-sense solutions, like the motion Conservatives are proposing today, the Liberals impose more inflationary band-aid solutions for political purposes.

Does my hon. colleague believe the Liberals will ever realize that Canadians just want them to stop taxing them to death and to get out of their lives?

Tamara Jansen: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague is right. We need to focus on the real problem, which is government inflationary policy, if we want to fix this. The Liberals offer excuses, but Conservatives offer solutions.

Statements by Members

A potato grown in B.C. faces the same climate change as the one grown in Idaho: same sun, same rain, same drought. However, the Canadian potato costs more because government policy adds costs at every step: fuel taxes, fertilizer taxes, packaging rules and transport costs. If climate change were the reason for our food inflation, then all the G7 countries would feel it the same, but instead, Canada has the worst food inflation in the G7. The weather, the climate, is global. The inflation is domestic.

Richard Bragdon (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise in the House today and speak to this important motion that our party's leader brought forward.

We recognize that the challenges Canadians are facing are serious and very real. Canadians do not have to look at an economics chart or study statistics to realize that the cost of putting food on the table is going up exponentially each and every month and year. In fact, we have seen, just this year, that the average cost of groceries to feed a family of four has hit over \$17,000 per year and is expected to go up another \$1,000 in a year. I have a feeling that many Canadians look at this and wonder how they are ever going to make ends meet.

We have to look at it holistically and realize that this pain is real. It is not just some table or statistic. It is a reality that families are experiencing day in and day out, and we are hearing about it. I am sure that my colleagues on the other side of the House get the same types of call I get. We do not even have to wait in our offices for a phone call. We can just visit the local grocery store and talk to those who are purchasing groceries. They recognize that the problem is not with the farmer, because it is not the farmer who determines the price. It is also not the trucking company that determines the price. Domestic government policy and the government's priorities are impacting the price of food.

It is time we put the priorities straight and put the cost of living first and foremost on the priority list of the government. We must not be distracted. We must address the root cause of soaring inflation in this country. We are not ranked number one in the G7 for food inflation without having responsibility for that. It is easy to scapegoat or point the finger at some vast, outside influence causing it, but we have to check within our own house and see what needs to be fixed. I would humbly present before the House that we must start with the foundation.

I was reminded of an ancient story, and perhaps some members will recognize it. It refers to those who were wise about where they built. They chose to build upon a rock, and when the winds, adversity and trouble came, their house withstood those storms because their foundation was firm. The foolish builders decided to build on sand, and when the winds and rains came and beat against the house, the structure looked similar. It looked great and wonderful, but what was underneath the structure was faulty. As a result, it began to falter when pressure came.

• (1355)

Now, we can curse the wind and blast the storms. We can holler at them and say they are terrible, awful and unjust, or we can look at the foundation and say, "It is time to fix it and make sure we are building on the right place." We have a choice to make. We could continue to build on sand and grow the size of government, grow

programs and spend more money. At the end of the day, we can spend and spend and never solve any problems if the foundation does not get fixed. It is time we fixed the foundation and addressed the real issues at the core of the challenges we are facing as they relate to affordability, which Canadians are struggling with.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Richard Bragdon: Mr. Speaker, I am starting to feel a bit comfortable, but I have to wind down because I am going to get interrupted. I will be giving colleagues a high-five and doing all that good stuff here in just a second. If we are going to address the faulty foundation, we have to deal with the four Fs. I will get into them in my second segment. I am just warming up.

Let us talk about the cost of food and the soaring input costs that farms are facing. We must also talk about fuel, because fuel is what drives and gets our food to market and on the grocery shelves. When the price of fuel goes up, the price of food goes up, so we have to address fuel. Once we get beyond fuel, we had better check the foundation so we can build a future of prosperity and affordability for every Canadian. It is time to check the foundation, to get the country back on the right foundation, to stop building on sand and to start building on a firm foundation.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[English]

"EVERY CHILD MATTERS" BRIDGE

Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I ask all members to join me today in expressing solidarity with the Nuu-chah-nulth people of Tseshaht First Nation after two incidents of racist vandalism at the "Every Child Matters" orange bridge in Port Alberni in just one week. Swastikas and hateful slurs defaced this important site of remembrance.

This was not random vandalism. It was an attack on survivors, on indigenous families, on Jewish communities and on the truth of what happened at the Alberni Indian Residential School. For generations, indigenous children were taken across this bridge from their families. Painting it orange was an act of remembrance, education and reconciliation.

Hate will not erase the truth. I thank the many volunteers who repainted the bridge and showed our community's resolve. We must condemn racism wherever it rears its ugly head in Canada, support education and the hard work of reconciliation, and stand with survivors today and always.

* * *

WOMEN'S HOCKEY

Mike Kelloway (Sydney—Glace Bay, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last month, Cape Breton proudly hosted the under-18 Women's World Championship, bringing the world to our rinks and showcasing the very best of women's hockey. The tournament coincided with the grand opening of the Kehoe Forum at Cape Breton University. It is a new, state-of-the-art facility and the first of its kind in Canada, dedicated exclusively to women's hockey and serving as a lasting home for women's hockey in the region.

Events like this do not happen by accident. They are built on years of grassroots leadership, including the work of the Cape Breton Blizzard team, along with dedicated volunteers, coaches, families and community partners who continue to grow girls' hockey and create opportunities for young athletes.

Through world-class competition and community pride, Cape Breton showed once again that when we invest in women's sport, we build stronger communities and a stronger future.

* * *

MILL CLOSURES

Tamara Kronis (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today is February 3, the first day that 254 forestry workers at the Crofton Mill are out of work. Almost all of them are still without jobs, and another 125 workers will be following them to the unemployment line in the coming weeks.

Since the Prime Minister took office, Vancouver Island has seen a steady drumbeat of mill curtailments and closures. Shifts are being cut, mills are being idled and families are turning to food banks in record numbers. When a mill shuts down, the whole community is closed. Crofton workers met with Liberal ministers in good faith and put forward practical, targeted proposals. They were promised employment, insurance support and transition funding. Ministers looked my communities in the eye and made those commitments. Well, it is February 3. The Crofton workers and others on curtailment in my community are out in the cold and still waiting.

I am asking for an urgent meeting with the minister to discuss the reasonable request Crofton workers made. Our communities deserve more than words and "someday" promises. They deserve action.

* * *

AFFORDABILITY MEASURES

Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, families in Brampton work hard and deserve support that works for them. That is why the government is increasing the GST credit by 25% for five years. This means a family of four in Brampton could receive up to \$1,900. It will help more than 12 million Canadians across the country.

Statements by Members

These measures are paired with \$500 million to protect supply chains, support farmers and help keep prices down at the checkout. They build on the progress already made, including a middle-class tax cut for 22 million Canadians, \$10-a-day child care, dental coverage for six million Canadians, expanded student loan forgiveness, and school meals for 400,000 children each year.

These measures are about making everyday life more affordable and supporting families in Brampton and across Canada.

* * *

FUR INSTITUTE OF CANADA

Blaine Calkins (Ponoka—Didsbury, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today and recognize the Fur Institute of Canada's day on the Hill.

The Fur Institute was created in 1983 by Canada's wildlife ministers and serves as Canada's national voice for the fur trade. The Fur Institute is internationally renowned for its expertise in humane trapping and is home to the Seals and Sealing Network, which promotes Canadian seal products at home and abroad. Representing a broad cross-section of the fur trade, from trapping and runway to farm gates and showrooms, this organization represents the interests of over 35,000 Canadian trappers, fur farmers, seal harvesters, artisans and furriers, as well as governments and indigenous nations all involved in the fur trade.

Trapping is an essential part of wildlife management, livestock protection, infrastructure maintenance and species recovery. In short, trappers live in harmony with the land, as opposed to living on it.

Today, there are over 20 delegates on Parliament Hill who are attending the Fur Institute of Canada's Hill day. I am excited to meet them, and I encourage all my colleagues to do the same.

* * *

● (1405)

[Translation]

HOME SHOW IN QUEBEC CITY

Steve Lavoie (Beauport—Limoilou, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, here we are in early February, and Expo habitat Québec is hosting its 40th home show at the Centre de foires d'ExpoCité in my riding of Beauport—Limoilou.

Statements by Members

For 40 years now, Expo habitat has been a must-see event for the construction and housing sector. Every year, it brings together contractors, experts and professionals from across Quebec.

Given the challenging housing environment across Canada, events like Expo habitat are more vital than ever. Expo habitat Québec contributes directly to this collective reflection by offering up real solutions to build better and faster. People come to have important exchanges, sharing ideas, innovative practices and sustainable solutions to housing challenges.

I would like to commend the organizers, exhibitors and all the partners who ensure the success and relevance of this show year after year.

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[English]

CANADA'S 22ND PRIME MINISTER

Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 20 years ago, the Right Hon. Stephen Harper was elected as Canada's 22nd prime minister. This week, as his official portrait is unveiled and as Conservatives gather to celebrate the many achievements of his government, I am proud to rise and remember the legacy he left, one of fiscal know-how, strength and unity.

Prime Minister Harper successfully led our country through the 2008 economic crisis, resulting in the best recovery in the G7, while cutting taxes and saving real money for Canadians. On the global stage, he held firm to his principles, supporting our allies and having the courage to stand up to those who did not allow for freedom or democracy. It was his leadership that united our Conservative movement and opened the door to millions of Canadians supporting our party. He is right honourable indeed.

I thank Prime Minister Harper for his public service and dedication to Canada.

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INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT WEEK

Hon. Mona Fortier (Ottawa—Vanier—Gloucester, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise today to recognize the important work that Canadian civil society organizations are doing around the world in these difficult times. During this International Development Week, I want to recognize the critical contributions of hundreds of workers from these organizations across Canada and especially those from Ottawa—Vanier—Gloucester.

[Translation]

Canadian international assistance has long been a beacon of hope around the world. The assistance that we provide supports the development of clean water and sanitation facilities, trains health care professionals on reducing infant mortality and ensures universal access to basic education for children, especially young girls.

[English]

With Canada's place in the world more important than ever, our government is committed to working with our civil society partners to build a strong and prosperous Canada. We know that when we work together, Canadians deliver for the world. By investing in

overseas development assistance, our government is implementing a pragmatic approach—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Nicola.

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SOUTHERN ALBERTA MUSTANGS

Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with profound sadness, I offer my sincere condolences on the passing of three junior hockey players from the Southern Alberta Mustangs. The families, teammates and coaches in Stavely, Alberta, who cared for Caden Fine of Alabama, and Kamloops' own J.J. Wright and Cameron Casorso, are in our thoughts as they grieve this heartbreaking loss.

Kamloops Minor Hockey had the honour of watching J.J. and Cameron grow up playing in the organization for 14 and 13 years, respectively. Many in the Kamloops community knew these players as teammates and friends. The pain of this tragedy will be felt for a long time, and the memory of these young lives will remain with us always.

They are gone from our sight but never from our hearts.

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[Translation]

THOMAS FAFARD

Patrick Bonin (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today, I would like to call attention to the meteoric rise of a Repentigny resident who is redefining the limits of what is possible. His name is Thomas Fafard.

Thomas has proven that even the longest-lasting records are no barrier to him; they are an invitation to excel. During his very first marathon on January 14, he beat Alain Bordeleau, the 40-year record holder. That was a first for Quebec. His was more than a timed performance; it was history-making.

This is just one chapter in Thomas's epic journey. Already a Quebec half marathon record holder, Thomas has an insatiable thirst for victory. In fact, he is not about to stop there. Today, his goal is clear: to earn a spot in the 2028 Los Angeles Olympic Games marathon.

Thomas's determination to push the limits makes him an outstanding ambassador. We look forward to seeing where his efforts will take him. We are proud of him. Repentigny and all of Quebec are cheering him on.

• (1410)

[English]

IRAN

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (North Vancouver—Capilano, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in solidarity with my constituents of North Vancouver—Capilano, which is home to a strong and vibrant Iranian Canadian community, to unequivocally condemn the Iranian regime's unjustifiable killing of thousands of peaceful civilian protesters.

The Iranian regime must halt its horrific repression and intimidation, and I call on the regime to respect the rights of its citizens.

I want to recognize the extraordinary courage of Iranian people both in Iran and here in Canada, who continue to stand up for fundamental rights and freedoms despite the regime's ongoing brutality. Canada has been firm and steadfast in its support for the Iranian people and in its opposition to the actions being taken by the regime.

I thank the people of Iran and Iranian Canadians for their bravery. I am inspired by their strength and their fight to shape a peaceful and democratic future for Iran. Canadians stand with them at this enormously difficult time.

* * *

COST OF FOOD

Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, three years ago the finance minister promised Canadians he would stabilize food prices. Since then, lettuce is up nearly 40%, coffee 33%, beef 27%, baby formula 13% and canned vegetables almost 12%.

Canada is leading the G7 in food inflation. It is now twice as high as when the Prime Minister took office and twice as high as it is in the United States. Canadians are making 2.2 million visits a month to food banks, which has doubled under the Liberal government. In my area, the local health unit has identified food insecurity as an urgent issue, as the typical family spends over \$1,200 each month on healthy food alone, and many are forced to juggle between rent and buying groceries.

Instead of working to reduce the cost of food, the minister is announcing yet another temporary rebate, giving some about \$10 a week. The government needs to support a Conservative affordability plan, one that eliminates taxes and encourages competition.

* * *

BARBARA “MARY” CHARLES

Wade Grant (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today with a heavy heart but in celebration of one of my matriarchs. Barbara “Mary” Charles passed away at the age of 96 last year.

Better known to thousands as Aunt Mary, she grew up as a Tsleil-Waututh member, went to a Catholic day school for much of her youth and at 17 married into Musqueam. She had 13 children and became the leader of her family, but also a leader in Musqueam as a councillor for over 40 years and engaged in the Sparrow case

Statements by Members

that proved our right to fish for food, social and ceremonial purposes.

After her time as a councillor, she became a cultural ambassador for Musqueam, welcoming dignitaries, royalty, celebrities and even politicians. In fact, the Minister of Housing and Infrastructure once called her his rock.

As we move forward, I want to raise my hands to my aunt and end this speech for everyone in the House the way she would end it, by saying, “May your days be filled with joy. May your successes be frequent. May you find peace and comfort, and may your hearts always know how special you all are.”

Hay čx^w qə.

* * *

CONSERVATIVE PARTY OF CANADA

Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Conservatives are united for hope. After 10 years of Liberal failure, Canadians are struggling just to get by. Groceries cost more, housing is out of reach, energy bills are up and crime is out of control. The Canadian promise that if someone works hard and plays by the rules they can get ahead has been broken. Conservatives are united to restore that promise.

While the Liberals offer slogans and photo ops, Canadians are demanding real results, but the Prime Minister's rhetoric does not match reality. Food inflation is higher than ever, housing is out of reach, dozens of mills have closed across British Columbia and no new resource projects have been approved or built.

Conservatives are focused on delivering real solutions. We will lower taxes, fight inflation, cut red tape, build more homes and produce more Canadian energy, so we can stand on our own two feet. We are united for hope. We are focused on results, and we are ready to make life more affordable for the millions of Canadians who work hard and deserve better than what this guy is promising.

• (1415)

The Speaker: The member is not referring to this guy, I hope. His comments should go through the Chair.

[Translation]

The hon. member for Terrebonne.

* * *

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Tatiana Auguste (Terrebonne, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Black History Month is celebrating 30 years of recognition in Canada. For 30 years, we have been sharing, remembering and honouring the stories that had been sidelined for far too long.

Oral Questions

This year's theme is "30 Years of Black History Month: Honouring Black Brilliance Across Generations—From Nation Builders to Tomorrow's Visionaries". As part of this theme, we are acknowledging those who helped build Canada. The workers who built strong communities, the leaders who stood up for justice, and the artists, educators, entrepreneurs and innovators who paved the way.

We are reminded of the Black communities in Nova Scotia, whose courage paved the way for freedom, respect and dignity in Canada. We are also reminded of the members of the Haitian community, who fled from a dictatorship in the 1970s and settled in Quebec, caring for, training and educating generations of Quebecers and Canadians. They also paved the way.

This Black History Month, let us honour these builders and visionaries, whose legacy I have inherited.

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[English]

CANADA'S 22ND PRIME MINISTER

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today, we unveil the portrait of the great Right Hon. Prime Minister Stephen Harper.

He reminds us of better days. As prime minister, he led Canada's economy through the great global recession with the smallest deficit, the shortest recession, the fastest recovery and the best balance sheet. He would then go on to successfully lead us through two wars: one in Afghanistan against the Taliban and then against ISIS. He then passed laws that kept our streets safe and expanded opportunity for Canadians. The cost of a home was an almost laughable \$450,000, and rent was only \$900.

We look back on Mr. Harper's many successes, not just in nostalgia but with hope, because it has been done before and it can be done again.

* * *

AGA KHAN

Taleeb Noormohamed (Vancouver Granville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on February 4, Ismaili Muslims across Canada and around the world will celebrate Imamat Day, marking one year since His Highness Prince Rahim Aga Khan became the 50th hereditary imam of the Ismaili Muslims.

In that time, Mawlana Hazar Imam has worked tirelessly to build bridges between nations, to advance the fight against climate change, to support community resilience and to improve the quality of life of those living in the most difficult of circumstances. For Ismailis, he has reminded us of the importance of being active, engaged, ethical citizens and that living our values of kindness, compassion and service to all is an act of faith. For us all, Hazar Imam has shown us the importance of faith, of maintaining balance in our lives, of taking the time to care for family and community and, above all, of living our physical lives with purpose and intention. These values reflect the best of what unites us as Canadians.

I invite all members of the House to join me in wishing His Highness and Ismailis across Canada, *Khushali Mubarak*.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

TAXATION

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians deserve to have a full fridge and a full bank account. The Prime Minister told us he could be judged by the prices at the grocery store. Since then, costs have been rising faster than in all other G7 countries.

My theory is that taxes on farming equipment, fertilizers and the entire supply chain are the reason we have the worst food inflation in the G7. That is my theory.

What is his theory?

• (1420)

Right Hon. Mark Carney (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition's theory is wrong. According to the Canadian Climate Institute, the industrial carbon tax has virtually no impact on grocery prices. There is no packaging tax.

The Canadian dollar and U.S. tariffs are both having an impact.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that does not add up, because every other G7 country is paying tariffs. Every other G7 country is experiencing the effects of climate change. However, they have less food inflation. Their consumers are not seeing the big increases that we are seeing here.

We have the worst food inflation in the G7, and the Prime Minister is not explaining why. What I am saying is that his inflationary taxes and deficits are to blame.

Will he work with us to eliminate these taxes and make groceries affordable?

Right Hon. Mark Carney (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, according to TD Bank, one of the major impacts on grocery prices here was the drop in the Canadian dollar during a Conservative Party filibuster before Canada's new government was elected.

The Canadian dollar is now going up, which will produce results for Canadians.

[English]

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians deserve to have a full stomach, a full fridge and a full bank account all at once.

The Prime Minister has said that he could be judged by the price at the grocery store. Since that time, food inflation has doubled and grocery prices are rising faster in Canada than in any other country in the G7. My theory is that his taxes, the carbon tax on farm equipment, fertilizer and food processors, and the new tax on diesel and gas, are the cause. That is my theory; what is his?

Right Hon. Mark Carney (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the impact of the industrial carbon tax on food prices is, as estimated by the Canadian Climate Institute, approximately zero. The impact of the fuel charge, which exempts diesel, gasoline, fertilizer and food processors, is de minimis.

What the fuel charge does do is support the farmers of Battle River—Crowfoot. It supports canola production. It supports biofuels. It supports our future.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, now we will have to find out whether the Prime Minister is telling the truth or his environment department is telling the truth. The Prime Minister says it does not apply to gasoline. According to his own environment department, it applies to both diesel and gasoline, seven cents a litre this year, and yes, it does apply to farmers, fishers and others.

Regardless, we have the highest food inflation in the G7. I have given my theory on why, under his leadership, Canadians are paying more, faster than anyone else. What is the Prime Minister's theory for his terrible record on food inflation?

Right Hon. Mark Carney (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know the Leader of the Opposition is just visiting his riding, but if he would spend more time—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I think we will have to start that from the top.

Right Hon. Mark Carney: Mr. Speaker, I recognize that the Leader of the Opposition is just visiting his riding and will be running in another riding in the next election. He should spend some time, I would suggest, with the farmers in his riding, who benefit from our trade deal with China and its \$7 billion in new exports, and who benefit from the biofuel charge that supports canola production, supports farm income, supports our future.

• (1425)

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I realize that the Prime Minister is just visiting Canada. I welcome him.

Let us go to my riding. Let us go to Drumheller. Let us go to Camrose. Let us go to Consort. Let us ask them if they believe that, when we charge a seven-cent-a-litre tax on the diesel and gasoline used to grow and ship food, or when we tax fertilizer and farm equipment, that gets passed on in the highest grocery prices in the G7.

Is he ready to make that trip to talk about that tax?

Right Hon. Mark Carney (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am always pleased to go back to my home province of Alberta. I am always pleased to go back to Drumheller, to Consort, which is the home of the great k.d. lang, I might add.

Oral Questions

I am always supporting Canadian farmers, as this government does, with new markets, with support for biofuels, with exemptions from the federal fuel charge, with exemptions from the industrial carbon tax, because we believe in Canada.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the original question was, what is his theory on why Canada, after a year of his leadership, has the highest food inflation in the G7?

Why is it that single moms, seniors and small businesses are seeing grocery prices rise faster here in Canada under his leadership, after the Prime Minister promised to stabilize them, than people in any other G7 country? I have offered my theory, which is that it is his many taxes on farmers, fishers, food processing and fertilizer.

Once again, if it is not all of his taxes on food production giving us the worst record, then what is?

Right Hon. Mark Carney (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one thing impacting, according to TD Bank, food prices is the fall in the Canadian dollar caused by the obstructionism of the members opposite before this government came into place.

What this government is giving Canadians is certainty, certainty with the groceries and essentials benefit, which is \$1,800 for a family of two, and is providing the support Canadians need, the boost now, to bridge to a brighter future in building Canada strong.

* * *

[*Translation*]

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Yves-François Blanchet (Beloil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first, allow me pay my respects to Prime Minister Harper, who is the thought leader for both the Prime Minister and the Conservative leader.

I would like the Prime Minister, in the company of someone who claimed to be sensitive to Quebec's reality, to summarize what he knows and understands about the expropriation and the trauma inflicted on residents of Mirabel during construction of the Mirabel airport.

Right Hon. Mark Carney (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to pay my utmost respect to the 22nd prime minister of Canada, a great prime minister of Canada. In a few hours, I will have the honour of presenting the unveiling of his portrait.

Oral Questions

The high-speed train is a major national project. It is a national project that will be carried out in close collaboration with residents of Quebec and Ontario.

Yves-François Blanchet (Beloil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I gather that this is the sum total of the Prime Minister's knowledge of the trauma caused by the expropriations in Mirabel, which he wants to duplicate and repeat.

Does he think that expropriation without mutual agreement, expropriation by email, expropriation without impact studies, and expropriation without genuine consultation are likely to ease the serious trauma suffered by the people of Mirabel and the Laurentians?

Right Hon. Mark Carney (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are working closely with the people of Mirabel, Quebec and Ontario to have a small corridor, not a major airport, but a small corridor for a project that will create more than 50,000 good jobs here in Canada.

• (1430)

Yves-François Blanchet (Beloil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am not aware of any agricultural producer who considers their farm to be too small to be worthy of respect.

Are the powers to suspend rules, laws, parliamentary privilege, environmental consultations, and expropriation rules not proof that Bill C-5 and its offshoot, Bill C-15, are heartless bills?

Right Hon. Mark Carney (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the process will be respectful, transparent and inclusive.

My question is the following.

Is the member for Beloil—Chambly for or against high-speed rail? Is he for or against the future of Quebec? Is he for or against the future of Canada?

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the food crisis is the worst problem facing families in Canada. There are single moms who do not even know whether they will be able to pay their bills.

I asked the Prime Minister for his theory, because if he cannot diagnose the cause of inflation and rising prices, he cannot find the solution. The Bank of Canada says that two-thirds of the increases reflect domestic factors.

I am giving him another chance. As an eminent economist, can the Prime Minister tell us what is causing the worst food inflation in Canada?

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Minister of Transport and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition knows full well that we have taken steps to help families. That is why he bowed to our demand to fast-track Bill C-19, which will provide no less than \$1,800 to Canadian families to help them deal with food and affordability issues.

[English]

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is another illusion. It will be \$10 a week, at most, for a

family. Most Canadians will get nothing at all. It will be \$10 a week for \$300 of groceries weekly for a family.

The question was, why is it that Canada has the worst inflation in food prices in the G7? The Prime Minister claimed it was our low dollar under his leadership. He had claimed that he was going to be so good with money and so good with protecting the loonie.

Why is it that he has stood in the House of Commons and admitted that his leadership has tanked our dollar and raised grocery prices?

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Minister of Transport and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not know, but the math I have is that \$1,800 divided by 52 is a lot more than \$10 a week.

The Leader of the Opposition knows very well that this is substantial assistance for Canadians who are experiencing affordability issues. That is why he bent over when we asked him to accelerate and pass Bill C-19 and make sure that we can get that aid to Canadians right away.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the Prime Minister is going to dodge questions, he had better find someone better than that to get up in his place. It is unbelievable.

We have said that we would work with the government to save the people the Prime Minister has priced out of groceries, and if that \$10 a week might make the difference for a very small number of people, members can bet we will work hard to do it. We are willing to put differences aside because Canadians are suffering the worst inflation and food prices in the G7.

Will he put differences aside and agree to remove all the Liberal taxes at the grocery store so Canadians can afford to eat comfortably again?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Jobs and Families and Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, all we hear from the opposition are imaginary taxes that they—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. I cannot hear anything, because there is too much noise.

The hon. Minister of Jobs and Families.

• (1435)

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Mr. Speaker, all we hear from the opposition members are conversations about imaginary taxes that theoretically are impacting the price of food. They do not want to work with evidence. They do not want to listen to experts who are telling us that the very thing we need to do is increase the money in people's pocketbooks. That is what we are doing, whether by cutting taxes for 22 million Canadians, ensuring that people have access to the groceries and essentials benefits, or making child care affordable. Families are saving \$16,000 a year in affordable child care—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Regina—Lewvan.

Warren Steinley (Regina—Lewvan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it took the minister a long time to get there.

The finance minister promised three years ago that he would stabilize grocery prices by Thanksgiving of 2023. Since then, coffee has gone up 33%, beef has gone up 27% and lettuce has gone up 40%, and Canada is leading the G7 in food inflation. Now he is announcing another temporary rebate, which would not reduce the cost of a single food item. The rebate is an admission of the Liberals' failure in a policy.

Will the finance minister keep his word and lower the price of groceries so Canadians can afford to put food on the table?

Hon. Adam van Koevorden (Secretary of State (Sport), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, never in his more than 20-year career has the new, temporary member of Parliament for Battle River—Crowfoot cared about people who are in financial need. The new, feigned approach to affordability is not convincing any Canadians.

The GST rebate makes a big difference for families who need it. The Conservatives have committed to voting for the bill, but they still want to criticize it and say it would not work. It would work. As somebody who has benefited from that benefit in particular, I can say that my family needed that help and that families still need that help, and that is why we are delivering for families in need.

Warren Steinley (Regina—Lewvan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, these are not my words; the Liberal finance minister said he would have grocery prices under control by Thanksgiving of 2023. Even my kids know that we should do what we say we are going to do. Why can the finance minister not figure this out? It is time for the Liberals to make sure Canadians can afford to put food on the table.

Will the finance minister keep his word to Canadians so they can afford to feed their family?

Peter Fragiskatos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, up until recently, the Conservatives have been frequently quoting Food Banks Canada. They have stopped, and I wonder why. I wonder if it is because the organization has suggested a key recommendation that the government is now fulfilling, which is the groceries and essentials benefit of almost \$1,900 for a family of four.

What about other supports that the Conservatives are against? There is the \$10-a-day child care program, the permanency of the national school food program, and the Canada child benefit sustained for middle-income and low-income families. That is what the government is about. That is what we will fulfill for this country.

Oral Questions

Shelby Kramp-Neuman (Hastings—Lennox and Addington—Tyendinaga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since 2023, the finance minister has promised to stabilize food prices. Instead, Canadians continue to face out-of-control grocery costs, something anyone who shops in our communities sees every single day. A temporary rebate will not fix the root cause: poor economic policy. The last time rebates were used, Canada ended up with the highest food inflation in the G7.

Why now should Canadians trust the finance minister to actually lower grocery prices?

Hon. Stephanie McLean (Secretary of State (Seniors), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is funny that on the one hand the Conservatives chide the groceries and essentials benefit, but on the other hand they are upset that it is not for everyone.

When I was the Minister of Service Alberta and had just had my new baby, I suddenly started getting child care benefit cheques that I did not need, but families that did need the money were not getting as much. We are ensuring that the families that need the money are getting the money they need, like the families in Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke. Single seniors are going to get an extra \$950 a year to help pay for toilet paper, lettuce and coffee.

Those are the families that need the money. Those are the families the Conservatives are fighting against. Tell me why.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman (Hastings—Lennox and Addington—Tyendinaga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-19 would not lower food prices, but we will not block a small rebate for the people who actually qualify for it.

Over the past three years, the prices of beef, lettuce and baby formula have all surged. Even basic student staples like Kraft dinner and canned beans are more expensive. Canadians need leadership that delivers. That means eliminating the industrial carbon tax, removing the fuel standard tax and strengthening competition in the grocery store.

When will the government start governing responsibly and lift these burdens so Canadians can afford groceries on their paycheques?

Oral Questions

• (1440)

Hon. Rechie Valdez (Minister of Women and Gender Equality and Secretary of State (Small Business and Tourism), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us break down affordability for an average young family of four in a year. The Canada groceries and essentials benefit would deliver nearly \$1,900. That same family can receive the Canada child benefit, which provides \$7,000. It is also saving \$16,000 for affordable child care, \$730 for dental care and \$800 for the national school food program, and it will get \$840 because we cut taxes for Canadians. That is up to \$50,000 of savings. None of this would even exist if the government were a Conservative government.

* * *

[Translation]

PENSIONS

Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, some retirees are being deprived of their old age security benefits because of errors in the Cúram software. The minister is telling us to give her their names and that they will help them.

There are 500,000 new applicants every year. If we are to believe the minister's figures from yesterday, figures that are constantly changing, and if it is true that only about 2% of files are problematic, that still means that 10,000 retirees could be affected.

When will she help them instead of downplaying their problem?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Jobs and Families and Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is not an easy fix. The department is in the process of modernizing systems that are more than 60 years old so it can better serve more than 7.5 million people every year.

If the member opposite is aware of any instances where seniors are having difficulty accessing their benefits, I would ask her to please share them with me so that my department can resolve these issues as quickly as possible.

Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, at first, the Liberals did not think there was any problem with pensions. They called it fearmongering. The following week, there were about 30 cases, or 0.2% of the files. Yesterday, that rose to 2% of claimants, which could mean up to 10,000 cases.

The Liberals are still treating this like it is no big deal. This government is so accustomed to providing poor services to the public that 10,000 retirees potentially being deprived of their pensions is no big deal.

Why does this government never take anything seriously?

Hon. Stephanie McLean (Secretary of State (Seniors), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yes, these delays are too long, but more than 98% of all claimants received their benefits without delay.

The department is actively working to quickly resolve any issues clients may encounter. We continue to improve the benefit delivery process.

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Laila Goodridge (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, three years ago the Minister of Finance promised Canadians that he would stabilize food prices, yet Canada now leads the G7 in food inflation. The price of lettuce is up nearly 40%, coffee is up 33%, beef is up 27% and baby formula is up 13%. The Liberals' solution is a temporary rebate that would neither address the root cause of why food inflation is so much higher here nor bring down the cost of any food.

Why should Canadians trust that the minister's new program would help them, when the last led to the highest food inflation in the G7?

Hon. Rechie Valdez (Minister of Women and Gender Equality and Secretary of State (Small Business and Tourism), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, speaking of affordability, I know how it felt to pay over \$2,000 a month for child care when I was raising my two young kids.

The good news is that, today, families are saving over \$16,000 per year thanks to the affordable child care that our government put in place. Our national early learning child care is also about giving families more choice. This is empowering parents, especially mothers, who can choose to go to work and who can choose to run their business. This is helping them contribute to our economy and is building Canada strong.

Laila Goodridge (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the problem is that the Liberals' solutions, their programs, are just not working. They are making it so that one in three kids is in the line at the food bank; there are 700,000 children accessing a food bank every single month. Food inflation is twice as high as when the Prime Minister took office a year ago and twice as high as what it is in the United States.

The question is simple: Will the Liberals just listen to Conservatives, steal our idea and support our motion to introduce a food affordability plan, eliminating the industrial carbon tax, eliminating the fuel standard tax and increasing competition amongst grocery stores?

• (1445)

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Jobs and Families and Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives would need to start having some good ideas for us to steal them. We are always interested in good ideas on this side of the House.

Oral Questions

The member for Fort McMurray—Cold Lake just said that nothing is working in her province. Let me tell her that the national school food program is feeding 58,000 children in her province. In fact, parents in her province are saving up to \$13,700 per child per year through early learning and child care. There have been 46,000 spaces created since 2021.

Clearly, the member has not spoken to the families in her riding and—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton—Bkejwanong.

Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton—Bkejwanong, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals promised stable food prices, but Canadians got the opposite. Lettuce is up 40%. Coffee is up 33%. Beef is up 27%. Canada now leads the G7 in food inflation, which has doubled under the current government and is twice the U.S. rate. The Liberals' grocery summit did not work. Their rebates will not cut prices. Their taxes drive costs up. There are 2.2 million Canadians relying on food banks.

Will the Liberals support our food affordability plan to scrap the industrial carbon tax and the fuel standard tax, and to boost competition?

Hon. Jill McKnight (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am confused by and concerned about the member's question. I am confused over the question not being about last week's important announcement. I am concerned that the Conservatives are missing the details of Canada's groceries and essentials benefit. It is a 25% increase to the GST tax credit for five years, with a one-time payment equivalent to 50% this year. It is \$500 million to address supply chain disruptions and keep prices down.

This is important news, and we need to focus on what we are doing for Canadians.

Jonathan Rowe (Terra Nova—The Peninsulas, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance promised to stabilize food prices three years ago. What the Liberals have actually done is create the worst food inflation in the G7. Food inflation is now double what it was when the Prime Minister got into office. This is not a global phenomenon. Canadian inflation is double that of the United States. Now, instead of fixing the actual problem, they have added a temporary band-aid. A couple making minimum wage would not even be eligible for it.

Will the Liberal government please stand with our food affordability plan to make groceries affordable for all of us?

Hon. Joanne Thompson (Minister of Fisheries, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me remind the opposition member from Newfoundland and Labrador that the people in his riding reach out to me on a regular basis. They reach out to say, "Enough with the fear and enough with the obstruction. Let's work together."

Let me remind the member that there will be \$50,000 in savings or direct payments to a family of four in affordability measures. This matters. I ask the Conservatives to please work with us to do what the people of this country and our province want done.

Scott Anderson (Vernon—Lake Country—Monashee, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are telling us that soaring grocery bills are

caused by external factors, as if the cost of living is going up everywhere. It is not. We have higher food costs than almost anywhere else in the G7. Meanwhile, the government piles on carbon taxes and red tape that make it more expensive to grow, transport and sell food. Let us be honest. These handouts are an admission of failure and a small band-aid for large, self-inflicted wounds.

When will the government stop blaming others and start scrapping the policies that are driving food inflation at the checkout?

Peter Fragiskatos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague can look to Dalhousie University's food price index of 2026. He can look to the recent TD report. We know climate change is a key factor when it comes to the increase in the price of food. This is admittedly a challenge for this country. This is why the Canada groceries and essentials benefit is so important.

Let us move beyond the script for a moment. The Conservatives showed a spirit of collaboration to pass that benefit. Will they go one step further and support budget 2025? We have an opportunity now to collaborate in this moment. This is what Canadians expect. It is what Canadians deserve.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Eric St-Pierre (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, recent aggression by major powers toward the Arctic region have underlined the importance of Greenland's and Denmark's sovereignty. This rhetoric is not happening in a vacuum. Indeed, if left unchecked, it threatens our NATO alliance and Canada's own Arctic sovereignty.

Can the Minister of Foreign Affairs share with the House how the government is working with our allies to protect the territorial integrity of Greenland and defend Canada's sovereignty?

• (1450)

Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this week, I will be travelling to Nuuk, Greenland, to formally open the Canadian consulate there. I will be meeting with my Danish and Greenlandic counterparts, where I will be reiterating the principles of state sovereignty, territorial integrity and co-operation amongst Arctic states, including the Nordic five. Here at home, we are investing more than \$80 billion in Canada's defence and security, including Arctic security, and we will build Canada strong.

*Oral Questions***AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY**

Adam Chambers (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 2016, Canadians built 2.3 million vehicles. Just last year, that number dropped to 1.2 million cars. Last week, there was more devastating news for Canadian auto families as General Motors laid off 1,200 employees.

When will the government stop telling people it is eventually going to be okay and start delivering results for Canadian auto workers?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Industry and Minister responsible for Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, of course, our hearts and minds are with the auto workers, and we are there for them. Again, this morning, I was on the phone with Premier Ford and with Vic Fedeli, working on new opportunities to bring even more auto making to the country. That being said, what we never hear from the Conservatives is the fact that these auto workers are victims of the unjustifiable U.S. tariffs. Why are they not denouncing that? Why are we not all working as one team Canada? That is what auto workers want.

Adam Chambers (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course we denounce those tariffs, but with all due respect to the minister, she has had 10 years with her Liberal colleagues to protect the auto sector here in Canada. Now it is being reported that the government is going to reintroduce subsidies for Canadians to purchase electric vehicles. Really?

Does the government really think the way to save Canada's auto sector is to give taxpayers' money to Canadians to buy Chinese electric vehicles?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Industry and Minister responsible for Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what is clear from the government is that, notwithstanding the U.S. tariffs, after 10 years, we were able to create 3,000 new jobs at the Windsor NextStar battery plant, which the Conservatives are against. Why are they against 3,000 jobs in Windsor? We were also able to create 4,000 jobs in St. Thomas in a Conservative riding. Why are they against it? Why are we not all working together to make sure we are attracting new investment in the auto sector? Meanwhile, we are working with the Province of Ontario on a great auto strategy.

Rhonda Kirkland (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 2016, Canada assembled 2.3 million cars. By 2025, that number collapsed to 1.2 million. Under the Liberal government, Canada's auto industry has been cut in half, and on Friday, 1,200 more auto workers in Oshawa worked their last shift. The Prime Minister promised Canadians he was the one to be trusted to get us a deal.

Instead of saying "who cares", will the Prime Minister commit to protecting Canada's auto industry and getting Oshawa's auto workers their jobs back?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Industry and Minister responsible for Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, who will get Oshawa's auto workers' jobs back? My colleague is misleading the House, because what she is missing in the Trillium report she is referring to is that in 2016, Japanese automakers were responsible for 44% of auto production in Canada. At this point, it is now 77%. We will invest in

those who invest in us, and we will support those who are making sure our auto workers are at work.

Rhonda Kirkland (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister has sat at the cabinet table for more than 10 years, and under her watch, the Liberal government has deindustrialized Canada, leaving the auto industry to be sacrificed to the U.S. Her inconsistent answers, from suing auto manufacturers to saying the government is getting its money back or restricting GM's access to the Canadian market, only continue to fuel the uncertainty that auto workers across Canada are feeling.

Will the Prime Minister act now and tell auto workers in Oshawa and across Canada how they are going to get their jobs back?

● (1455)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (President of the King's Privy Council for Canada and Minister responsible for Canada-U.S. Trade, Intergovernmental Affairs, Internal Trade, and One Canadian Economy, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, perhaps I will be allowed to add my voice to other colleagues and say how happy I am to see former prime minister Stephen Harper in Ottawa today. I had the privilege of serving in the House when Mr. Harper was Prime Minister of Canada for nine years, and it is a privilege to see him in good health and smiling in Ottawa today.

With respect to supporting the auto industry, I also remember, as an opposition MP, even in the far corner over there in the third party, Mr. Harper and his ministers supporting the auto industry at an important moment in our history, and that is exactly what our government will continue to do, as the former prime minister did in those years as well.

Arpan Khanna (Oxford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada once built over two million vehicles in a single year, but under the Liberals, that is now down to 1.2 million. That is nearly half, and as production drops, 1,200 more auto workers in Oshawa worked their last shifts just this last week. CAMI workers who lost their jobs are now getting heavily taxed payouts, and they are struggling to make ends meet while their plant sits idle. There is no production. There is no timeline, and there is no support.

After destroying Canada's auto industry, when will the Liberals finally stand up for auto workers?

Oral Questions

Hon. John Zerucelli (Secretary of State (Labour), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have met with Unifor in that member's riding, and I will tell members something that the auto workers told me. They told me they want opportunities. They want opportunities to grow the economy, and that is what we are doing. Since we were elected last year, we have created about 180,000 jobs. Wages are rising. Inflation is within the Bank of Canada's target range. The Prime Minister is focused on building bold and building new opportunities with Canadian steel and Canadian lumber, working with unionized workers. We are investing in infrastructure, growing key industries and investing in trade so Canadian businesses can create new opportunities. Canada has one of the strongest economies in the G7.

Arpan Khanna (Oxford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, auto workers in my riding want their jobs back. Auto workers have kept our country moving for generations. They are hard-working, they are tough and they are highly skilled, but the government keeps selling them out. We need Canadian cars made with Canadian steel and made by Canadian workers. The Liberals promised a deal. They promised they would defend Canadian jobs, but we are seeing job losses right across our country.

How many more auto workers have to lose their livelihoods before the government starts putting Canada's jobs first?

Hon. John Zerucelli (Secretary of State (Labour), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are fighting for those auto workers every single day. Those workers want us to work together, and that is exactly what Prime Minister Carney's plan delivers. Time and time again—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I think the member knows, and he clearly did not mean to do that, I hope.

Hon. John Zerucelli: Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are obstructing the Prime Minister's plan. Time and time again, the Conservatives vote “no”. They block projects, delay progress and stand in the way of the very things that their constituents want. We want to build this country: build big and build bold. The Conservatives are standing in the way. When will they get on side?

Kathy Borrelli (Windsor—Tecumseh—Lakeshore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 1,200 more auto workers in Oshawa just lost their jobs. Brampton workers are still waiting on the Liberals to respond to their 3,000 jobs that were lost. Windsor thrives on auto manufacturing and now we are left worried about our future. The Liberals promised a deal for Canadians. They promised to defend Canadian jobs, but every week, the government fails on all accounts.

When will the Liberals stop their pointless photo ops and get real results for the thousands of auto workers who have lost their jobs?

Hon. Evan Solomon (Minister of Artificial Intelligence and Digital Innovation and Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, here is some breaking news for the opposition: We are in a trade war. Illegal and unjustified tariffs are taking those jobs, and this party is fighting for those jobs and investing in the auto sector. Do members know how to fight for Canadians? We fight for auto jobs. We cut taxes for 22 million Canadians. We boost the GST rebate, helping to put food on the table. We build affordable homes. We invest in defence, child care and pharmacare. That is

how we fight for Canada. We believe in Canada. We build in Canada. We buy in Canada. The Conservatives should try it.

* * *

● (1500)

[Translation]

FORESTRY INDUSTRY

Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent—Akiawenrahk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the forestry sector is very important to Quebec's economy. Some 57,000 people work in the forestry in Quebec. Unfortunately, the news is bad.

A few days ago, we found out that Domtar is closing its Outardes sawmill on the north shore. In Amos, in Abitibi, 100 people will be losing their jobs at the Arbec plant. That is the reality today. We need positive and constructive measures that produce real results.

Why is the government unable to deliver real results for the Canadian economy?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Industry and Minister responsible for Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, clearly the people who work in the lumber and forestry sector are affected by the tariff war. That is why we have introduced several important measures. My colleague, the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, is working on a plan.

In the meantime, we have measures through the Business Development Bank of Canada, or BDC, and through Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions.

I have a great deal of respect for my colleague and would even call him a friend. I would be happy to work with him on specific cases, because we have to be there for workers in Quebec's forestry sector.

Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent—Akiawenrahk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would also like to tell the minister, whom I might call a friend, that, unfortunately, the policies are not working. Quebecers want results, not just lip service. I would like to remind her that her Prime Minister said that he was going to fix the tariffs by July 21. The tariffs on wood are 45%.

Are you looking for ideas? I have a few: reduce bureaucracy, eliminate anti-development laws and lower industrial taxes. Will you do that to deliver actual good results?

The Speaker: Again, questions must be directed through the Chair.

The hon. Minister of Industry.

Oral Questions

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Industry and Minister responsible for Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague and, quite frankly, we are already doing many of the things he suggested, including cutting red tape. I find it fascinating that the Conservatives never, ever criticize any of the messaging that comes out of the White House.

They will never say the tariffs are unjustifiable and unjustified. They will never say there is a trade war. They will never say the victims of this trade war are the people who work in the softwood lumber sector, the aluminum sector, the steel sector and, of course, the automotive sector.

The question is, why?

* * *

[English]

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Michael Coteau (Scarborough—Woburn, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as members of Parliament we have a responsibility to help build an economy where everyone has the opportunity to find success. While some Conservatives continue to dismiss diversity, equity and inclusion, the government knows that empowering under-represented entrepreneurs strengthens communities and helps build a stronger Canada.

As we mark the beginning of Black History Month, can the minister responsible for small business speak to the government's programs to support Black entrepreneurs and help start and grow their businesses?

Hon. Rechie Valdez (Minister of Women and Gender Equality and Secretary of State (Small Business and Tourism), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada's commitment to inclusion and equality is embedded in our charter, a commitment we reaffirm as we celebrate and mark Black History Month.

Through the Black entrepreneurship program, the government is giving Black entrepreneurs the tools they need to scale and grow their businesses. To date, we have supported over 24,000 Black entrepreneurs across this country, who are creating jobs and really building this country strong. We are building on that success by extending the program and investing \$189 million. While the Conservatives question the value of inclusion, we will unite and empower all Canadians.

* * *

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals issued millions of temporary resident permits in the last five years. The results are that rents have skyrocketed, emergency rooms are overflowing and Canada's youth jobs crisis is the worst it has ever been. Some 1.5 million temporary residents had their permits expire last year. That is more than the entire population of Calgary.

I have a simple question: Can the Minister of Immigration tell the House how many of these folks have actually left the country, as the law requires them to do?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians gave the government a clear mandate to bring sustainability to our immigration system. We have been clear that we are reducing the temporary resident population. Our student numbers are down. Our worker numbers are down. The temporary resident population fell by 176,000, and our asylum numbers are down by a third. We will stick to our targets. We will enforce our rules so that our immigration system works for Canadians, for newcomers and for our businesses.

• (1505)

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I had a sneaking suspicion the minister would not answer that one, because she actually boasted in the Canadian press that they brought in millions of temporary residents with no way to track if they would leave. Worse, the minister has signed off on bringing in hundreds of thousands more temporary residents this year without knowing if they will leave.

At the end of this year, three million temporary residents will have had their visas expire. That is roughly the population of Toronto. If the minister has no idea if millions of temporary residents have left, why is she still issuing new permits?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, for the member's benefit, I will say that Canadians gave the government a clear mandate to bring immigration to sustainable numbers. That is exactly what we are doing.

In *The Globe and Mail* on January 15 there was a great article. TD stats show as well that rent is decreasing and housing starts are up. There has been economic recovery. We are bringing more population to our rural communities through our rural immigration pilot as well as Francophone immigration. We are here to strengthen our communities and fill labour gaps when needed.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like members to visualise the math lady GIF for a moment, because last year the Liberals removed only 22,000 people who had no legal reason to be in Canada. Millions minus 22,000 is still what? It is still millions.

I will ask this again: If the minister has no idea if millions of temporary residents have left and has no plan to remove them, why is she still issuing new permits?

[Translation]

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said, we have a clear mandate. Canadians gave us a clear mandate. We are, in fact, working to strengthen our immigration systems. The most recent data show that the temporary resident population fell by 176,000 in the fall. We will keep working to improve our economy for all Canadians and for all businesses.

* * *

[English]

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Dominique O'Rourke (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every year, International Development Week is a time to recognize Canada's contribution to sustainable, inclusive development around the world. Tomorrow the University of Guelph will welcome the International Fund for Agricultural Development and Farm Radio International to advance linkages between Canada's farm competitiveness and global rural transformation.

As we mark this year's International Development Week, can the secretary of state describe how Canada's efforts are delivering results for partner countries and why that matters to Canadians?

Hon. Randeep Sarai (Secretary of State (International Development), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this year's theme for International Development Week is "prosperity through partnership". Canadians are strong when we work together and work with others. While our development efforts are grounded in fighting poverty and advancing inclusive growth, they can also lay the groundwork for long-term mutual prosperity. I saw this myself in Indonesia, where decades of development co-operation have helped cut poverty by half while paving the path to a new trade agreement that will benefit Canadians and Indonesians alike.

This is how we create opportunity: by building prosperity through partnership.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are shamefully increasing rent and other charges for our soldiers, sailors and air crew. With one hand they promised a pay raise, but with the other they are clawing it back with rent hikes and a new post-living differential. Often our troops are ending up with less take-home pay than they made before.

The defence committee recommended the rent increase be reversed, but the Minister of National Defence said no.

When will the Liberals stop clawing back the hard-earned pay of our troops and reverse this unfair and unnecessary rent hike?

Hon. David McGuinty (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are consumed with rebuilding, rearming and re-booting our Canadian Armed Forces. We are building thousands of new homes. We are retrofitting thousands of existing units.

Every member of the House knows it is time for us to invest properly in our Canadian Armed Forces members, which is exactly what we are doing. For example, recently we acquired a 37-unit

Oral Questions

apartment building in B.C. as a result of an acquisition. We are making others around the country. As we build the portfolio of housing, we will be bringing the cost down.

* * *

● (1510)

[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the need for nutrition, education, health care and equal rights, particularly for women, has never been so acute around the world, but Donald Trump has decided to abolish USAID, the international aid agency.

This senseless decision will cause suffering for millions of people. What are the Liberals doing? They are doing the same thing: making cuts. This is a cruel decision that will have a real impact and increase both instability and insecurity.

Will the Liberals reconsider this irresponsible decision?

[English]

Hon. Randeep Sarai (Secretary of State (International Development), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, addressing the roots of conflict and instability abroad helps reduce the risks Canadians face here at home. Investing in development helps build stronger allies, new trading partners and new markets for Canadian businesses. Our government is making generational investments to strengthen the Canadian economy, help Canadians get ahead and build a more resilient future for our country. Our development efforts are a critical part of that by strengthening our international partnerships and supporting a more peaceful, stable and prosperous world.

* * *

HOUSING

Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, maintaining existing affordable and co-op housing stock is essential to address the housing crisis. China Creek Housing Coop in my riding was shocked to learn that there is no funding in the coming year in CMHC's budget to cover the housing charge subsidies. That means low-income families, seniors, single parents and people trying to get by will be made homeless. They are not alone; approximately 300,000 more homes across the country will be impacted.

Will the Prime Minister tell these families they do not need to fear losing their home, and confirm today that ongoing funding will be in place for their housing charge subsidy?

Business of Supply

Hon. Gregor Robertson (Minister of Housing and Infrastructure and Minister responsible for Pacific Economic Development Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her concern about the challenges for co-op housing. Co-op housing is a key priority within Build Canada Homes. We will ensure that a significant portion of the Build Canada Homes funding will be targeted for stabilizing and investing in new co-op housing.

As someone who has co-op housing in my riding, the most in B.C., I obviously want to make sure my constituents and those in the member's constituency and in co-ops across the country feel the strong support of the government. We are focused on delivering for co-ops.

* * *

[Translation]

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I wish to draw the attention of members to the presence in the gallery of the Right Hon. Stephen Harper, the 22nd prime minister of Canada.

[English]

Prime Minister Harper is here today on the occasion of the unveiling of his official portrait.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

* * *

TRAGEDY IN ALBERTA

The Speaker: Following discussions among representatives of all parties of the House, I understand there is an agreement to observe a moment of silence for the victims of the tragic accident that occurred in Alberta.

I invite hon. members to rise.

[A moment of silence observed]

● (1515)

Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. It is an honour to raise this point of order when the Right Hon. Stephen Harper is in the House.

I remember the level of decorum we had in those days, and I rise only because Standing Orders 14 to 16 were repeatedly violated on all sides of the House today. When Mr. Harper was prime minister, he was never once interrupted by heckling, as I recall. I hope we can go back to that.

Dan Albas: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

The Secretary of State for Sport referenced the “temporary” member for Battle River—Crowfoot. It is in the Standing Orders that we are supposed to use either the title of the leader of the official opposition or the name of the riding. To add any adverbs or adjectives undermines the decorum in this place, and as someone who is part of the government, he should know better.

The Speaker: Yes, indeed, we have to be careful about using epithets, because they have the potential for creating disorder. The member's point is well taken, and I hope all members will observe that advice.

The hon. government House leader is rising on a point of order.

Hon. Steven MacKinnon: Mr. Speaker, I regret omitting the word “backward”, as in “bent over backward”, in an earlier answer.

Greg McLean: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. During question period today, the Secretary of State for Labour referenced Canada's having the best economy in the G7, but every economic institute says exactly the opposite, including the Bank of Canada, so I would ask—

The Speaker: That really sounds like debate.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—FOOD AFFORDABILITY

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Richard Bragdon (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I was stating, it is so important at a time like this that we check the foundation. If we just continue to build and build, without making sure that the foundation is right and the thing upon which we are building is sound and secure, many times we are going to have even more problems.

Canadians are demanding that we check the foundation to make sure we get it right. The foundations I am talking about are the very sectors that helped build this country in the first place: the foundations of farming, forestry, fisheries, the fuel sector and natural resource development. Those things help provide food security and economic security for our people.

However, what we have seen since that time is an ever-expanding growth in government, and a dependency upon government and growing its programs, without growing, developing and ensuring that the economics upon which they are built and established are firm and successful. Those are the very sectors that provide the revenue and the strength to sustain those programs.

Too many times we are looking to another new and expansive government program that costs Canadian taxpayers more and more money—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

It is nothing the member has done. There is a lot of noise in the chamber and more, I believe, outside in the courtyard, so I would invite people in the courtyard to leave expeditiously so the chamber can continue its business.

The member for Tobique—Mactaquac may continue.

Richard Bragdon: Mr. Speaker, I want to draw our attention to one of the big challenges we are facing. We have gotten away from our foundation, which is the affordability of food.

Business of Supply

When we look at the cost of groceries affecting each and every Canadian right now and their households, when we look at the fact that Canada now has the highest food inflation in the G7, that is not bad luck. That is just plain bad policy. Food inflation is twice as high now as when the Prime Minister took office. After nearly a decade of Liberal rule, life costs more, not less. Food inflation is said to now be double that in the United States, and it is obviously more than in all of the other G7 countries. They face the same weather and climatic changes that we do. They face the same global supply chain challenges and shocks that we do. What is the difference?

It is a difference in governments and the approach and fiscal policies they undertake. When we consider that our food banks are being overrun, we have a situation that no longer is just an urban issue but has also spread into our rural communities. I have talked to the food bank workers in our areas. They are exhausted. They work harder and harder and put in more and more hours. They give out more food than ever before. With these growing challenges, 2.2 million visitors go to food banks every month. These are historic numbers, and they are troubling numbers.

When we consider that food processing costs have continued to soar and that the input costs on our farmers have continued to soar, we realize we are expanding in all the wrong indicators and at all the wrong times. It is time we check our foundation, get back to what works and get away from the things that are detrimental to the growth of the very sectors of our economy that built this nation into the greatest nation there is.

This great nation we live in is facing a great challenge, and it is because we have expanded in the areas we should be pulling back from. We have retreated in the areas we should be growing in, which are the areas of our future prosperity and the same as our past prosperity: the sectors of farming and natural resource development, and our fuel and oil and gas sectors.

The ones that helped build the country are the ones that are going to help restore the country's prosperity. We must reverse course, stop putting the boot on our producers and on our farmers, and address the food inflationary challenges that every Canadian is facing right now, by getting out of the way and removing some of the regulatory and tax burdens that are overwhelming our farmers, our producers and our citizens. It is time to get back and fix the foundation.

• (1520)

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting. Conservative after Conservative is happy to jump up and say that this year, we have the worst food inflation in the G7. However, if we look at the last five years, we will find that this is not the case, that Canada does relatively well.

When we did get a high year compared with other G7 countries, we are in the process of passing Bill C-19, the grocery benefit, doing exactly what a caring government should do.

Will the member at least acknowledge that Canada is not broken and is doing relatively well on the inflation file?

Richard Bragdon: Mr. Speaker, I always thank my hon. colleague for his many hours here in the House. He works tirelessly. I must say, though, he is profoundly wrong in this regard. Canadians are not saying to me, at least in my constituency office, that they have never had it so good, that it is so wonderful how well they are doing, that they have never had more money in their pocket. No, it is the exact opposite. They are frustrated because of the policies of the government.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is like saying to the arsonist, go put out the fire you started; we will trust you. It was not this side of the House that said no to pipelines. It was not this side of the House that put carbon taxes on our farmers. It was not this side of the House that erected interprovincial trade barriers. It was that side of the House. It is time they get their side of the House in order.

• (1525)

The Deputy Speaker: I want to assure the member that I have not started any fires.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Jonquière.

[*Translation*]

Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am always amazed at the cynicism behind the Conservative Party's motions. They are using a real problem, namely food inflation, but ascribing it to a completely far-fetched cause. They say that food inflation exists today because there is a carbon tax.

Only the Conservative Party would try to further the oil companies' agenda by raising an issue that is affecting the entire population. I find that outrageous. Which type of business made the most money in recent years since the end of the COVID-19 pandemic? It is the oil and gas sector. It has been raking in record profits year after year, and yet that is not enough for my Conservative colleagues. They also argue that the standards that have been implemented should be lowered on the grounds that it would reduce the cost of food. That is preposterous.

[*English*]

Richard Bragdon: Mr. Speaker, it is a bit beyond rich when recipients of transfer payments that come from the oil and gas sector, to the tune of \$13 billion to \$14 billion a year, then turn around and say to that very sector that it is the cause of food inflation. I say no. If they are so principled against those who produce our oil and gas, they should say no to the transfer payments, and we will redistribute it to the provinces that appreciate it.

Business of Supply

Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member has been such a passionate advocate for nation-building projects that would tie Alberta to New Brunswick and everybody in between, economically, materially and through national unity. I know he knows the inextricable links between food security, energy security, economic security and therefore national security, which is imperative for Canada. I wonder if the member might want to make some comments about that.

Richard Bragdon: Mr. Speaker, yes, we in New Brunswick, and in my part of the country that I represent, appreciate the hard work of our friends in Alberta and those, in particular, in the oil and gas sector, who help produce the fuel to fill up the trucks, fill up the ships and fuel the trains that transport the food from that part of the country to our part of the country and the energy from one part of the country to the others and also produce the revenues through which our regions of the country that sometimes struggle fiscally have the means to feed, work, build schools, build hospitals and maintain things. If we want to build a country that has food security, economic security and energy security, we had better work together and appreciate all regions of this country, and that includes our oil and gas producers.

Hon. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to the opposition motion. I cannot help but think as I listen to the debate, including the last speech as well as those I listened to earlier this morning and prior to question period, how maybe, just maybe, the Conservatives would have a leg to stand on with this argument had it not been for the fact that the last time they made this argument, it came to no fruition whatsoever.

I think back to question period when the Leader of the Opposition was telling a world-renowned economist, the Prime Minister, about his theory, why he believes we have high costs of food in Canada. I listened to him, and he said, "This is my theory. This is my theory," and it is this and that, all these reasons why. Well, I remember the Leader of the Opposition's theory that went on for years about the carbon tax. He said if we got rid of the carbon tax, food prices were going to come down instantly. They were going to drop. All of the world's problems, all of Canadians' problems, would be cured if we just got rid of the carbon tax. What ultimately ended up happening? I would argue that the Leader of the Opposition was to some degree successful in that. He always pictured that he would be the one to finally get rid of the carbon tax, although he was not, but in reality, that carbon tax was eliminated. It was eliminated last spring, in 2025.

I will be sharing my time with the member for Bourassa.

What happened when we eliminated that carbon tax was that there was effectively no impact at all with respect to food prices. There was no deflation. As a matter of fact, if we listen to their argument today, Conservatives are telling us food prices have gone up exponentially higher since that carbon tax was eliminated. That is effectively what they are saying. However, they promised us. The Leader of the Opposition put forward his theory on how to reduce the cost of food, for years, and then as soon as the carbon tax was gone, it did not change anything.

Who repeatedly got up on this side of the House to say economists were telling us there is virtually no impact from the car-

bon tax on food? Who said that all along? The Governor of the Bank of Canada made a comment that it was 0.25%, or something like that. What did the Conservatives do? They just attacked the Governor of the Bank of Canada, said he had no idea what he was talking about and that he should be fired. That is what the Leader of the Opposition was saying.

Then he comes in here, along with all of his members, saying, "This is my theory." His theory is that it has to do with more taxes, hidden taxes, made-up taxes, taxes that do not even exist when one actually tries to break them down. He comes in here with such pomp and circumstance, such conviction, and he stands there and tries to lecture the Prime Minister on how to solve the problems because, again, it can only be due to the federal government and its supposed imaginary taxes. However, the reality of the situation is that it has to do with so much more than that.

The three main causes that drive prices up have to do with global impacts. That does not fit the Conservative narrative. They will certainly never talk about any of them, because it does not fit their objective. It did not fit their objective years ago either, and it did not stop them then, so I do not expect it to stop them now. For the purposes of having a debate, after years of doing the same thing over and over, I will once again attempt to put forward my position, which, by the way, is supported by economists throughout the world. "Heaven forbid we would have to listen to those elites, those experts," I am sure the Conservatives are saying right now.

The first main cause is climate and weather impacts. Extreme weather, heat waves, droughts and climate-driven crop failures remain one of the biggest contributors to rising food costs. That is just a fact. That is being reported by economists of all political stripes from throughout the world.

● (1530)

The second leading cause is global supply chain distribution. Shipping delays, rail bottlenecks, port inefficiencies and higher international freight costs are adding to the expenses because it is even harder for product to reach Canada.

The third cause, which I have talked about many times in the House when we have talked about the rising cost of food, is geopolitical events. The war in Ukraine disrupted global grain and fertilizer markets, raising the input costs for Canadian farmers and food processors.

All of these things matter, and they matter if members come here from a genuine place of trying to make the situation better for Canadians. This matters because, if we want to have an informed, intelligent debate on this issue, we need to be able to accept some of the reality of what is actually going on.

If a member's objective is to come here and not talk about what is really happening in the world, and their objective here is to, at any opportunity, try to seize power through, whether deliberate or not, misinformation, then they would be taking the approach the Conservatives have been taking. They try to paint this, as they have for years, as the Liberals creating the problem. They say that the Liberals are the only ones who can possibly be responsible, and therefore, it is all their fault, but it just does not jive with what is going on in the rest of the world. It does not jive with what economists are saying or what anybody who has any kind of expertise is saying.

I hear the food professor quoted in here by Conservatives, and it is because that is their only source of information to try to back their claims. It is becoming an ongoing joke on this side of the House every time they say, "According to the food professor...". The reality is that, if we want to have an informed debate about this, they are going to have to start to take a different approach and be honest about what is really going on.

The approach the Conservatives took for years, and I will argue that it was effective, was with the carbon tax. They effectively created enough distraction by pushing the issue, but it did not serve them one bit. They ended up right back on that side of the House, after litigating that argument for years, because they were not actually being honest with Canadians or putting forward a sincere argument as to what is going on in this country.

The vast majority of Canadians, as demonstrated in April of last year, were able to see through that. At one point, they may have said that the Conservative Party looked like an option they might choose, but as soon as a more credible option came along, Canadians changed their mind, saying, "Actually, we want people who know what they are talking about and who are being honest with Canadians." That is my argument here today.

We can have this discussion, and if members want to talk about the economic impacts of the market-driven effects of what the government does, I am happy to have an open and honest conversation about that. However, if they try to do it in the void of talking about every other tangible variable that goes into what is going on, they are being disingenuous at best and intentionally trying to mislead people at worst.

I appreciate my colleagues who have been standing up on this side of the House today to try their best to put forward what is really going on and offer genuine solutions. On this side of the House, we recognize the problem. We look for long-term solutions, and then we also look for short-term solutions. Those short-term solutions to help people get through difficult times are some of the things we did recently, such as reducing the GST to put more money back in the pockets of the people who need it the most, which is really important to highlight.

We have spent a lot of time today highlighting Prime Minister Harper's contributions and him being in Ottawa, but let us not forget that it was Prime Minister Harper who brought in the universal child care benefit, which gave cheques to millionaires. It basically said to everybody that, no matter what their income was, they would all get the exact same amount of money.

Business of Supply

Our approach is different. Our approach is that we support the people who need it the most because these are the people who will genuinely benefit from those measures.

• (1535)

John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Madam Speaker, my colleague was talking about honesty and how important it is.

I recall sitting in the House over the past 10 years or so. At some point, the Liberals were telling Canadians and members about opposing the carbon tax while the world is burning. I remember the former health minister asking how Conservatives would dare go on a summer vacation with their kids in the car while the planet is burning. However, the second it was politically advantageous, the Liberals got rid of the carbon tax.

Who is really being dishonest with Canadians? Is it the Conservatives, who talked about the impact the carbon tax was having on Canadians financially, or is it the Liberals? The second it was politically viable, they threw their principles out the window and eliminated the carbon tax, only to put in an industrial carbon tax and a fuel standard tax that picks up right where the other left off.

Hon. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, there is a key difference between that member and me.

I am standing here right now, and I will say, as somebody who studied economics and believes in market-driven solutions, I believe, as others have also said on this side of the House, that we can drive market behaviour through government intervention. I still believe that, and I stand by everything that I previously said.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, to the member's question about who is being disingenuous, if he is unwilling to talk about the global climate and weather, global supply chains and geopolitical events in this context, then he is being disingenuous to the argument. The member is just trying to paint it as Liberals creating this problem writ large and wants to just forget about what is going on in the rest of the world because none of it matters. That is being disingenuous.

• (1540)

[*Translation*]

Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Madam Speaker, I will take my colleague at his word. He said in his speech that we need to be honest with Canadians.

The government's strategy to get us through the tariff crisis is to invest in more oil and gas infrastructure. That is what the Liberals said. They are ready. They invested \$34 billion in a pipeline, and they are ready to help the industry develop new infrastructure. I do not know if my colleague is aware, but 60% of the entire oil sector is owned by Americans.

Business of Supply

Is my colleague prepared to be frank and honest with Canadians and tell them that this strategy will do the opposite of weaning us off the American market?

[English]

Hon. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, if all the member has been doing is paying attention to infrastructure projects, he has missed everything that the Prime Minister has been doing, or at least 99% of it. The Prime Minister is going out into other parts of the world, creating new opportunities and new trade relationships for Canada in the world. That is what we need to do right now. Conservatives want to live in that nostalgia, in the days of great opportunity with the United States, as though it would somehow magically come back if the Leader of the Opposition were to become prime minister.

The reality is that the world has changed. Right now, our responsibility, if we are being honest about this, is to do the hard work. The hard work is not to capitulate to everything that the U.S. demands of us. The hard work is going out into other parts of the world to find new trade relationships so we can become a more diversified economy that trades globally and never again put ourselves in a position where all of our eggs in one basket with one trading partner.

Will Greaves (Victoria, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a bit like living through an episode of *The Twilight Zone* to hear the opposition talk about carbon pricing in this country.

Being from British Columbia, I know that the first consumer price on carbon in North America was introduced in British Columbia in 2007 by a right-of-centre government that some members of the opposition benches supported at the time. There is no historical memory opposite of the reality of climate change and climate policy in this country. There is nary an honest word that the opposition has to share on this topic. For a new member of the House such as myself, it is deeply disillusioning.

I wonder whether my hon. colleague from Kingston and the Islands would elaborate on the government's approach to combatting climate change.

Hon. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, it is refreshing to hear that a new member of the House of Commons is aware of what was going on in here before.

I remember listening to speeches from Conservatives who had sat in the B.C. legislature that brought in that carbon tax. They then stood right on the other side of the aisle here and talked it down. The member for Winnipeg North and I would get up time after time to challenge them on it. We would say that they had been in the B.C. legislature, had brought this in, and they would completely ignore the question as if we were making stuff up.

The reality is that, if members want to be honest about it, they need to be fair. I will defend everything I have previously said in the House relating to pricing pollution, and any market mechanisms for that matter.

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

The member for Foothills posed a question. Then the government whip responded to it. While the government whip was responding, the member for Foothills heckled inappropriate language that not only I heard but also a number of my colleagues heard. We would ask that he withdraw the comments.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): I think it will be necessary to look to the records and come back to the hon. member, should that be necessary.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Bourassa.

[Translation]

Abdelhaq Sari (Bourassa, Lib.): Madam Speaker, no one, but no one, in the House today can ignore the cost of living situation, certainly not our government, not our side of the House. The cost of living is now one of the leading concerns of Canadians and of our government especially.

This concern centres on the price of groceries. Groceries are getting more and more expensive. I see this reality in the riding of Bourassa. My colleagues here see it too in every riding. We see it. We see it in grocery stores. We see it at food banks. We hear it from the Canadians who appeal to us for help.

The question is not whether a problem exists. Unlike the opposition, unlike the other side of the House, we, as the government, choose not to politicize a human problem, but to take action. The real question is who is taking serious, responsible and effective action to respond to this situation.

Let us now talk about the context surrounding food inflation. Before I talk about the solution, let us first try to understand the problem itself. The food inflation that Canadians are experiencing did not come out of nowhere. It is the result of a combination of factors. It stems from a range of problems, a very systemic and complex set of problems. These include major disruptions to global supply chains, geopolitical conflicts affecting the production and transportation of food, tariffs and protectionist measures imposed by certain trading partners, increasingly frequent extreme weather events that are affecting crops, and excessive concentration in certain segments of the grocery sector.

These phenomena are not limited to our country, Canada. They are driving up food prices around the world. We cannot control the decisions made by others, but we can control the decisions we make, the decisions made here in Canada by the Canadian government. That is precisely why our government took action and made a decision. Today, I am talking about immediate, targeted assistance, specifically the Canada groceries and essentials benefit.

Business of Supply

Faced with this reality, our first responsibility is to help households cope with the current cost of living. That is why the Minister of Finance and National Revenue introduced Bill C-19, which creates the new Canada groceries and essentials benefit. This benefit will replace the GST credit, but it will be much more generous, more predictable and better adapted to the current reality. In concrete terms, the government is proposing a 25% increase in this benefit for five years starting in July, automatic indexation to inflation to protect households' purchasing power, and a top-up payment equal to a 50% increase in the GST credit, to be paid this spring.

For a family of four, this means up to \$1,890 in support per year. For a single person, it is up to \$950. This is a tax-free benefit. It will be paid four times a year. It will target low- and modest-income households. In total, more than 12 million Canadians will benefit from this increased support.

These are concrete, immediate and, above all, responsible measures, but they must be passed quickly so we can implement them. If the members opposite want to make life easier for Canadians, they need to help us pass this bill as quickly as possible. The bill I am talking about here is Bill C-19, of course. I therefore invite all members to set aside partisan strategizing and act in the best interest of Quebeckers and Canadians.

Tackling the source of the problem means helping households. That is essential. However, it is not enough.

● (1545)

If we hope to achieve lasting results, we also need to tackle food inflation at its source. That means supporting Canadian food production and strengthening our supply chains. That is why our government is going to turn to the strategic response fund. We are setting aside \$500 million specifically for food sector businesses. This investment will help increase production capacity, modernize facilities and absorb some of the cost increases without passing them on to consumers, of course.

We are also going to invest \$150 million to support small and medium-sized regional businesses in the food sector. SMEs are essential to local economic vitality and, of course, they are essential to food security. Another \$20 million will also be allocated to the local food infrastructure fund to support food banks. This essential, one-time support is intended to meet the immediate needs of families experiencing an emergency.

We are also aiming to reduce production costs and enhance competition. That is why our government is also taking action to lower the cost of food production in Canada. The Prime Minister announced immediate expensing for greenhouse buildings. In practical terms, this will allow producers to fully write off the cost of their new greenhouses immediately. This measure will free up capital that they can use to invest in modern equipment, increase local production and reduce dependence on imports.

We will also work on developing a national food security strategy. This strategy will focus on strengthening the resilience of our food system, encouraging much healthier competition and reducing vulnerabilities in our supply chains. The government will also work with the provinces and territories to standardize product labelling, including unit pricing. This will make it easier for consumers to

compare prices and make informed choices. We are taking a more comprehensive, systemic approach to making life more affordable for Canadians. These measures are part of a broader approach to making life more affordable.

I want to review a few facts. We have reduced taxes for 22 million Canadians, saving two-income families up to \$840 per year. We have eliminated or reduced the GST for first-time buyers of new homes, which can result in savings of up to \$50,000. We made the national school food program permanent, providing 400,000 children with healthy meals at school. We introduced automatic payment of federal benefits so that citizens receive the benefits they are entitled to. These measures demonstrate one thing: Our government acts consistently, but above all, as I have said and will say again, responsibly.

In conclusion, yes, the cost of groceries remains very high. Yes, Canadians are waiting for results. That is precisely what our government is delivering through direct support to households, investments in food production, concrete action on supply chains and an economic vision focused on resilience and equity.

Our goal is clear: an economy that works for everyone, where help arrives on time and where no one, and I mean no one, is left behind or left out. That is our country's economy, that is Canada's economy, that is the economy of a strong Canada.

● (1550)

Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Madam Speaker, my colleague had a lot to say about affordability. If we want to help the most vulnerable people, one pretty easy way to do that is to increase the old age security benefit. We have been calling for this for a long time. Many of the people with the lowest incomes are seniors.

The government is dragging its feet on this issue. In fact, it never agreed to do it. Not only that, but now Cúram is causing more problems for seniors who should have access to OAS.

I do not know what my colleague thinks of that, but it is a pretty simple solution. I am disappointed that he did not bring it up.

Business of Supply

Abdelhaq Sari: Madam Speaker, I want to start by saying that when it comes to the information system problem, the technology problem or the solution, my heart goes out to those who may be experiencing difficult situations. However, I do not really like the idea of revisiting that point to provide explanations. I do not really like teaching. I am not in a position to teach anything. I do not relish the idea of addressing that aspect because I think my colleague is smart enough to realize that it is a much more systemic issue, and we are taking action on the elements that can be most effective and where we can have a much greater impact.

Our government is taking action on issues that will have an immediate impact now, as well as a recurring and permanent impact.

• (1555)

[English]

Steven Bonk (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Madam Speaker, over and over again, when we bring up the industrial carbon tax, the clean fuel standard or the packaging tax, the Liberals say that these are imaginary taxes and they do not exist.

Today, in agriculture committee, we asked directly those affected in the food processing industry, and they said that these place immense costs on their bottom line.

I am wondering how the member opposite can square that circle.

[Translation]

Abdelhaq Sari: Madam Speaker, I just want people to remember that food inflation is a global phenomenon. People also have to remember that we are choosing targeted measures, as I said earlier. We chose actions with action indicators for a much greater impact. The problem that we are talking about today is something we are seeing. It is here and now, as members on the other side of the House say every question period. We are taking action in this area to achieve a much greater impact.

However, my colleague forgot to say a few things. Earlier, I was talking about measures. He forgot that we have also taken serious action on supply chains. We took action with farmers. We took action on developing greenhouses. That plays a really important role in lowering the cost of living and the cost of groceries.

[English]

Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, when the previous Liberal government brought together the top executives of the big grocery chains that have been price gouging Canadians since the pandemic, they showed up with no plan. The grocery executives offered nothing but pictures of their weekly sale flyers and were held to no accountable commitments. The meeting was all for show, and while the government pat itself on the back, it walked away with nothing to show for it and no relief for Canadians.

Regarding Bill C-19, helping people matters, but without an excess profit tax, families pay twice: once at the store and again through taxes.

Does my colleague not agree that it is time for an excess profit tax to make those who are profiteering off people pay their fair share?

[Translation]

Abdelhaq Sari: Madam Speaker, I just want to repeat something I said before, to make it clearer. Our government is going to work with the provinces and territories on standardizing product labelling. That is a very important factor. The unit price is very important because it makes it easier for consumers to compare prices and pick the most affordable option.

That is something that I mentioned in my speech and wanted to repeat for clarity.

Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ): Madam Speaker, my colleague's answers are interesting because, when we asked him whether he was in favour of increasing OAS benefits for seniors aged 65 to 74, who are facing discrimination, he told us that the government is focusing on what would have an impact. He thinks that helping seniors has no impact. Those are his words.

I would like him to explain why, in his opinion, helping seniors aged 65 to 74 who are facing discrimination would not have enough of an impact.

Abdelhaq Sari: Madam Speaker, the member is skirting around my remarks. I hope the member is looking to understand what an impact indicator is. When we take an action, an impact indicator helps us choose the measure that will have the greatest impact on the majority of Canadians.

I talked about the 12 million Canadians who are going to benefit from this measure. That is the impact I wanted to talk about. No, we are not forgetting seniors. This government is not leaving anyone behind. We are all Canadian, and we are all entitled to receive support.

[English]

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order, because I think it is appropriate. I made an accusation of the member for Foothills, and I would like to apologize.

It was not he who made the unparliamentary remarks; it was in fact the member for Miramichi—Grand Lake. I would ask for him to take the opportunity to apologize for using the unparliamentary language.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): He is not in his seat, so I cannot call on the hon. member to rise. We will look into the record and come back as necessary.

The hon. member for Foothills.

• (1600)

John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the outstanding member for Regina—Lewvan.

Business of Supply

Before I get to the essence of my speech, I would ask for the indulgence of the House for just a couple of moments.

In small towns like ours, hockey is the fabric of life. Unfortunately, in my riding yesterday, that fabric became frayed. Heartbreak struck southern Alberta yesterday when three members of the Southern Alberta Mustangs were killed on their way to hockey practice. J.J. Wright and Cameron Casorso of Kamloops, and Caden Fine of Birmingham, Alabama, were killed on Highway 2.

Yesterday I had the opportunity to speak to a number of residents of that community and hear about those hockey players. They were more than just athletes; they were outstanding young men who epitomized the values of southern Alberta: commitment, hard work and dedication to community. The residents talked about these hockey players volunteering at the senior centre, playing shinny on the street with young local kids, or going out of their way to clean up the arena after a hockey game.

To the families of those hockey players, and certainly the driver, who was not at fault, I want everyone to know that our thoughts and prayers are with them.

I want to thank all the colleagues in the House who have approached me today with their condolences as well.

I would say to the Southern Alberta Mustangs hockey organization, the billets, the families and the volunteers, that we share their grief.

I would also like to take a moment to thank U.S. Ambassador Pete Hoekstra, whom I called in a bit of a panic last night. One of these hockey players was from Alabama, and his family members were beside themselves about how they were going to deal with this tragedy and get their son home. He called me immediately last night and walked me through the process, which I shared with the family. From my residents, I share a heartfelt thanks to the ambassador.

Finally, on behalf of the entire Foothills community, we send our deepest condolences to the hockey organization, the families, the people and the volunteers in Stavely and all of southern Alberta. We are with them in this time of unimaginable sorrow.

Now it is hard to move on, but I am very thankful for that moment.

We are talking about another big issue, certainly, for families in Foothills and right across the country, which is food inflation and the inability of families to afford to put food on the table.

I would like to go back to where this debate actually started, which was before Thanksgiving of 2023, when the now finance minister got up in front of the House and said that he would stabilize food prices by Thanksgiving. That did not happen.

Then Prime Minister Trudeau got up and announced the GST rebates, once again to stabilize food prices, and that was the second promise broken.

The Liberals got up and said they had this grocery code of conduct, which would be a vital tool that, once implemented, would lower grocery prices. That has been implemented, and every single

expert we have talked to has said that the grocery code of conduct was never designed to lower food prices.

Every single time the Liberal government stands up and talks about its promise to Canadians to lower and stabilize food prices, it is another promise broken. Therefore, members will have to excuse me, my colleagues and certainly many Canadians when the Prime Minister got up in front of a grocery store and once again brought out the same tired Trudeau GST rebate that did not work the first time and tried to sell it to Canadians once again as the salve for their inability to afford grocery prices.

As the Leader of the Opposition said earlier in his speech, I found it very interesting that before the Prime Minister got up and made his announcement, all the grocery prices were removed from the shelves behind him. It was probably the first time he has been in a grocery store and had to actually look at the prices. He said during the election campaign that he did not grocery shop for himself and did not know the price of strawberries. He has people who do that for him.

Real Canadians are facing a real problem, which is their inability to afford groceries. What has happened as a result of Liberal policies is that Canada now has the highest food inflation in the G7, twice that of the United States.

The Liberal whip was proselytizing earlier today, saying that this is a global problem, and how dare the Conservatives and Canadians blame the Liberals for this issue. If it is a global problem, why is it that in Canada, food inflation is at twice the rate of the United States, our closest neighbour and most active trading partner? The U.S. is not facing these same problems.

● (1605)

Let us take a look at what we have in Canada compared to what they have in the United States. Why is Canada facing food inflation at a rate far outpacing our nearest neighbour? Number one is the industrial carbon tax. Does the United States have an industrial carbon tax? No, it does not. An industrial carbon tax increases costs on every link in the supply chain. I do not know of any economy on the planet where they increase taxes and expect it not to also increase the prices of the products that economy produces. That is number one.

Number two is the fuel standard tax. We say it is a hidden tax, but the Liberals say it does not even exist, that it is imaginary. Well, how do the Liberals have an imaginary tax in their budget? Maybe their budget is also imaginary, and I am sure many Canadians wish that were the case. In the Liberal budget, it says it will cost Canadians 7¢ a litre on gas and diesel, a tax that will go up to 17¢ a litre in four years.

Business of Supply

Again, I would ask any economist: If taxes on fuel are increased, would they not expect that to also increase the cost of products at the end of that production line? Well, of course they would. I can guarantee that Shell, Esso, Petro-Canada and Costco are not eating that 17¢ a litre. It is going directly to the drivers who drive the food, farmers who grow the food, processors who process the food and certainly retailers who sell the food.

The United States also does not have a plastics ban on food packaging. The United States also does not put tariffs on fertilizer that it imports into the United States. The United States also does not have new bulk labelling rules on fertilizer. Canada is bringing in those new rules. With just the P2 plastics ban, the bulk labelling on fertilizer packaging and the new plastics labelling rules, experts in the industry say those three things combined will add \$15 billion to the cost of products in Canada. That is not imaginary. Those are very real numbers that will be passed on to the consumer. No industry is going to absolve or absorb those costs.

Let us go through a very simplistic supply chain. That product, and everything that makes that product, is going to be transported by train, car and/or truck, processed, packaged and then transported to the retailer. Every step along the way, it is paying that tax. Thus, those taxes will be passed on to the consumer, driving up food prices.

Now the average Canadian family is going to be spending almost \$18,000 on groceries, double what the weekly grocery bill was under the Conservatives. It was \$160 a week; now it is \$340 a week. Those are facts, not imaginary, and they are a result of these taxes that are put on by the Liberals.

In my last minute, I want to mention that yesterday the Minister of Foreign Affairs made a comment that at a time when certain countries are cutting research, at a time when academic freedom is under attack, we believe in science and we believe in research. I found that hilarious, as the Liberals have announced that they are shutting down seven agricultural research centres across Canada, and there is not a region of Canada that is not being targeted: Indian Head, Saskatchewan; Lacombe, Alberta; Quebec City, Quebec; Nappan, Nova Scotia; and Portage la Prairie, Manitoba.

There is a great comment in the National Post, which I thought encapsulated this very well:

On large scales and long timelines, public agriculture research translates into more affordable, more secure food. Science takes time, so it's likely going to be years before we can fully quantify [the impact of] what this loss means for the country.

At a time when the Liberals are talking about supporting research and science, they are closing down seven critical research centres in Canada, going back to tired Liberal policies like a GST rebate that did not lower grocery prices last time and is not going to lower the price of a single item at the grocery store this time either. They need to support our motion, an actual plan to address affordable food in Canada.

• (1610)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): Before we go to questions and comments, I will just remind hon. members not to use the papers too close to the microphones. The noise is very upsetting for the interpreters.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I wonder if the member can explain to me how, using his logic, there were years, 2022 and 2023, when Canada's food inflation was less than the United States' food inflation, and we had the carbon tax in place at that point. I am thinking in terms of the comments that you made, implying it is the industrial carbon tax that has caused our food inflation to be higher than that of the United States. What happened to that principle before, when Canada's food inflation was less than the U.S.A.'s food inflation?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): This is a little reminder to the hon. parliamentary secretary that I did not imply anything.

The hon. member for Foothills.

John Barlow: Madam Speaker, perhaps Canadian consumers would wish the Liberals had stopped at the consumer carbon tax, but when we have a consumer carbon tax, and then we add an industrial carbon tax, a fuel standard tax, a P2 plastics ban, bulk labelling on fertilizer and now new labelling rules that, as I said, add \$15 billion to the cost of producing food, that is why we see food inflation go from something that may have been manageable to now being 6%, or twice the rate of the United States, which does not have the same regulatory regimes and uncompetitive tax policies.

[Translation]

Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Madam Speaker, earlier I was telling a Conservative member that I was rather surprised by the connection being made between the carbon tax and food inflation. However, a connection can be made with the cost of energy. High energy costs can, in fact, cause inflation. A proper analysis of energy costs will show that, since 2021, oil companies have drastically increased their refining margins to the point where they made \$131 billion in profits from 2021 to 2024. My Conservative colleagues seem to think that it is still not enough.

I would like to know whether my colleague agrees with me that, instead of ending standards that are essential to the energy transition, we should ask the greedy oil companies to do their part by reducing their margins so that we can reduce inflation.

[English]

John Barlow: Madam Speaker, my colleague's question gives me an opportunity to comment on another point made by my colleague, the whip of the Liberal Party, who talked about how he does not like to hear from the food professor. They only like their experts, but not ours. I want to articulate the fact that when we quote the food professor, we are many times talking about the food price report. As my colleague mentioned, energy was an issue in there, related to the cost of food and the reliance on energy. We need to ensure that we have more options when it comes to energy security, which means food security, but the food price report was written and put together by dozens of different scientists from across the country. This is not just one expert whom we are quoting. This is a document produced based on the work of dozens and dozens of scientists and experts right across the country.

Fraser Tolmie (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to share with my colleague from Foothills that the thoughts and prayers of those in Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan are with him and his riding.

During his intervention, my colleague was talking about the increased cost of food, and I just received an email from someone in my riding, saying that their old age pension went up by \$2.43 a month, which is \$29 a year. Their question was how they could get by, given all the increases that they have.

We have talked about the carbon tax. The carbon tax is embedded in the costs that are throughout the food supply chain, so I would like for my colleague to just share a little more. Would he agree with me that maybe those costs should be revealed to the people of Canada who go to the grocery store, so that when they see the labels, they understand where the taxes are going and what—

• (1615)

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

John Barlow: Madam Speaker, I think that is an excellent point. This is the difference, in terms of why the Liberals were willing to throw their principles away and get rid of the consumer carbon tax. They made the mistake of actually having it on receipts and bills, where Canadians could see it. That is why they have no problem increasing the industrial carbon tax and the fuel tax. They are right. They can say it is imaginary because consumers cannot see it, because it is not on the bill. If they want to do it right, put it on the—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Regina—Lewvan.

Warren Steinley (Regina—Lewvan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Foothills for his amazing speech. The start was something that hits home for me, being from Saskatchewan. We had the Humboldt bus crash a few years ago. Whenever there is a tragedy in the hockey community, it hits everyone pretty hard. A few years ago, I used to think about it from the perspective of being a hockey player myself, playing some hockey and travelling on buses. I now think about my kids being on those buses.

From Regina—Lewvan and all across Saskatchewan, to the member for Foothills, to the families, to the Mustangs hockey team and all of their extended families, our hearts are with them. It is a

Business of Supply

very tough time. Our hearts go out to everyone involved: best wishes and God bless them.

I will now transition, like my colleague did, to talking about our opposition motion. I really want to start by reading out what the opposition motion is. I think that, a lot of times, some of our colleagues maybe just get their direction on how to vote from the whip's office over on the Liberal side, and they have not read the motion. I would like to see what they disagree with in the motion. I am going to read the motion:

That, given that the finance minister promised in October 2023 that food prices would stabilize “soon” and that the Prime Minister stated in May 2025 that he would be judged by the prices at the grocery store, and that,

- (i) Canadians face the highest food inflation in the G7,
- (ii) food inflation is twice as high as it was when the Prime Minister took office,
- (iii) food inflation in Canada is twice as high as it is in the United States,
- (iv) Canadians made 2.2 million visits a month to food banks,
- (v) food bank use has more than doubled since the Liberals took power,

the House call on the government to immediately introduce a Food Affordability Plan that:

- (a) removes the Liberals' hidden taxes on food, including,
 - (i) the industrial carbon tax on farm equipment, fertilizer, and food processors, that drives up the costs of producing food and are passed onto consumers,
 - (ii) the fuel standards tax, which is seven cents a litre—

This is according to Environment Canada's own numbers.

—and rising to 17 cents a litre on farmers, truckers, and those who bring us our food,

- (iii) the food packaging tax that will cost Canadians \$1.3 billion; and
- (b) boosts competition in our overly-concentrated grocery sector.

My questions and comments are going to be around this: What is there to disagree with in this?

The Liberals always say that there are no hidden food taxes. I am going to read a quote from Sylvain Charlebois, who was on the *Evan Bray Show* in Saskatchewan, one of our most popular call-in shows, I might add. This is exactly what Sylvain Charlebois, the food professor, said on the *Evan Bray Show*:

I've always believed that taxing food is immoral. It shouldn't happen, but it is happening, and a lot of people think that we're only taxing bad food. That's actually not true, because for inflation, there are more and more products being impacted. We have some goofy fiscal rules in Canada. For example, if you buy two muffins and it's over \$4, it's not taxable. Under \$4, it is taxable. If you buy four muffins, then that's not taxable. If you buy five granola bars, that's taxable. Six is not taxable. I mean, it's all over the place and it's very confusing. And I've always believed that when you get to the till, a lot of people don't even look at their receipts, but you'd be surprised how much taxes you actually pay.

Business of Supply

That combats some of the conversation we have had from the Liberal side of the aisle, when the food professor has laid out some of the taxes that are paid on groceries when one is at the grocery store. I pack lunches, not as many lunches as my wife packs, obviously, because I am here a bit more. Our kids take muffins and granola bars and sandwich meat and bread and cheese to make sandwiches. They all take that for school lunches. Those are all taxed because they are processed. The Liberals never really complete that end of the story.

I know it is hitting people harder and harder. We have a lot of families. As I said off the top, when we were talking about hockey, my three kids all play hockey, and many, many parents now are packing groceries to take on these trips when we are going to different towns. One of the parents was amazed. We were going on a trip for two days, and they went and bought fruit, vegetables, sandwich meat, cheese and buns. It was two bags of groceries. It was \$187. That makes it harder and harder to get by. I am not sure if some of my colleagues across the way are not having these same conversations with parents or with seniors. My colleague from Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan just brought up an excellent point about how little the increase is that seniors have been getting. How do they expect to keep up with the rising cost of groceries?

● (1620)

As has been stated, the cost of groceries is going to go up \$1,000 this year for a family of four. I do not know of any benefit that is going to keep up with that rise in the cost of food.

Another comment I am wondering about is in respect to the fuel standard tax, which costs seven cents a litre and will be rising to 17¢ a litre. My colleagues across the way are always saying that there are no hidden taxes on groceries. In question period today, our leader informed the Prime Minister, who did not know, that it came from the documents of ECCC, Environment and Climate Change Canada.

Our leader had a very good question for the Prime Minister that was not answered. Are we supposed to believe what the Prime Minister said, which is that there is no clean fuel tax, or ECCC's documents, which say that the clean fuel tax is going to add 17¢ a litre to gasoline by 2030? I think I will take the department's advice since it has the experts.

As my colleague from Foothills said, if anyone thinks that an increase in fuel prices does not affect the price at their grocery store, either they are lying to themselves or they are lying to each other, because all food at grocery stores is trucked from all over this country and all over North America with our interconnected supply chains.

One thing that I want to make very clear right now to the six or seven people watching this is that tariffs do not affect food prices. There are very minimal tariffs on any food coming into this country. The Liberals try to conflate that and make it a global problem, but it is actually untrue. There are very few tariffs affecting the prices at the grocery store. The Liberals should take responsibility for what they have caused over the past 10 years.

I remember when I asked about this in question period: The finance minister stood up in 2023 and said that they would stabilize

grocery prices by Thanksgiving. That was almost three years ago, and they brought out the same program as the one they brought out a couple of days ago, a rebate program.

I want everyone out there to know that they would get \$10 a week with this rebate program. Most Canadians are spending \$300 a week on their grocery bill, so they would get a \$10 coupon for a \$300 grocery bill. Sure, it is nice and people would take it, but it would not change the fact that food prices continue to go up.

We want to look at the root of this problem of food price inflation, and we need to look at what we are doing domestically. TD brought out a report today that says that two-thirds of the cause of food prices is domestic policy. That means that we need to look at what we are doing and what the Liberals have been doing to not combat food prices. That means the industrial carbon tax, the fuel standard and the packaging price that my friend talked about, which is \$1.3 billion to change plastic packaging.

Not using plastic packaging is going to really add to the food waste in this country. Processors said this at the agriculture committee. I know the agriculture minister sits at the kids' table and does not get to make a bunch of decisions, but the fact that we are trying to tie the hands of food processors in their ability to transport food safely and make sure that it is preserved and has a longer shelf life is a problem that the Liberals have made internally. That is laid completely at their feet.

We have read out the motion. We have put down some clear guidelines for what we would like to see in a food affordability plan. I would ask some of my Liberal colleagues to look at this motion line by line. Some of it might not feel good. Reading that 2.2 million people are visiting the food banks is not a good-news story, but it is happening in our country.

We are the breadbasket of the world. We have the best producers and the best farmers, and we should have the ability to feed our own population. A lot of that inability and a lot of that food inflation is because of the policies that have been put forward by the government in the last 10 years.

● (1625)

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member was a big part of the speeches delivered by the Conservative Party 18 months ago, when we were hearing the Conservatives say on a daily basis that if we got rid of the carbon tax, inflation would be gone. It was going to resolve all the problems dealing with inflation. The government was being told to get rid of the carbon tax.

Canada's new Prime Minister made a commitment, and we got rid of the carbon tax, as everyone knows. He got rid of it in order to increase the disposable income of Canadians. That is the reason it was gotten rid of. The impact on food inflation was nowhere near what the Conservatives predicted it would be.

Why should Canadians believe Conservative ideas like what we are hearing today when their other ideas are such disasters?

Warren Steinley: Madam Speaker, that question would have a little more validity if the Liberals would stop stealing our ideas. Taking the GST off first-time homebuyers was our idea in the campaign plan, and they took it. Removing the consumer carbon tax was our idea, and they took it. Providing a first-time homebuyer account so Canadians can save money when buying their first home was our idea, and they took it.

As the Conservative leader has said, we want to work together and get better results for Canadians. The member standing up to say we do not have any good ideas would have a lot more credibility if Liberals stopped stealing our ideas. We are okay with that, but they should go all the way. They should get rid of the consumer and the industrial carbon taxes and scrap the food packaging tax.

We have so many more ideas. If they want to take them, they can go ahead, but they should do a better job of implementing them.

Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is not news to anybody, and it certainly will not be to this member, that the Prime Minister really loves to self-identify as a European. It seems that he came back for European countries, but not necessarily for ours.

To that end, I think every farmer and expert would say that over the last 10 years, the same government that he advised has been implementing, when it comes to agriculture, policy-based evidence, not evidence-based policy. I wonder if the member might comment on some of those European policies around grain production, live-stock transportation and all the other policies, taxes and bans that Liberals try to apply here and that just drive up costs for farmers, producers and the people who buy the food. It is almost like they do not know where their food comes from.

Would the member comment on that?

Warren Steinley: That is a tough but very fair question, Madam Speaker. I thank my colleague for being a continuous advocate for her people in Lakeland.

The problem is that there is less and less rural representation on the Liberal side. They are getting further away from the people who produce the food, the fuel and the fertilizer that run this country. It would be wonderful if they would take more opportunities to maybe get out of downtown Toronto, downtown Vancouver, downtown Halifax or Moncton.

I hear some of my colleagues talking. I think I hit a nerve, because some of them could not find rural Canada with a compass. That is something used to find direction with. If they took some time to actually visit some of the producers on the ground, they would hear that the industrial carbon tax is affecting their fuel and that the fuel standard is affecting their fuel and their bottom line and is making things more expensive. Some of those practical—

Business of Supply

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): We have to leave some time for more questions.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Yorkton—Melville.

Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Speaker, we all know that Liberals want us to buy from Canada, and food in Canada is the best. However, it requires fertilizer. We heard about a number of issues where the government is attacking our farmers and all types of foods that farmers grow. Now, on top of what has been mentioned already, the government wants them to grow more canola and more grains but use 30% less fertilizer by 2030. That is four or five years from now.

Our food security is at risk, and I would like the member to speak a bit about that issue.

• (1630)

Warren Steinley: Madam Speaker, that is a great question. The government is always asking our producers to do more with less, and that fertilizer reduction is an example of that. Our farmers would do better.

I hear the member from northern Saskatchewan chatting. I worked with him for many years, and everywhere he goes, I have to clean up his mess.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): Order. It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Vancouver East, Housing; the hon. member for Courtenay—Alberni, Natural Resources; the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands, Finance.

[*English*]

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time.

First, I must respond to the comment from my colleague across the way about my friend and colleague from northern Saskatchewan, who has actually done more in the last 10 months than the 13 members of Parliament who sit representing Saskatchewan in the Conservative Party have in the last decade. Quite frankly, it is truly amazing. Maybe that is a good area to kind of pick up on. Let us take a look at what I would classify as a flash of reality for members opposite.

Business of Supply

I have had the opportunity to ask a few questions today about why Canadians should believe the Conservatives on the type of ideas they are presenting today. We can do a reflection on some of the ideas their current leader has had over the last number of years. Do members remember, years ago, cryptocurrency and how many seniors lost money, possibly because of the leader of the Conservative Party's saying he loved cryptocurrency, and maybe even implying that it should be a great alternative to the Canadian dollar? People lost a lot of money on that.

Then the Conservatives had the other idea. They are going to fire—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): Can I call everyone to order while we are making speeches? Thank you.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, the leader of the Conservative Party said that he was going to fire the Governor of the Bank of Canada. What a dud of an idea that turned out to be, when in fact the governor has done a phenomenal job protecting the Canadian economy, looking at where our overall inflation rate has been and making sure the interest rate matches. The economy in Canada, compared to that of other G20 nations over the last number of years, has done exceptionally well.

Let us go on to the idea we have talked about quite a bit today: the carbon tax. A year and a half ago, every member of the Conservative Party who spoke in the chamber would so often say that getting rid of the carbon tax would make inflation virtually disappear. Then we had a new Prime Minister and 70 new members of Parliament on the Liberal benches, and there was a change in policy, which got rid of the carbon tax. We did that as an affordability measure, and it was very important to the Prime Minister and to the caucus to get rid of the carbon tax.

What happened as a result? If we listen to the Conservative economists within that caucus, there should have been zero food inflation, but then the Conservatives came up with all these different excuses, such as when the member for Foothills was saying that the reason we now have food inflation is that Canada has X tax and Y tax. The member was comparing Canada to the United States, because the United States' food inflation is actually a little lower than what it is in Canada today, and he said Canada's food inflation was because we had these taxes.

I asked the member for Foothills why the United States had a higher food inflation rate than Canada when Canada actually had a carbon tax. I asked him how that would occur. Why did Canada have a lower food inflation rate than the United States when we had the carbon tax?

The Conservatives tend to give bumper sticker-type slogans in an attempt to deceive Canadians, when in fact they know full well that their imaginary taxes are not going to have any sort of impact such as they state to Canadians in the House or through social media.

I would suggest that the principle of the motion we are debating today is yet another example of the Conservatives' saying things but knowing full well they are not going to work.

An hon. member: Name one.

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, there is the industrial tax. Do members know it was the Province of Alberta, with a Progressive Conservative government, that first introduced an industrial tax in Canada?

An hon. member: First jurisdiction in North America.

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, it was possibly the first jurisdiction in North America, I agree, and that was a Progressive Conservative government. Why did the Conservatives not get rid of it? In fact—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

• (1635)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): I remind hon. members that this is not a conversation.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, that does not matter to the far-right Conservatives today, because all they want to do is fly up the flagpole some form of information, usually misleading, all in an attempt to try to agitate Canadians.

Every member of the Liberal caucus is concerned about food inflation. We all are. That is why we have introduced Bill C-19, a bill that would provide grocery and essentials benefits: real, tangible benefits to help Canadians. That is a reality that would in fact make a difference.

The Conservatives are kind of being brought into it because they do not want to be seen to be voting against it. They did not want a recorded vote, but they were okay to just have it pass on division. Now they are trying to backtrack a little; they are trying to say they support it. Of course they should support it, because it would help more than 11 million Canadians. That is a positive thing.

The Prime Minister and the government have recognized, whether through legislative policies or budgetary policies, ways we can support Canadians and build Canada strong. I say that because I believe they are being well received in all regions of the country.

Canadians in Conservative ridings are supporting many of the initiatives the government is bringing forward, including Bill C-19, dealing with supports for groceries and essentials; and including things like the tax break the Prime Minister implemented for the middle class, one of the first initiatives, in June, which some 22 million Canadians benefit from. I have already talked about the cutting of the carbon tax. In terms of youth, first-time homebuyers are able to have a new home built but not pay the GST. These are all initiatives that are there to help Canadians.

When we hear the type of ideas that are being demonstrated today by the Conservatives, my best guess is that even though we have a minority government, I do not think those ideas are going to pass. Do the Conservatives have any support coming from members of the Bloc, the NDP or the Greens? I hope not, but we will have to wait and see.

When the Conservatives bring forward legislation or motions, they tend to try to frame them in such a way that they have more to do with raising money for the Conservative Party and getting people upset and angry. I have witnessed it because somehow one of my email addresses ended up receiving the fundraising request letter. I get a number of emails asking for money, and I have not given a dime, nor would I.

Former prime minister Stephen Harper was in the gallery earlier today. I am sure he is truly amazed at the degree to which the current crop of Conservatives has moved to the right. They are so far to the right. Their line is, “Let us get out of the way. Government plays no role in society.”

• (1640)

Warren Steinley (Regina—Lewvan, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is always entertaining to see my colleague, the Liberal member for Winnipeg North on his feet. The louder he gets, the more I wonder if he is telling the truth or not.

I would just add this: If it were such an important policy, if the new old food rebate were so important, why was it not in the budget a couple of months ago? Why did the Liberals not budget it? It has a \$3-billion price tag. If it were so important and such a central plank to the new old government, why was it not in the budget?

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, there are a lot of good things in the budget. Let us talk about the national school food program, which feeds 400,000 children in Canada. It is a program that is needed, and the Prime Minister made it a permanent program in this budget. Where is that budget today? The Conservatives are filibustering the legislation. They talk about it. When it comes down to the reality, there are a lot of things in that budget.

I would encourage members to rethink their position. If there is anyone within the Conservative Party today who believes the government does have a role to play, they might want to consider a leadership change, even though it might be somewhat late given the 87%—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): That is not the business of the House.

[Translation]

The hon. member for Jonquière.

Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Madam Speaker, earlier, I asked a Liberal colleague who was looking for the best way to help the most vulnerable members of our society deal with food inflation whether he thought that increasing OAS benefits was a good idea. He said that he did not think the effects were significant enough. We will just leave his statements at that, but I will repeat my question for the parliamentary secretary.

In the context of increasing food inflation, will the government support the proposal from the Bloc Québécois to increase OAS

Business of Supply

benefits and, at the very least, eliminate this injustice that exists for seniors aged 65 to 74, while also perhaps resolving the issue with Cúram, which is causing unacceptable delays?

[English]

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, the good news is that with the groceries and essentials benefit, the biggest benefactors would be individuals on fixed incomes, and we are talking about a lot of seniors. They would benefit in a very big way from it.

In regard to the OAS issue, the previous government had increased it by 10% for those 75 and over. The rationale was that there is a difference between 65 and 75 in terms of medical requirements, the ability to work and so forth, so I think it was a justified move. Plus, back in the 2019 election, the then prime minister made a commitment to give that 10% to seniors on the OAS who are 75 and above. All in all, this is a government, and in particular this is a Prime Minister, that is supporting our seniors, and the Canada groceries and essentials benefit is a good example of that.

• (1645)

Will Greaves (Victoria, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I think we should all in this chamber sympathize because our Conservative colleagues are having a bad week. The polling clearly shows Canadians are rallying behind the leadership of the Prime Minister. The polling clearly shows most Canadians do not have confidence in the Leader of the Opposition. To add insult to injury, just today the last Conservative to serve as prime minister was in the House, reminding our colleagues opposite of that vanishing sensation of winning an election.

My sympathies are with them, but I think it is intolerable to hear our Conservative colleagues working so hard to divide Canadians. As we heard just a few minutes ago, they are dividing rural Canada from urban Canada as though many of our ridings do not straddle both, as though the members in this chamber do not have an obligation to represent all of our constituents and as though urban MPs do not know and love rural Canada.

My question for my hon. colleague from Winnipeg is whether he would agree that the reason Canadians are supporting the Prime Minister at this time is that he is deeply committed to bringing Canadians together, as he did when he announced last year that the consumer price on carbon would be removed because it was divisive. It was divisive because Conservatives had been attacking it relentlessly for years.

The Prime Minister wants to bring Canadians together. Does my colleague agree?

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister, over the last number of months, has demonstrated very clearly to all Canadians that he wants to build a team Canada approach, bringing provinces together with indigenous communities, looking at ways we can build a stronger and healthier country and at the same time supporting Canadians where they are on the issue of affordability, like with the groceries and essentials—

Business of Supply

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): We have to resume debate. The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Leslie Church (Parliamentary Secretary to the Secretaries of State for Labour, for Seniors, and for Children and Youth, and to the Minister of Jobs and Families (Persons with Disabilities), Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a privilege to rise in the House today to speak to this opposition motion. It is a motion that reflects what we have been hearing, frankly, from the opposition for several months now. Food affordability and bringing down the cost of living generally are worthy priorities. In fact, food affordability is a key priority for this side of the House, which I will come to in a moment.

What continues to disturb me about this motion, and indeed about the approach taken by the Conservatives, is how when we scratch even a little bit below the surface, we discover that the opposition does not stand for affordability at all, that they block it at every turn. Rather than raise the level of debate to how we can work together to tackle the complex and very real challenges facing Canadians, we are instead treated to repetitive claims of hidden and imaginary taxes, and the demonization of regulation aimed at a healthier environment and competitive industries.

Once upon a time, a healthier environment and competitive industries were objectives shared by Conservatives. Blaming food prices on the actions we are taking to reduce plastic waste might be easier than explaining global inflation or climate change or Canada's long, beautiful and glistening winters, but it is not accurate. Our actions to reduce plastic waste and pollution are not the reason that food affordability is under pressure.

We should be talking about fertilizer prices. We should be talking about transportation, about labour costs, about global supply chain shocks, about the war in Ukraine and even about price volatility in the energy sector. We should be talking about tariffs from our southern neighbour, and even about climate change. Climate change increases the frequency and severity of extreme weather, droughts, heat waves, floods and other extreme events that damage crops and reduce agricultural yields. Climate change is a driver of food price increases, not just in Canada but also around the world.

Extreme events have been directly linked to spikes in prices of potatoes in the United Kingdom, cabbage in South Korea and cocoa in West Africa. Extreme weather such as heat, drought and heavy rain disrupts processing, transportation and storage. It can also spoil perishable foods during handling and transportation. This leads to higher costs throughout supply chains. Sudden shortfalls and production risk can lead to market tightening, export bans and price volatility, but plastics policies protect places. They reduce waste. They clean up communities.

When I talk to people in my riding of Toronto—St. Paul's, they want to reduce plastic waste and pollution. They know plastics are in our Great Lakes and our watersheds, in our landfills, in our own bodies, affecting us and our kids in ways that we are still learning about. Let us be serious and find a path to reduce our plastic pollution and protect the environment and human health. Let us recognize that we are a mature, capable country where we can work to address affordability and also work to protect a pristine environment that defines so many regions of this beautiful land.

In another era, Conservatives knew this. They fought against acid rain. They fought against the depletion of our ozone. They brought in Canada's environmental assessment act and environmental protection act. However, those actions were 40 years ago. Today's opposition approach sells division, and it sells blame. It sells the environment as a villain. It is short-sighted and it is cynical. Whether it is plastics or fuel emissions, there is a reasonable path to making progress on these issues while making life a little easier for Canadians too.

Again, in another era, Conservatives would have supported incentives to encourage industry to adopt cleaner practices, to innovate new ways of doing things that would increase productivity and create a competitive advantage for our country and for our businesses, but not today. That is disappointing because Canadians want serious government and serious leaders who can diagnose real challenges and work with others to implement actual solutions. That is why I stand here, proud to fight for the actions of our government, the actions we are taking to help support Canadians.

● (1650)

We are heading into tax season, and Canadians will see that we have cut taxes for 22 million of our friends and neighbours across this country, reducing the basic tax rate from 15% to 14%. Our Canada child benefit, which is indexed to inflation, helps six million children in Canada and their parents with roughly \$8,000 per year per child. Over six million Canadians today are part of our dental care plan, which is saving Canadians on average close to \$800 per year on dental fees. The national school food program, which we have recently made permanent, can help a family with two kids save over \$800 per year on school lunches. Our early learning and child care plan has brought fees down right across Canada, with families in my riding of Toronto—St. Paul's often saving over \$10,000 a year on child care costs. That is the kind of saving that changes lives and opens up new possibilities for families.

What do these programs have in common? The opposition voted against them. The Conservatives call government support for them wasteful and even “garbage”. I am glad the opposition has decided to help us pass legislation to put our new Canada groceries and essentials benefit into action. I welcome that co-operation because that is what a plan on food affordability should look like. Our new benefit would help 12 million Canadians with the cost of food and essentials. It is a five-year boost that we would deliver to the former GST credit and a one-time extra boost for just this year that would increase the benefit by 50%. A family could look forward to \$1,900 this year, and single seniors or young adults could have \$950 with this new grocery benefit.

That is not the end of the plan. It also includes a national food security strategy, and that plan is going to help us increase food production in Canada. We are going to be offering immediate expensing for greenhouses, improving our supply chains by working with industry, increasing competition in the grocery sector by working with the Competition Bureau, implementing unit price labelling and enforcing action against anti-competitive practices so that over time, not only are we increasing Canadian food production, but we are bringing down the costs for consumers at the grocery store.

The bottom line is that the federal government has a serious plan that it is putting into action. It is not a quick fix; it is part of a plan to grow our economy and create prosperity. It is a plan for reclaiming control over supply chains, protecting our public balance sheets and positioning domestic industry where global demand is headed. It is for building economic opportunities and increasing collaboration and competitiveness globally.

A stronger, more competitive economy does a lot of things. It lowers production and transport costs, reduces exposure to global shocks, keeps markets competitive, builds climate resilience and, most importantly, stabilizes prices over time. This is what the government is doing to build Canada for Canadians. We are building a stronger, more competitive economy, working for Canadians, supporting the most vulnerable and enhancing our social security net when people need it the most. We are helping Canadians put food on the table because economic strength is one of the most effective tools for keeping food and lives affordable. That is what we are delivering and will continue to deliver while helping to create a cleaner, healthier and safer environment for all.

That is the beauty of Canada and of working with and for Canadians. They know that with a serious government, they can count on it to make change and do the hard work and heavy lifting of introducing the programs and supports that are going to help strengthen our economy, make life more affordable, protect our environment and build a Canada that is prosperous for all.

● (1655)

Steven Bonk (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Madam Speaker, there was so much wrong in that speech and so much that I found deeply offensive as a farmer and rancher, someone who raises livestock and grows crops in the beautiful coulees that lead into the Qu'Appelle Valley in Saskatchewan. In the summertime on my ranch, it is almost deafening from the sound of insects, the trees and grass moving and the beautiful nature we have that is looked after by the farmers and ranchers.

Business of Supply

There are no more environmentalists in Canada than there are agriculture producers we have, yet we have someone lecturing us who lives in downtown Toronto, probably the most man-affected place in Canada. It is cement and asphalt. There is nothing there that has to do with nature, and they are telling us how to run agriculture policy?

How on earth can she square that circle of telling farmers in Canada that they have to pay tax on fertilizer and the fuel that produces food for Canadians when she is living in the middle of a concrete jungle?

Leslie Church: Madam Speaker, first and foremost, I did no such thing. What I did was challenge the Conservative opposition to work with us and to debate this issue with facts and not fiction.

I would have the member opposite know that I may proudly represent a downtown Toronto riding, but I grew up in the heartland of Alberta. I know a thing or two about this country from coast to coast, and I am proud of it. I would also have the member opposite know that the government is building one Canadian economy. This is not about dividing farmers from urban centres or rich from poor. This is about ensuring that our country gets through the tough times of the next few years, survives and prospers. To do that means building an economy that works for everyone.

Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Speaker, what this individual does not understand is the beauty of this country that already exists and was totally ignored by the government when the Liberals came into power. In this country, our agriculture, and any industry that did anything of significance, which was done extensively in agriculture across this country, made us the most innovative and clean country to grow food. In this country entirely, we create less than 2% of the greenhouse gases in the world. I have said this to classrooms: If we took a pie and cut it into 100 pieces, we would be less than two of those little slivers.

Are we still continuing to innovate? We better believe it, but at the same time, we are being accused of not contributing to a situation where, I am sorry, there are no boundaries around Canada when it comes to the environment. What is the government doing about relationships with India, the U.S. and China when it comes to greenhouse gases? We are at the top of the pile, not the bottom, and the member should be ashamed of herself for her behaviour.

Business of Supply

Leslie Church: Madam Speaker, our policy as a government and our plan involves the types of supports and initiatives that farmers and industry would welcome, from building our supply chains to investing in rail and ports and ensuring that our biofuels are supported.

I am someone who knows how much even Albertans care about the environment, and how much concern there is for the pristine nature in the national parks or in the foothills of the Rockies; these places matter too. All I am saying is that Canadians are a serious, mature and capable people who know that we can both achieve food affordability and make progress on that front while at the same time protecting the wonder and the nature that is the beauty of Canada.

• (1700)

Will Greaves (Victoria, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is again disappointing to hear that the leading strategy of the opposition party is nothing less than pitting Canadians against each other, trying to convince rural Canadians and Canadians from across the prairie provinces that the government does not care about them. The insistence by opposition members that only they speak for real Canadians is one of the core divisive pieces of our politics. It is shameful. The members should, in fact, apologize to the House. They should apologize to my hon. colleague.

I will ask my colleague from St. Paul's whether she would like to elaborate on the way in which affordability challenges related to food are an issue that many Canadians face, Canadians in cities and Canadians in rural Canada, and how the government is addressing those needs while bringing the country together.

Leslie Church: Madam Speaker, food affordability touches all Canadians. In my own riding of St. Paul's, whether it is seniors on a fixed income, young people or newcomers, they are going to benefit from this new groceries and essentials benefit that we have. It is one of the reasons the policy is in place. The benefit is a part of it, and the other piece is building the food security strategy to go with it to ensure that we are actually creating a long-term solution.

Steven Bonk (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of the motion put forward by the Leader of the Opposition, a motion that speaks not just to economic theory but to daily life, on farms, in rural communities and at the kitchen tables of Canadian families. I speak today not as a member of the House, but as someone directly involved in agriculture. I am a farmer. I deal with input costs, fuel bills, freight invoices and the realities of producing food in this country. When we talk about food prices, I am not speaking in abstractions. I am speaking from the field, from the farmyard.

In October 2023, the finance minister promised that food prices would stabilize soon. In May 2025, the Prime Minister said he would be judged by the prices at the grocery store. If that is the measure, Canadians have already rendered their judgment. Food inflation remains among the highest in the G7, twice as high as when the Prime Minister took office, and roughly double the rate of the United States. Every month, there are nearly 2.2 million visits to the local food banks, and the usage has more than doubled since the government came to power.

As a farmer, I see both sides: families struggling to afford groceries and farmers struggling under the rising costs to produce food. I want to share an example from my riding. Not long ago, I met a young farm family who run a mixed operation. They work long hours, help their neighbours and quietly support their community, sponsoring the local rink, donating to fundraisers and stepping up when others are in need. They are proud, stoic people who do not look for handouts, yet their input costs, such as diesel, fertilizer, machinery repairs and freight, have risen far faster than the prices they receive for their grain and livestock. Their margins are being squeezed.

Today, that same farm family now relies on the local food bank to help feed their own children. It is deeply uncomfortable for them to admit that. They are being pushed to food banks not because they are unwilling to work, but because public policy has driven up the cost of production while their income has not kept pace. That is not a failure of farming; that is a failure of public policy.

It is not just about grocery pricing. This is about increasing the cost of production. These policies squeeze farmers from planting to harvest to transportation and erode their bottom lines. When input costs rise faster than revenues, farmers cut back, delay investment and are pushed to the brink. When the government layers on the industrial carbon tax, higher fuel costs under the clean fuel regulations and new taxes on food packaging, it is not just raising grocery prices. It is directly hurting the viability of family farms. Food does not magically appear on store shelves. It is grown, harvested, processed, transported, packaged and distributed. Every step along that journey costs money.

When government policy raises the costs, consumers pay more. The industrial carbon tax applies to farm fuel, fertilizer production, grain drying and food processing. On my farm, that means higher costs to run tractors, to dry grain and to buy fertilizer. The clean fuel regulations have already added about 7¢ per litre to diesel, and that is going to rise to 17¢. In Saskatchewan, where distances are long, that directly increases the cost of producing and delivering food. The proposed food packaging tax will add \$1.3 billion in costs that will ultimately show up on grocery shelves.

Members opposite say that these taxes are imaginary. Trust me that they are not. They show up on my fuel invoices, my fertilizer bills, my freight costs, my machinery parts and ultimately in food prices. In fact, in Saskatchewan, there is a line item on our natural gas bill that says “carbon tax”. We have already seen what happens when these taxes are removed. When the consumer carbon tax was lifted from home heating oil, prices responded immediately and families felt relief. This proves that these taxes are real and embedded in the cost of living, and removing them has an immediate effect.

If removing one portion of the carbon tax helps families, then removing the industrial carbon tax and clean fuel regulations from food production and transportation would meaningfully help bring down the cost of grocery prices. Farmers are not asking for special treatment, just common sense: Stop taxing the production and movement of food.

● (1705)

In fact, this morning at the agriculture committee, I asked some witnesses directly if there was an effect. Did they see a direct effect from the industrial carbon tax, from the food packaging tax and from the clean fuel standard? My goodness, they had a lot to say. It is a direct cost and it is crushing their operations. The over-regulation and the tax burden they are feeling are putting them at real risk of losing their businesses. We cannot make food more affordable by making it more expensive to produce.

The second part of the motion, boosting competition in our grocery sector, is also critical. More competition would benefit both farmers and families. This motion is pro-common sense. It recognizes that federal policy sets the framework within which food is grown, moved and sold. Right now, that framework is making food more expensive. Canadians need practical policies that balance environmental goals with affordability, competitiveness and food security. We cannot decarbonize and deindustrialize agriculture. We cannot lower food prices by taxing the tools that farmers use to feed this country.

This motion has a clear path forward: Remove the hidden taxes that drive up food costs and increase competition in the grocery sector. If the Prime Minister wants to be judged by the grocery prices, he should support this motion and act on it.

There are so many ways that we can help reduce grocery costs in Canada. These taxes are killing farmers. We have no choice. We have to buy diesel. We have to use fertilizer.

I will give an example as an agriculture producer. When the Liberals came out with the plan to reduce fertilizer use by 30%, I want them to know that there is not a direct correlation. If we reduce fertilizer use in Canada by 30%, we are not going to have only a 30% reduction in production. It does not work like that. There is a certain amount of fertilizer we need. Plants need a certain amount of nitrogen. They need a certain amount of phosphorus. If we reduce that, we are not going to have a 30% reduction. It is going to be a lot less. There is a lot of science behind this.

Trust me: Farmers do not want to spend a cent more than they have to when it comes to fertilizer and when it comes to herbicide. We have tried to limit our inputs as much as we can. Margins are

Business of Supply

already very tight in Canada. It is not like we are going out and trying to use more product than we need to. The Liberal government is penalizing us every step of the way when we are trying to reduce its use.

If members want to talk about the environment, as the last speaker said, I can go on for days about it. I had the pleasure of teaching sustainable grazing and carbon sequestration all over the world for 20 years in many countries. I can say that Canada leads the way on this front. There are many studies in Canada where we have producers who have changed their grazing methods, done nothing more than change the way they utilize their land, and we are now sequestering up to 12.5 tonnes of carbon per hectare. Canada is leading the way when it comes to regenerative and sustainable agriculture. Do we get any credit from the federal government for this? No, we do not.

When it comes to zero till, much of that has been pioneered by a very good friend of mine, Pat Beaujot, who created a company called Seed Hawk. The company uses zero-till methods and makes minimal disturbances in the soil, keeping carbon in the soil where it needs to be instead of releasing it into the atmosphere. This is a Canadian invention, yet when it comes to the Liberals, they say we have to use the baseline of 2005, which is just after when this technology was introduced into Saskatchewan. There is so much hypocrisy on that side, where the Liberals claim they are champions for the environment, yet when it comes down to it, their only solution is taxes. That is the only thing they want to do.

If not, Canadians, including farmers, families and food bank users, will draw our own conclusions. I will be proudly voting in favour of this motion, and I encourage all members to do the same.

● (1710)

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am not a farmer myself, but over the years, I have lived in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. I have visited many farms. I have talked to cattle producers, hog producers and chicken farmers. I have visited, driven on tractors and so forth. I understand the important role that our farmers play today, as does the Prime Minister. It is one of the reasons we were able to bridge the gap and get the canola issue resolved, and hopefully the impact of that on the Prairies will be very positive.

At the end of the day, they are, for all intents and purposes, imaginary taxes because if someone goes to a grocery store and they buy a dozen eggs, they buy some hamburger and they buy some milk, there is no tax. The impression the Conservatives are trying to give is that there is a direct tax on those bills. Would the member not agree?

Private Members' Business

Steven Bonk: Madam Speaker, I most definitely do not agree with that statement. For example, if the member opposite was to go on a trip and calculated all the costs of his trip, if part of the cost was fuel, he would know that there is tax on that fuel. Does that not increase the price of his trip? It is very simple math. I do not know how the Liberals can square the circle of thinking that by making food more costly to produce, it is actually going to bring down the price.

Warren Steinley (Regina—Lewvan, CPC): Madam Speaker, we just saw exactly the lack of common sense from the Liberal side when it comes to this discussion. My colleague gave a wonderful speech as a producer. The Liberals were very quiet, because there is not as much farming knowledge on that side. He laid it out perfectly. The price of beef has gone up 33% in this country, the price of coffee is up 30%, and the price of lettuce is up 40%. That is the direct effect of it costing more money to grow and raise that food. I do not know why the Liberals do not understand that point.

There is one more thing. Can my colleague please touch on the fact that there are no tariffs on food? The Liberals are trying to scare everyone into saying this is an American problem, when it is a made-in-Canada problem.

Steven Bonk: Madam Speaker, it is just common sense. When you have more tax and more regulation, the price of everything goes up. The primary producers in Canada are some of the best in the world. We find it so offensive when the Liberals, who have no connection to agriculture whatsoever, in any way, shape or form, tell us how we should manage our farms. They tell us we should be thinking about the environment, when we can find no one more concerned about the environment than the people who make their living from it. In fact, in the Prairies we call ourselves green Conservatives, not blue Conservatives, because we are so concerned with the health of our land, the health of our soil and the health of our grasslands.

• (1715)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): It being 5:15 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forth with every question necessary to dispose of the business of supply.

[*Translation*]

The question is on the motion.

[*English*]

If a member participating in person wishes that the motion be carried or carried on division, or if a member of a recognized party participating in person wishes to request a recorded division, I would invite them to rise and indicate it to the Chair.

John Barlow: Madam Speaker, I would like to request a recorded division.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): Pursuant to Standing Order 45, the division stands deferred until Wednesday, February 4, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I suspect if you were to canvass the House, you would find unanimous consent to call it 5:30 p.m. at this time, so we could begin private members' hour.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

USE OF FEDERAL LANDS FOR VETERANS

Alana Hirtle (Cumberland—Colchester, Lib.) moved:

That:

(a) the House recognize,

(i) that the government is making historic investments in the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) to meet our NATO funding targets earlier than committed,

(ii) the assumption that an increasing number of CAF service members will lead to a growth in the ranks of Canadian veterans over the next few decades; and

(b) it be an instruction to the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates to undertake a study on alternative ways to make use of underused and surplus federal lands and buildings, in ways that help reinvigorate communities by serving as centers that provide services for veterans, provided that,

(i) there be no more than six and no less than four meetings held on the study,

(ii) the committee report its findings to the House of Commons within six months following the adoption of this motion.

She said: Madam Speaker, right now in my riding of Cumberland—Colchester, there is a building that tells two stories at once. The Colonel James Layton Ralston Armoury in Amherst, Nova Scotia, named for a decorated war hero and former minister of national defence, sits empty today. At the same time, veterans in our community struggle to find affordable housing and access the physical and mental health services they have earned through service to this country. That gap is a problem, but it is a problem we have the power to solve if the folks in this room are willing to work together. Motion No. 16 is about connecting those two realities, taking federal properties that are not meeting their full potential and transforming them into vibrant community hubs that would deliver real support to the women and men who served us in uniform.

Here is why I believe we need to have this conversation now. We are making historic investments in the Canadian Armed Forces. We are meeting our NATO commitments ahead of schedule. That means that, over the next decade, we need to prepare for thousands of new service members to one day become veterans. This is not just about addressing today's challenges. It is about getting ahead of tomorrow's needs with smart planning that works for veterans, communities and taxpayers.

Let me paint a picture of what is possible. The Ralston armoury is a historic building with deep roots in Nova Scotia's military heritage. The North Nova Scotia Highlanders called it home. This is the regiment that landed on Juno Beach on D-Day, facing down the 12th SS Panzer Division in the wheat fields of Normandy, where it paid a devastating price: 80 dead and 200 wounded or captured in those first brutal days of the campaign, with 13 of the captured soldiers executed by the SS. These were not abstract statistics in our communities. These were sons, brothers and fathers, and their sacrifice helped liberate Europe.

That building, their building, now sits in administrative limbo, declared surplus in 2016, then closed unexpectedly in 2020 due to structural concerns and closed again in 2025 due to environmental concerns. The community has fought to save it, but without long-term commitments toward a clear path forward, it will remain unused while its potential goes unrealized.

I ask members to imagine the armoury becoming a veterans' resource centre, including affordable housing units designed for veterans transitioning to civilian life, mental health services, peer support groups, career counselling offices, meeting rooms where local veterans groups could gather and a revamped museum honouring the Highlanders' legacy, reminding everyone who walks through those doors what service and sacrifice really look like. It is not a fantasy. This motion is designed to explore how we could take buildings, such as the Ralston armoury, and turn them into solutions that honour the past while serving the present.

Cumberland—Colchester is not alone in having this potential. In the riding of Brandon—Souris, my colleague across the aisle represents a community where the Canada Lands Company has already identified federal property available for housing development. What if that were to become another veterans' service hub, delivering wraparound support in Manitoba? In the riding of Kamloops—Shuswap—Central Rockies, my colleague in this chamber has similar federal properties sitting underused. British Columbia veterans deserve the same level of coordinated support we are talking about building in Nova Scotia.

The list goes on and on. Coast to coast to coast, I could point members toward federal real estate that could be doing more, not someday, but right now.

This motion would direct the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates to examine the best ways to make this happen. We would hear from veterans. We would consult with real estate and housing experts. We would look at successful models from other jurisdictions. By the end of this session, we would have concrete recommendations ready to implement.

Some might ask, “Why focus on this? Why now?” The answer is that it is because housing affordability is a crisis that touches every Canadian community, and veterans are certainly not immune to the challenges; because mental health support should not require navigating a dozen different offices, criss-crossing the province; and because, when we ask Canadians to step up to serve their country, we make some pretty big promises, and those promises do not expire when they take off the uniform. This is about an obligation and an opportunity.

Let us be clear about something else: This makes fiscal sense.

● (1720)

Public Services and Procurement Canada is already working to offload underused federal office space through 2034, projecting \$2.45 billion in operational savings over the next decade. We are going to be disposing of these properties anyway. The question is whether we do it strategically and intentionally, in ways that solve real problems for real people, or whether we just liquidate the assets without thinking about the bigger picture.

Private Members' Business

Motion No. 16 says, let us be strategic. Let us be intentional. Let us make sure that, as we move these federal properties off our books, we are creating something of ongoing value in the process.

Here is what I love about the motion. It is a win for everyone. For veterans, it means coordinated services in community-centred locations, places where they can access housing, health care, career support and peer networks without driving for hours or navigating bureaucratic mazes. For communities, it means taking buildings that are sitting empty or underused and turning them into anchors of local revitalization, places that create jobs, support vulnerable populations and strengthen our collective civic infrastructure. For taxpayers, it means using assets we already own more efficiently, generating savings while delivering better outcomes. For members of the House, regardless of party, it means delivering solutions that our constituents can really see and feel.

When we walk past the Ralston armoury in Amherst or, more generally, an empty or underused federal building in any of our ridings and we see renovations under way, when we see veterans moving into affordable units, when we see families accessing services that help them thrive, that is a story we can all tell with pride. This is not about pointing fingers at past decisions. This is about building something better going forward.

I want to be clear about what the motion does and does not do. It does not mandate specific outcomes. It does not override local decision-making. It does not tie anyone's hands. What it does is create space for local solutions, for good ideas to come to the surface. It directs a committee to do what committees, when they are at their best, do best: gather evidence, consult experts, listen to stakeholders and develop recommendations grounded in reality.

This work will provide us with a road map that communities can adapt to their specific local circumstances. This is a chance for us to show the Canadian people what it looks like to work together. These are problems that every voter can understand. We have the potential to deliver easy-to-understand wins in ridings that span the entire country. The Ralston armoury in Amherst might become a veteran resource centre. The federal property in Brandon—Souris could focus primarily on affordable housing with integrated social services. The site in Kamloops might emphasize mental health programming with on-site peer support networks.

Even if a member does not know these specific locations, we all know about the type of properties I am talking about. One size does not have to fit all, but the principle is universal: We have assets, we have needs, and we have an opportunity.

Private Members' Business

Here is what I am proposing that every member of the House consider. I would ask all of us to take a minute right now, to put down our phones and maybe even close our eyes for a short, still moment of consideration. Consider if we have federal property in our riding that could better serve the community. I am willing to bet the answer is yes. Consider if we have veterans who would benefit from more coordinated, accessible services. I am willing to bet the answer is yes. Consider if we owe something to the Canadians who step up, put on the uniform and serve. I am quite certain that the answer is yes for all of us.

With those questions in mind, I now ask for support of the motion being put forward today. I invite the full membership of the chamber to participate fully in this process. Come to the committee meetings. Share important insights. Tell us about the distinctive realities on the ground in ridings across the country. This kind of participation will help us build the best possible recommendations.

Here is the truth. We are going to have more veterans in the coming years. Our NATO commitments mean a larger Canadian Armed Forces, which means more people who will eventually transition to civilian life and who deserve our support when they do. We can wait until the need becomes a crisis, or we can plan ahead. We can let underused properties continue gathering dust, or we can transform them into community assets. We can talk about supporting veterans in the abstract, or we can take tangible action.

● (1725)

This is not abstract for me. I grew up with a visceral understanding of the price so many veterans pay as they sacrifice their bodies in service to their country. My grandfather, Private Ralph Hirtle, served as a dispatch rider in World War II, carrying critical information between the front lines in France and central command. He returned home with shrapnel in his chest, a price paid that was made front and centre for us kids before every Christmas, Thanksgiving and birthday celebration as we were reminded to not jump up on Grampy's lap: "He still hurts from the war." He carried that physical pain with him every day.

Later in life, I became intimately familiar with the mental pain that too many veterans have had to carry. Six years ago, in the autumn of 2019, my partner Joe died. He was a man of incredible light and unpredictable darkness. As a young man, he drove south, across the border, to enlist in the U.S. Army. He signed his papers and was off to the fight in Vietnam. As was true for tens of thousands of the men he served with in the mud and the muck, he brought parts of that fight in Vietnam back with him. Through PTSD, Joe would relive parts of that fight for decades. Long after returning to the safety of Canada, he carried that mental shrapnel the rest of his life.

I could not help Joe. I could not offer him much more than the equivalent of mental band-aids, but this motion is a step we can take together to help us move beyond mental band-aid solutions. This is a step that might allow us to unlock creative solutions to better serve veterans across Canada.

The North Nova Scotia Highlanders landed on Juno Beach 82 years ago this June. They fought their way across northwest Europe. They liberated villages. They paid an unbearable price, and

they came home to build families and communities across Nova Scotia.

The building that bears Colonel Ralston's name, the building where those Highlanders gathered, trained and kept their legacy alive, deserves better than the red tape of administrative limbo. I believe we can do better, and this motion is how we start. Let us embrace the opportunity. Let us study this thoroughly. Let us learn from best practices. Let us develop recommendations that communities from coast to coast to coast can implement. Let us prove that when we make commitments to the women and men who serve, we keep them, not just with words but with action.

I ask every member with us today to see and embrace this opportunity. Motion No. 16 says that we have assets, we have needs and we have an opportunity. It asks, how can we be more strategic? How can we be more intentional?

I ask now for the support of the House on Motion No. 16. Let us show the Canadian people that when we work together, we can get good things done.

● (1730)

Blake Richards (Airdrie—Cochrane, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what I often find happens when I hear a politician talk about wanting to do a study is that it is often a way to avoid taking action.

With these underused properties, and there is one in my riding, I listen to my community. I know what it needs. I do not need to have a study of Parliament to decide what needs to be done with those properties. I would suggest that any member who has one of these properties in their riding should know what their community needs. We do not need a study of Parliament to be able to decide what needs to be done.

The same thing goes for when we talk about serving our veterans. If this member of the government wants to see more services for veterans, she should walk over to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and say, "Let's get more services for veterans," rather than trying to gum up Parliament with a study when we could be just taking action. She is part of the government. Why does she not just take action?

Alana Hirtle: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member across the way for his question, but I am not sure that I want to.

Private Members' Business

His point is taken. There certainly have been studies done. The need for veterans' housing is obvious, and the government understood that. This year, it launched Build Canada Homes, which will help provide housing for individuals, including veterans. By identifying the federal surplus buildings in each of our ridings, we are going to be better able to service those individuals and get it moving faster.

Will Greaves (Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for Cumberland—Colchester for the touching and personal remarks she shared with all of us in the chamber today.

I also represent a riding that has a significant number of Canadian Armed Forces and Department of National Defence properties. While the hon. member opposite's point is taken that many members, I am sure, do have an idea of what we might do in our ridings with some of those properties, I would suggest that the merit of my colleague's motion is to have a systematic review of all of those properties across Canada so that, instead of an ad hoc process where individual MPs are putting forward their own favourite projects, we might actually have a more broad, wide-reaching and systematic assessment of the properties that the federal government could use to better effect for Canadians, and in this case, for veterans. Would my colleague care to comment?

Alana Hirtle: Mr. Speaker, my colleague hit the nail on the head. Sending the motion to committee and allowing for the study would enable a process to be put in place so the same procedures could be used across the country to identify buildings within each riding, create a process whereby they can be reallocated for the community and then enable the community to do what is best for it.

• (1735)

Scott Anderson (Vernon—Lake Country—Monashee, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am sure the member is aware that the Department of National Defence is expanding rapidly right now and that the unused properties are generally World War II heritage leftovers.

What would the member say about the coming expansion and how that may conflict with her bill?

Alana Hirtle: Mr. Speaker, I do not think there would be a conflict. I believe that we have the opportunity to repurpose historic buildings that have served our communities in past decades and to move them forward. With things like heat pumps, solar power and better energy efficiency, we can transform these buildings into units that can be occupied for decades to come.

[*Translation*]

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is simple. Why are we debating Motion No. 16 here, rather than with my colleague on the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates?

[*English*]

Alana Hirtle: Mr. Speaker, I would say that because OGGO is an opposition-chaired committee, it makes perfect sense for everyone to work on a non-partisan basis to review the opportunities and to see what we can do to move them forward.

Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to the motion introduced by the member for Cumberland—Colchester, Motion No. 16.

While this motion appears to be related to the current and future use of federal office space, it calls upon the House to recognize, among other things, “that the government is making historic investments in the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) to meet our NATO funding targets earlier than committed”. Clearly, this is nothing more than a Liberal talking point that does not add value, nor can it be substantiated in any way. It is not clear whether there has been an increase in CAF members over the past few years, let alone in the past six months since the government announced its new spending policies. I would also ask what the member means by “historic investments”.

The Liberals have been in power for over 10 years. On this issue, what do they have to show for it? Simply recommitting to make progress after 10 years of inaction is a convenient way of avoiding accountability. For example, a report tabled by the Auditor General last fall revealed there are significant shortcomings in the living standards of our military. She identified that only 5% of major repairs were completed of the more than 227 high-priority repairs needed across three bases. These were not insignificant: lack of potable water, malfunctioning sanitary waste systems and deteriorating external walls. However, on this, there was no apology for or even an acknowledgement of these deplorable conditions, while the Liberals continued with their reckless spending and avoided their commitment to defence spending for a decade.

One of the first things the government could do, if it truly plans on making generational investments, is to start investing in living quarters that meet basic standards for our military. It does not deserve a pat on the back for saying it is going to make historic investments in the Canadian Armed Forces. Conservatives will hold the government to account for its failure to adequately support the brave men and women of our armed forces. We will not let the government simply claim that it is making these historic investments when we have yet to see it act.

Private Members' Business

Further, without any plan to study what impacts finally meeting our NATO commitments could have on veterans' services, the motion goes on to call for the House to recognize the assumption that an increasing number of CAF service members will lead to a growth in the ranks of Canadian veterans over the next few decades. Seriously, this assumes that, after 10 years, the Liberals have solved their management of recruitment to the armed forces, which has been a disaster, and that we will need more service centres for veterans, to such a degree that Public Services and Procurement Canada should abandon its promise of reducing federal lands and selling underused office space for affordable housing.

Let us talk about the Liberal government's recent action on veterans' services, since the member's motion assumes they will need to be expanded, a claim that was made just months after the Liberals decided to cut \$4.3 billion in funding from Veterans Affairs Canada over four years. How the Liberals claim, on one hand, they will need to expand services in the future, while cutting them at the same time, makes little sense to me.

On the issue of PSPC's failure, in 2017, a report was published that stated that 50% of government office space was not being used to full capacity. Two years later, in 2019, Public Services and Procurement Canada began to identify which buildings would be suitable for housing and implement a plan to sell these properties to developers.

In 2021, the Treasury Board Secretariat created an oversight program to assist in departmental co-operation and implementation of the federal lands initiative, though in 2024, it was dissolved due to a lack of funding. At that time, budget 2024 announced \$1.1 billion over 10 years, starting in 2024-25, for PSPC to reduce its office portfolio by 50% to 2.95 million rentable square metres.

● (1740)

However, in June 2025, the Auditor General's report entitled "Current and Future Use of Federal Office Space" slammed Public Services and Procurement Canada for their slow implementation of the plan to reduce office space and for their failure to deliver affordable homes for the most vulnerable, despite more than \$1 billion being allocated to PSPC for this one task. More specifically, from the department's original plan to reduce the footprint by 50%, since 2019 they have only managed to reduce their office footprint from six million rentable square metres to 5.9 million in 2024. This plan came with a promise to save \$3.9 billion over 10 years and save taxpayers nearly \$1 billion annually from operating costs.

Further, the Auditor General predicted that there are many savings to be made by selling federal buildings. Annual maintenance on unused federal buildings cost taxpayers \$2.14 billion in the 2023-24 fiscal year. Selling these buildings will generate savings of approximately \$1 billion per year moving forward. Like many Liberal promises of savings, after five years it has not worked out the way they planned.

Additionally, a process already exists for departments to communicate their office needs to Public Services and Procurement Canada. If Veterans Affairs Canada needed new space for veterans services, they already have an internal mechanism available without needing to invoke parliamentary motions or committee studies. That is why the third part of this motion is egregious, in that it

seeks to instruct the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates to undertake a study on alternative ways to make use of underused and surplus federal lands and buildings when one already exists.

I am skeptical of the motivation, in that I believe there is a desire to control the agenda of the government operations and estimates committee by instructing an opposition-led committee to undertake this study, given the following. The TBS sets policies and approved funding that guide how departments can acquire and use government office space. Departments are responsible for understanding and articulating their specific needs for services and the office space required to support their programs and mandates. PSPC, as the custodian, manages the government's portfolio of office spaces and works with departments to meet their space requirements. Therefore, if Veterans Affairs Canada needed more space, they would simply need to go to PSPC and make that need known.

In closing, I would note that the Auditor General found that while PSPC has been slow in meeting its mandate, the department lacked up-to-date, standardized and reliable information from federal tenants on the daily use of office space. She has been clear: The federal government does not efficiently or adequately use its spaces. Our position is clear: Sell these surplus buildings and use them for affordable housing.

We are opposed to attempts to redirect the work of committees in order to distract from the government's failures in reducing and selling underused federal office buildings so they could be converted into affordable housing. Self-congratulatory motions such as this allow the Liberal government to avoid accountability for its years of inaction and failure to execute its reduction of federal office space, and allow the Liberals to get away with promising investments for the men and women of our Canadian Armed Forces or for our veterans without following through on those promises.

Conservatives will continue to do the work we were elected to do as the official opposition and hold the government to account for its broken promises.

• (1745)

[*Translation*]

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, tonight, the fundamental question is: Why debate this motion in the House? This question seems very simple, but it is crucial to me. Since I have been a member of the House of Commons, I have rarely seen orders of reference from the House to committees, other than for questions of privilege. I have seen my share of questions of privilege. I sat on the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs for three years.

I was surprised to see the Liberals take the initiative to move this motion. Let us examine it together. To begin, the motion asks for the following:

That:

(a) the House recognize,

(i) that the government is making historic investments in the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) to meet our NATO funding targets earlier than committed,

First of all, that is not true. More than 10 years ago, Justin Trudeau's Liberals committed to reaching 2%. It is a bit ridiculous to claim that this is earlier than expected.

The second point reads as follows:

(ii) the assumption that an increasing number of CAF service members will lead to a growth in the ranks of Canadian veterans over the next few decades;

That is an insult to the active military personnel who contact me as the Bloc Québécois veterans critic. The housing for active military personnel is outdated. There is a severe lack of investment. It is scary. The houses are like sieves. We are hearing more and more news about this every day.

The third point says this:

(b) it be an instruction to the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates to undertake a study on alternative ways to make use of underused and surplus federal lands and buildings, in ways that help reinvigorate communities by serving as centers that provide services for veterans, provided that...

I will always be an ally of veterans. I will always be there to stand up for their basic needs. I keep saying that we need to see to their basic needs. What are those needs? They are food, shelter, and security. I am the first to call for dignity for veterans. I am the first to ask that their needs be met, that they be consulted—it is a small word, but it is crucial—and that we not patronize them.

However, I am very aware that they are currently being exploited. Let me be clear: I am in no way against the substance, but I am against the form. If the Liberal government wanted to launch a study on the subject, it could have done so in committee. The Liberals have four members on the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates. Those four members are competent and know how the parliamentary system works. They know full well that they can move a motion to study the subject. However, the government has decided to do so here in the House. I come back to my question: why?

House of Commons Procedure and Practice, fourth edition, at page 795, states the following:

The Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates has a very broad mandate, which includes, among other matters, the review of the effective-

Private Members' Business

ness, management and operation of the central departments and agencies, and the review of the effectiveness, management and operation of new and emerging information and communication technologies by the government.

That is a lot.

The committee is also mandated to review the process for considering the estimates and supply, and the format and content of estimates documents. The Standing Orders also empower the committee to amend certain votes that have been referred to other standing committees as part of the estimates, in coordination with those committees.

• (1750)

I will ask my question again. Why does Motion No. 16 direct the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates to look into this matter? If we are talking about providing housing for veterans, I am sure that my colleagues on the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs would be honoured to study the issue of housing, homelessness and surplus land available. That is committee work, after all.

I fundamentally believe that committees are autonomous and that their work should not be dictated by the House. This precedent, a word we have heard so often, would give members of non-recognized parties like the NDP and the Green Party the ability to direct the work of committees based on an order of the House.

I am concerned about setting this kind of precedent because it is not being done out of compassion. Perhaps it is being done for the sole purpose of getting around the Bloc Québécois, which holds the balance of power at standing committees. We will say that again and again, because this situation is exceptional. The government knows that just three votes in the House will enable it to do an end run around Quebecers, who wanted 22 separatists, 22 people who love Quebec, 22 champions of Quebec's distinct nature, 22 patriots to advocate for them right here in the Parliament of Canada. Many people might find this part of the process irritating. I can hear them laughing, but they cannot bulldoze us. The rules of democracy exist to prevent unilateral decisions. Parliament must not become a chamber that rubber-stamps executive decisions. It must be a chamber of debate, reflection and oversight of government.

As a member of the Bloc Québécois, I will always stand up to defend these fundamental and intrinsic principles of the Quebec sovereignist movement.

[*English*]

Mike Kelloway (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport and Internal Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to seek the support of parliamentarians from all parties to adopt a motion that I believe we can all agree with and that would benefit our country's courageous veterans. The motion calls for the House of Commons to instruct the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates to study the use of underused and surplus federal lands and buildings to support services for our veterans. I would like to thank the member for Cumberland—Colchester for bringing the motion forward, as it clearly demonstrates a commitment to improving access to services that our veterans need.

Private Members' Business

Most of us are aware of the important work that public servants do at Veterans Affairs Canada to support members who have left the Canadian Armed Forces and who have become veterans. The programs offered by Veterans Affairs do more than make a veteran's life a little easier; they are absolutely a lifeline. These programs provide critical support for veterans facing serious mental health and physical challenges. Just as importantly, they also benefit veterans' families, which play a vital role in the care and well-being of veterans.

There is no greater service to our nation than military service, and our veterans therefore deserve access to the support they need, no matter where they live in this country. In fact, I believe we have an obligation to look into proposals or initiatives brought forward that could help our veterans. We owe it to them to do so, and that is what the motion is about.

As many members of the House are aware, the federal government is the custodian of a large number of underused lands and buildings that have been deemed surplus to federal needs and are being considered for disposal. The intent of the motion, to be clear, is to explore how some of these properties could be repurposed to house and support programs for veterans, who have bravely served our country. For example, surplus properties could be suitable for infrastructure needed to deliver education and training, as well as health care and mental health services, for our veterans.

They could also be used to provide affordable housing, which has been mentioned here today. We know that too many veterans struggle with access to affordable housing, and some are even experiencing homelessness. According to the latest data, it is estimated that approximately 2,000 veterans across Canada experience homelessness every year. Our government has made a commitment to Canadians to address the housing crisis. We have already taken action on this front, as has been talked about today.

In September we launched Build Canada Homes, a new federal agency dedicated to building affordable housing at scale. It is doing that by leveraging public lands, offering financial incentives to builders, attracting private capital and supporting modern infrastructure and manufacturers in building the homes Canadians and veterans need now.

Build Canada Homes will also help address homelessness by building transitional and supportive housing, while working in partnership with provinces, territories, municipalities and indigenous communities. We are also continuing to fund the veteran homelessness program, which was launched in 2023.

In November 2025, the Minister of Veterans Affairs announced an additional \$22.5 million in funding to support initiatives aimed at preventing and reducing veteran homelessness in communities from coast to coast to coast. With this funding, the government is partnering with 10 different organizations across Canada, enabling community organizations to deliver tailored services, including housing assistance, mental health and addiction supports, and employment services.

These are important measures, but we know we must do more for our veterans. The truth is that veterans have unique needs and require services specifically tailored to them. If we have surplus

buildings, or land for that matter, that could be used to help provide these services, we should endeavour to make this a reality.

There are many factors that cause our veterans to seek support services that they need when they transition from military life to civilian life. The transition, as has been mentioned here today, can be challenging. As military personnel leave a structured environment and adjust to a life that is less predictable and less ordered, finding their footing in these new surroundings can take time and indeed support. There can also be a sense of loss of community when our servicemen and servicewomen leave the military. After years of working and living with tight-knit groups, to suddenly experience an absence of community can be a major adjustment.

Many veterans face physical and mental challenges after leaving the forces, as was brought up here today.

● (1755)

While most of us are familiar with post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD, there are numerous other physiological and psychological conditions that can affect our veterans. By providing counselling and a range of support services through Veterans Affairs, we can help prevent some of these challenges from developing into more serious illnesses. Therefore, if we are able to leverage some of our surplus land and buildings to transform them into space where more services are available for our veterans, we should examine those possibilities.

When we look ahead and seek to expand our military and increase our troop complement, as we are, we can expect that in the future there will be more veterans who will require services and programs to help them adjust to life outside the military. The member for Cumberland—Colchester is quite right that the government is making historic investments in the Canadian Armed Forces to meet our ambitious and vital NATO funding targets. Increasing the number of service members will naturally lead to a growth in the ranks of Canadian veterans over the next few decades, so we must acknowledge that providing support to our military is more than the acquisition of the tools and equipment they need to do the job. It is about ensuring that the people doing the dangerous jobs and keeping us safe, the armed forces and the veterans, are at the core of this motion.

In closing, I encourage all members of the House to support this motion to initiate a study of the use of underused and surplus federal lands and buildings to support our veterans. We owe it to our veterans who are struggling now and the future veterans who are currently in the military. It is the right thing to do and the Canadian thing to do, so let us do what we all know is right and support the adoption of this motion.

Private Members' Business

• (1800)

Blake Richards (Airdrie—Cochrane, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we stand here today watching the Liberals once again play politics with veterans. Rather than treating our veterans as heroes who served the country, this motion is just the latest action in a string of actions taken by the Liberal government, which treats veterans as pawns for their political ambitions.

In less than a year since the election, the Liberals have made several inexplicable decisions that not only neglect their duties to veterans but also insult veterans. It started with the minister being unable to answer how many veterans had been helped through the flagship programs on homelessness and employment. Despite millions of dollars spent and years of patting themselves on the back, they had no idea if their program was actually doing anything.

The Liberals then decided that they would not provide wreaths for Remembrance Day for cenotaphs across the country. After push-back from the Conservatives, they had to walk that back, but just before Remembrance Day, the Liberals announced more than 4 billion dollars' worth of cuts to veterans' benefits. They refused to answer questions about where those cuts would take place, but we already know that their budget proposes to cut veterans' pensions.

The Liberals sent out more than 100 letters to veterans demanding massive repayment sums because of the department's own negligence and accounting errors, while they simultaneously moved legislation to retroactively change legislative decisions to avoid having to pay back the disabled veterans they have been overcharging for years. The Liberals stand here today, once again using veterans as a pretense for their political goals.

Just last week, half of the Women Veterans Council resigned in protest of the Liberal government's using them for photo ops and virtue signalling, while ignoring them the rest of the time and not allowing them to work for veterans or even have a say with the minister.

Canadians have had enough, and it is time for action. With the budget implementation act, the Liberals snuck in changes to the pension indexing of veterans, meaning that they would receive less money every year to keep up with the rampant inflation that Liberal deficits are costing us. Food inflation, the cost of living and housing are all up, and now veterans' pensions are down.

We have to ask ourselves, what are the Liberals telling veterans? On one hand, they are claiming in this motion that veterans need more service spaces, but on the other hand, they are carrying out the largest cuts to veterans that we have ever seen. On one hand, they are finally acknowledging a cost of living crisis after denying it for years, but on the other hand, they are lowering veterans' pension indexing to give them less every year. The cherry on top is that the Liberals are also using the budget implementation act to retroactively change legislation to avoid a lawsuit representing veterans who were overcharged by VAC for long-term care.

Actions speak much louder than words, and Canadians can see right through the Liberals. Instead of making more empty promises and motions, why do the Liberals not finally start to do right by veterans and reverse their decision to cut veterans' pensions and services?

Perhaps most pertinent to this debate is the fact that veterans in Amherst, Nova Scotia, have clearly expressed their desire for a building there, and they have done so for years now. We now have the Liberal member for that very community introducing a motion for debate which does not call for action to grant the veterans of Amherst what they are asking for. Instead, the motion suggests a study should take place to determine what should be done.

We already know what should be done. We already know what this property needs to be used for. There is no excuse for the games that the Liberals are playing here. It is fully within their authority and their ability as the Government of Canada to facilitate the transfer of that property. Had the motion today called for action, they would have found support on this side of the House.

I know that veterans in Nova Scotia and across Canada will be incredibly disappointed to hear that the government thinks that a motion for a study six months from now is an acceptable answer to a call for action they have been making for years now. This issue comes down solely to political will and priorities, which the government has clearly signalled its disinterest in. The government does not care what becomes of the Amherst Armoury or what becomes of homeless veterans.

For years, I have asked minister after minister in the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs if they know how many homeless veterans there are, and how many homeless veterans that their so-called veterans homelessness program has helped. Every single one of them has not been able to answer. They do not even know how many there are, let alone how many they have helped.

• (1805)

That pattern is as disturbing as it is clear: The Liberals love to talk the talk, but they never walk the walk. Words, promises and platitudes are never acted upon or followed up on. It is easy for them to forget about the cost of their inaction when they are here in Ottawa, spending away the future of Canadians, but for everyday Canadians in proud historic towns like Amherst, the effects of their inaction weigh heavily.

Built in 1915, the Colonel James Layton Ralston Armoury, locally known as the Amherst armoury, housed some of Nova Scotia's finest. Local men signed up at the armoury to serve in World War I and to fight Nazi Germany in World War II.

Private Members' Business

There were 497 men from Amherst and its surrounding areas who never returned home. Their names are marked on a local cenotaph in the Amherst area. For almost 500 individuals who paid the ultimate price, the Amherst armoury holds dear meaning. What is just a talking point for the Liberals in Ottawa is a living part of the heritage of Amherst, Nova Scotia, and its people, and they deserve action, not empty promises, so let us today renew our calls on the Liberal government to abandon its political games and to commit to the transfer of a historic property like that to the people who deeply care for it.

The motion also asserts that there will be a need for more veteran services due to higher recruitment numbers as a result of policies of the Liberal government. To support this, the Liberals have been happy to parade around a recent report that states that applications to the Canadian Armed Forces have increased by 13% last year.

Once again, we are faced with Liberal misdirection. To begin with, the Auditor General report in November of last year clearly states that the Canadian Armed Forces continually fails to meet its own recruitment goals year over year. Among the reasons cited for this was a cumbersome, bloated and outdated recruiting system. The report rightly points out that most applicants drop out of the process because it can take upwards of a year to get enrolled in the Canadian Armed Forces.

If we follow this reasoning, how can the Liberal government be so happy about a 13% increase in applications, when just months ago the Auditor General cited the loss of applications due to a broken recruitment system, which remains unfixed?

Further, the Canadian Armed Forces has also indicated that the 13% figure does not reflect anything to do with the policies of the current government and is a projection it has been making and watching for over four years now. Right off the bat, the very premise that underlies this motion has proven to be false.

In conclusion, it should be stated very clearly that the Liberals have an abhorrent track record when it comes to our veterans. Whether it is changing the minister of veterans affairs every six months or cutting billions from veterans benefits, or whether it is ignoring the veterans who work tirelessly to help their fellow veterans or even offering veterans who are looking for help in living their lives medical assistance in dying instead, the Liberal government has made it very clear that veterans are not its priority.

To any Canadian who is listening today, let me make this as clear as I can. I have served in government before, and the power to transfer a federal property such as the one in Amherst, Nova Scotia, is something the federal government has the mechanisms and the authority to do. All it needs to do is act. Anyone who tells the people of Amherst or anywhere in Canada that this is an issue that needs to be studied in a parliamentary committee or debated over months and months in the House is someone who is not serious about the needs of their constituents or of veterans.

The time for political games with our veterans is over, and the time for action is now.

• (1810)

Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am glad that this motion has come forward to inspire the conversation around the veterans in our country.

First, I will highlight that clearly everyone in the House, and all Canadians, agree that no veteran should be living on the streets of this country. Any man or woman who served this country should be prioritized when it comes to housing. They should not be left out on the streets.

However, we do have concerns around this motion. We know that this is a real problem. Veterans are overrepresented when it comes to homelessness and homeless people on the streets of our great nation, but so are indigenous peoples. We have been flagging this. I have raised this in the House many times: Any government buildings or any government lands that are to be used for housing, something that we have supported and we do support, should be prioritized for Canada's military veterans, RCMP veterans and, of course, indigenous peoples, who, again, are overrepresented in terms of homelessness in this country, the first peoples of these lands.

We have seen the breakdown many times when veterans groups, organizations or legions try to access funds to build veterans housing. Constantly, what we find out, and we can see where it has happened in Ontario, is that when a group wants to get housing going, even when a municipality comes forward saying it has land, the provincial government says that veterans are a responsibility of the federal Government of Canada. Often the federal government does not provide the funding that is needed, so they fall between the cracks.

Even when local governments or local organizations want to spearhead a project to make sure there are no veterans in their community or anywhere in Canada without a place to live, often the gaps collide. There is an opportunity right now for the federal government to show leadership.

One thing about this motion is that it is non-binding. What we heard from my Conservative colleague, which I wholly support, is that we are talking about doing a study in six months' time on a non-binding motion. This could be in the fall economic statement. In fact, the Prime Minister could announce a policy this week that could absolutely cement that all government lands and buildings to be used for housing are to prioritize Canada's men and women who have served in the military or the RCMP and indigenous peoples, on whose lands they are.

However, the Liberals will not do this. Instead, we have a motion that is going to drag this out. Honestly, it is a motion that, as much as we are frustrated with, we will support at second reading to get the conversation going. However, it is absolutely unnecessary. In fact, this should be an urgent priority of the government. It should be looking at ways to support those groups and organizations and fast-tracking shovel-ready projects, those that are ready right now to be implemented. We have cities, provinces and territories that want to support Canada's military and RCMP veterans and indigenous peoples on federal lands, but they require the federal government to come to the table and actually be the leader when it comes to pulling it together.

Again, we recognize this is a real problem, and we need a pan-Canadian approach to this. However, we do not need to wait for a study when we know there are government lands and buildings that could be used immediately. We have non-profits with shovel-ready projects. We need data, as my colleague talked about earlier. There is no credible data to identify how many of Canada's military and RCMP veterans are homeless. We need to ensure that there are strong transition supports for those who are in an absolute crisis. We need this to be coordinated across the government. All levels of government should be working collectively to address this problem. We need housing-first supports.

It is critical that we get to a place of prevention. When a military or RCMP veteran is homeless, we cannot wait for them to be in crisis. This should be a priority of government. If someone who is serving, right through to their release, is in trouble, if they do not have housing lined up or if they do not have safe, secure supports when they are released, we need to ensure that at least they have, as a bare minimum, a place to live.

• (1815)

The government has had a decade to address this problem, and the Liberals bring forward a motion to talk about it and do a study in six months, which it does not require. This can be enacted now. We would expect a lot more from the leadership of the government. All parliamentarians would expect more.

I hope that the mover of this motion actually goes to the Prime Minister and the cabinet and says that the least we could do for Canada's veterans is make sure that none of them are homeless. This could be done expediently, and it has to be done expediently, because we cannot lose veterans. When a veteran is homeless and they are not getting the adequate supports they need, we know what can happen.

This is disrespectful to Canada's veterans, the people who put their lives on the line for our safety and our security and have served our country. To the mover, I hope that this is in the fall economic statement, or even better, that the government fast-tracks this process and gets moving on making sure that no veteran is left homeless in this country.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): The time provided for the consideration of Private Members' Business has now expired, and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.

Adjournment Proceedings

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*English*]

HOUSING

Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for more than 30 years, successive Liberal and Conservative governments have relied on the private sector to attempt to deliver the housing Canadians need. The results are undeniable. Canada's non-market housing stock has dwindled to just 4.5% of total housing, well below the G7 average. To be clear, CMHC has indicated that Canada needs an additional 3.5 million affordable homes by 2030. The PBO's report on the Build Canada Homes plan found that the government will deliver only 26,000 new units of housing over five years. That is 5,200 units per year. At this rate, it would take 673 years to reach the goal CMHC has set out. Based on the life expectancy at birth for a Canadian born in 2023, that is eight and a half lifetimes.

Housing costs have soared, homelessness is rising, and deeply affordable homes are disappearing faster than they are being built. Despite the scale of this crisis, federal housing spending is projected to drop by 56% by 2028-29. At the same time, funding for existing affordability programs is set to expire in the coming years, with no clear replacement. This is not a serious plan as it is currently laid out.

Build Canada Homes was presented during the election as something akin to a postwar level of federal investment in housing. Instead, the Parliamentary Budget Officer has confirmed that it lacks the targets, funding and safeguards needed to deliver affordability at scale. Build Canada Homes includes no minimum requirements for affordability across its projects. Of the sites announced so far, only six are expected to achieve affordability targets. Without clear targets written into the program, there is no guarantee that future projects will deliver homes that low- and moderate-income Canadians can afford.

Budget 2025 indicates that CMHC, the federal agency formerly responsible for delivering housing programs, is facing cuts of \$860 million per year. Canadians do not know which programs will be cut and which will be saved by Build Canada Homes. There is no transparency or accountability. Let me be clear about what this looks like on the ground.

Adjournment Proceedings

At the China Creek Housing Coop in Vancouver, residents are facing the possible loss of housing charge subsidies that keep their homes affordable. Earlier this year, the government announced an extension of the federal community housing initiative, creating the impression that affordability protection will continue, yet the most recent federal budget contains no provision for the continuation of these subsidies into the coming year. When the co-op contacted CMHC for clarification, it was told there is no information beyond what was presented in the budget: no timeline, no transition plan, no assurance that existing subsidy recipients will continue to receive support. CMHC has effectively told residents to contact their member of Parliament because it cannot provide answers. The residents affected include low-income seniors with serious health concerns, single parents with children, and indigenous and Métis families.

Without housing charge subsidies, many will be unable to afford their homes not only at China Creek but anywhere in Vancouver's rental market, and for that matter across the country, where rents routinely exceed the total monthly income of those most affected. The fear of imminent homelessness is real, and it is taking a profound emotional toll on people with nowhere else to go.

• (1820)

Caroline Desrochers (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing and Infrastructure, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to report that the Government of Canada is taking action to lower housing costs for Canadians across the country. Budget 2025 is making generational investments in housing and infrastructure because we know that housing costs have a significant impact on the cost of living. These strategic investments will build major infrastructure and homes, create lasting prosperity and empower Canadians to get ahead.

In September 2025 the Prime Minister and the Minister of Housing and Infrastructure launched Build Canada Homes, with an initial capitalization of \$13 billion. Build Canada Homes is Canada's new federal agency with the mandate to scale up the supply of affordable housing across Canada. By leveraging public lands, deploying flexible financial tools and acting as a catalyst for modern methods of construction, Build Canada Homes is driving a more productive and innovative homebuilding sector.

The new agency will partner with private sector developers on mixed market housing developments that combine affordable rentals with market units. The approach will help unlock new sources of private capital, create more affordable housing supply and ensure that housing remains financially viable and affordable over the long term.

Build Canada Homes will also help fight homelessness by building transitional and supportive housing and will work with provinces, territories, municipalities and indigenous communities to pair these federal investments with necessary wraparound services.

In addition, the \$1.5-billion Canada rental protection fund will also be launched under Build Canada Homes to help protect existing affordable housing. This initiative will help the community housing sector acquire at-risk rental apartment buildings to ensure that they remain affordable over the long term. The Canada rental protection fund aligns with Build Canada Homes' broader mandate

to grow the supply of affordable and non-market housing. All projects funded via Build Canada Homes will include an affordable component, not only by building new homes but also by preserving those that Canadians already rely on.

Build Canada Homes and the Canada rental protection fund will build on the success of programs like the affordable housing fund. As of September 2025, over 54,000 new units have been committed through the affordable housing fund. The Government of Canada has provided an additional \$1.5 billion in loans to the fund's new construction stream. This brings the total federal investment in the fund to approximately \$16 billion.

To ensure that the rental market remains fair and accessible, the Government of Canada has also created the blueprint for a renters' bill of rights, which sets out principles for a fair and transparent rental system. We are calling on the provinces and territories to take action to support the blueprint's principles, to improve the rental system and to ensure that renting is a fair and transparent process across Canada.

The Government is making historic investments in affordable housing and is working to lower housing costs for Canadians so every family can find a home that fits its needs and its budget. We are committed to doing this. We will do it using Canadian materials, Canadian workers and Canadian ingenuity, and by working in collaboration with every member of the House.

• (1825)

Jenny Kwan: Mr. Speaker, currently, operating agreements for approximately 300,000 units of existing social and co-op housing are slated to sunset. If the Liberals do not renew those operating agreements, their housing charge subsidies will end. That means there would be, potentially, a loss of 300,000 units of already built affordable homes to add to the acute housing crisis. That means that the Prime Minister is not only failing to build truly affordable homes at the scale that is needed but is also failing to protect existing ones, homes set up to ensure that coordinated affordability is at the centre of its operation so it can deliver deeply affordable housing at scale.

My question is, will the Prime Minister correct this fundamental flaw and commit to ensuring that Build Canada Homes is doing its job to ensure that core funding is in place to ensure affordability, and will the Liberals commit to contribute funding for housing charge subsidies, including for the residents at China Creek, so no one is pushed into homelessness because of inaction by the federal government?

Caroline Desrochers: Mr. Speaker, the government is committed to solving the housing crisis by focusing on affordable housing across the full affordability spectrum. Budget 2025 is making generational investments in housing and infrastructure in order to do so.

Build Canada Homes is going to work with partners across the housing ecosystem to drive the development of affordable housing options that will support a mix of income levels. Build Canada Homes is going to grow the supply of affordable and community housing and will work with non-profit housing providers to offer flexible financial tools, including low-interest loans and contributions. These partnerships are central to Build Canada Homes' strategy to grow community housing and to ensure long-term affordability.

The federal government is taking action through a wide range of measures, which I mentioned before, to restore affordability, expand housing options and ensure that every Canadian has a place to call home.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight to speak to the closure of the Crofton mill on Vancouver Island and what it exposes about the state of Canada's forest sector and the Liberal government's failure to act when forestry workers need help most.

Today, February 3, the first round of layoffs at Crofton takes effect. Workers are emptying lockers and families are losing paycheques. Mortgages, rent and grocery bills do not pause while the government deliberates. Communities are being told to wait. I am raising this tonight because Geoff Dawe, the president of Public and Private Workers of Canada, contacted me directly. His concern was simple and alarming. Workers losing their good-paying union jobs cannot access the federal supports that they were promised and deserve. Crofton is not in my riding, but when hundreds of Vancouver Island workers are thrown out of work overnight, riding boundaries mean nothing. It demands a national response.

I reached out immediately to three federal departments about removing barriers to workers' support, barriers that simply should never have existed in the first place. I acknowledge those ministers and officials who responded, but let me be clear: Workers should not need an MP running interference just to get help when mills close.

I also want to recognize British Columbia's Minister of Forests, Ravi Parmar, who is working around the clock, North Cowichan Mayor Rob Douglas and Duncan Mayor Michelle Staples, who are doing everything they can on the ground, despite the absence of a serious, coordinated federal response. When governments fail to intervene during a sectoral crisis, the outcome is predictable: economic shock, mental health crisis, population loss and entire communities shaken to the core. This moment is a real-time stress test for employment insurance, labour market development funding, softwood lumber relief and federal-provincial coordination. Right now, the system is failing that test.

Let me explain. The government announced \$1.2 billion for the forest sector. Workers quickly discovered that only \$50 million of

that is actually for them. That is less than 5%, not for income replacement, not for retraining and not for communities trying to survive closures. The \$50 million for tens of thousands of workers is not support; it is neglect. In British Columbia alone, nearly 50,000 direct forestry jobs are at risk. These are mill workers, fallers, truck drivers, equipment operators, indigenous workers and workers in single-industry towns.

Forestry has sustained generations of families in my home province. British Columbia produces roughly 45% of Canada's softwood lumber exports, yet under the \$450-million labour market adjustment envelope, British Columbia receives only about \$70 million, while Ontario receives roughly \$230 million. That is indefensible. It is not proportional and it abandons forestry communities in British Columbia.

When the auto sector faces crisis, Ottawa intervenes. When steel faces unfair trade action, Ottawa steps in, and rightly so. Forestry workers are asking, though, why they are treated as expendable. What is missing is a new, dedicated round of forestry relief, including softwood lumber supports, that reflects the scale of this crisis and treats British Columbia fairly. Many affected workers are between 55 and 64 years old, too old for retraining and too young for retirement. Employment insurance replaces just 60% of income, and severance clawbacks block access to support entirely.

Workers are not asking for charity; they are simply asking for action. They are asking for employment insurance replacement to be raised to at least 80% and for EI duration to be extended to 104 weeks. They are asking for no waiting periods and no severance clawbacks. They are asking for bridge-to-retirement supports for workers aged 55 to 64. They are asking for guaranteed apprenticeship completion and long-term mental health supports. They are asking for mobility assistance where local jobs do not exist.

Crofton is the test. Layoffs are happening today, and the excuses will not pay the rent. Delay is not neutral; it is harm. The government must act, and it must act now.

Adjournment Proceedings

• (1830)

Claude Guay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the mill closures are a challenge across the country, not just in British Columbia. We feel for every worker who is being impacted with that situation, as well as their families, but the reality is that we are faced with an unjustified tariff war from our neighbour to the south, which is affecting this industry and has been affecting it for many years. We have been fighting numerous tariffs over the years, but the government is taking on a series of activities to help the industry, and these require profound measures.

Some of those measures include the \$1.2 billion the member mentioned, which is really to help, from a liquidity perspective, the companies that are facing these tariffs. The larger companies are taking advantage of SIF, the strategic innovation fund, to survive or combat those tariffs, but there is also a \$500-million program that we have announced, which is related to retooling—

An hon. member: It is \$20 million for workers.

Claude Guay: Mr. Speaker, it is \$50 million for the workers. The \$500 million is actually to help companies diversify into new products and changes, which is required. The reality is that it is going to take a while to address these problems that are specific to an industry that has been affected for so long. Last but not least, we have worked with the British Columbia government, because it is also within their purview.

We have also recently created a working group for 90 days, with representatives from across the country who are going to make suggestions to the government as to what needs to happen. It is going to happen very soon. We also have, as the member mentioned, the program to help in terms of salary and retraining for the employees.

It is a difficult challenge across the country. We have heard about multiple mill closures, not just in British Columbia, but particularly in British Columbia, Quebec and Ontario. We take this very seriously, and we are there to help not only the employees. We have to help the companies too, if the companies are to hire those employees and provide them with work.

• (1835)

Gord Johns: Mr. Speaker, feelings are not enough. The layoffs are happening today. I am urging the government not to abandon the families and workers at Crofton. Forestry workers do not need more reassurance; they need action. If the government is serious about preventing further job losses and supporting workers who have already lost their jobs, it must deliver real, sector-specific relief now, including softwood lumber relief funds that are proportional to British Columbia's role in this industry and comparable to what auto and steel received.

This means stabilizing existing mills, securing fibre supply, resolving the softwood lumber dispute with the United States and diversifying markets through a team Canada approach with provinces, labour and industry. Workers are losing their jobs today, and support must be timely and fair. Many have paid into employment insurance for decades. EI at 60% is not enough. Waiting periods delay income at the very moment families are losing pay-

cheques, and severance clawbacks punish workers for benefits they have earned.

Will the government act now? Will it help the workers and families of Crofton, B.C., right now?

Claude Guay: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for making it very clear and obvious what is happening across the country, not just in his riding or in British Columbia. Resolving the trade issue is actually a challenge, just as it is in steel, in auto, in aluminum and in forestry. The challenges in forestry have been going on for many years, and we need some fundamental structural solutions to be able to strengthen our industry across the country and take care and offer good jobs. We have actually been talking about the Build Canada Homes program and the buy Canadian program, because if we actually consume more of our wood, we will be able to employ more employees in our mills across the country.

FINANCE

Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight at Adjournment Proceedings to pursue a question I asked the Minister of Finance back on December 4, 2025, about what was committed in the budget.

At page 348 in the budget, it very clearly states that a component of carbon capture, utilization and storage, known as “enhanced oil recovery”, would not qualify for investment tax credits.

For those who are watching and do not know what “enhanced oil recovery” is, it is basically using the fig leaf that we are somehow pulling carbon out of the atmosphere, keeping it stored and avoiding its global warming effect, which is somehow good for the climate. However, what they are really doing is using the pressure and the impact of shooting carbon dioxide under the surface to areas where the industry has not been able to access the oil that is still there. Therefore, enhanced oil recovery is not about carbon capture and storage; it is about increasing oil production.

Back when the budget was being drafted and before it was tabled on November 4, a clear case was made to the government not to add a new fossil fuel subsidy and to make it very clear. It is still there. The government did not use disappearing ink. It still says, at page 348 in the English version of the budget, that enhanced oil recovery is not eligible for investment tax credits.

Adjournment Proceedings

The reason I asked the question of the Minister of Finance back on December 4, which was ironically exactly a month after the tabling of the budget, was due to the memorandum of understanding that had been executed with the Government of Alberta on November 27, which, amazingly, said exactly the opposite of the commitment made in the budget. I made the point in my question that some might call it a flip-flop, but a flip-flop is a sandal. This is a betrayal, because in the agreement with Danielle Smith of Alberta, the Government of Canada committed to provide exactly the subsidy it said it would not provide on page 348 of the budget.

My question was a financial question. We already had quite a stunning bottom-line number in this budget for the extent of the deficit, a \$78-billion deficit, but when we throw more money at subsidies, what we do is increase our deficit because we add to what the government is spending more than to what it receives.

The Green Party has a very good record on the subject of deficits and trying to strike balance. Of all the parties in the last federal election, we submitted more proposals to the Parliamentary Budget Officer for review than any other party. We provided, chapter and verse, how the government could bring in more revenue and pay down the deficit faster without austerity, without cuts, without depriving our social safety net of the resources it needs to expand and to provide for the needs of Canadians.

These studies are still on the Parliamentary Budget Officer's website, should anyone want to check out how much money we would have raised with a financial transaction tax, how much money we would raise with a wealth tax, or how much we could get if we put Canada first and stopped allowing the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board to take Canada pension plan money and invest it in other countries.

I did not get an answer that day. The Minister of the Environment rose, but she did not give me an answer.

Therefore, what is the deficit now that the Liberals have betrayed the promise on enhanced oil recovery?

• (1840)

Caroline Desrochers (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing and Infrastructure, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for bringing up this issue.

The world is changing rapidly. The United States, the world's largest economy and Canada's main economic partner, is fundamentally reshaping all of its trading relationships. To say that it is causing disruption for Canada is an understatement. This is not an economic transition. It is a generational shift, a rupture.

Sitting back and thinking about the good old days is not a strategy. We need to transform our economy from one that is reliant on a single trading partner to one that is stronger, more independent and resilient to global shocks. This is why we have removed federal barriers to internal trade so that we can be our own best customer. This is why we passed legislation to fast-track the approvals of nation-building projects, a key to diversifying our economy and fulfilling our potential as an energy superpower.

We are a resource-rich country with critical minerals, clean and conventional power and a world-class agri-food industry. Let us be

clear: Canada has what the world needs, and we need to secure our place in the new global economy.

In November, our government struck a new partnership with the Province of Alberta to lower emissions, unlock our natural resources and build a stronger and more sustainable economy. It will enable a clear and efficient approval process for a new pipeline, built and paid for by the private sector with indigenous peoples' co-ownership and benefits. The pipeline will bring Canadian oil to new Asian markets. It will help us diversify our exports, reduce the discount on current sales to U.S. markets and increase Canada's independence and prosperity.

The memorandum of understanding that we signed with Alberta also advances the construction of Pathways Plus. It will be the largest carbon capture, utilization and storage project in the world. It matters because energy does not only have to be low cost; it also needs to be low carbon. Under the MOU, Alberta will beef up its own technology innovation and emissions reduction program to establish an effective carbon price of \$130 per tonne. This is an accomplishment. This will help send a clear signal to industry that emitting carbon is costly, and therefore make carbon capture, utilization and storage more attractive.

For our part, we will extend federal investment tax credits to encourage large-scale carbon capture investments, including Pathways and enhanced oil recovery. Pathways will make Alberta oil among the lowest carbon-intensity produced barrels of oil in the world. As for enhanced oil recovery, it is a plus for carbon capture and storage. It generates demand and revenue for captured CO₂, and therefore, it helps to scale up and attract carbon capture projects, all while storing the captured CO₂ so it is not released into the atmosphere.

Canada can be and will be a superpower in both clean and conventional energy.

• (1845)

Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, that was four minutes without an answer. I asked what the deficit is now because the government has increased throwing money at big oil. I did not get an answer.

Adjournment Proceedings

I was told a number of things that are not true, including that, somehow, the memorandum of understanding with Alberta has something to do with diversifying trade in Canada. With a barrel of West Texas Intermediate selling at less than \$60 a barrel, and they cannot make money out of bitumen in northern Alberta unless it is selling for \$80 a barrel, there is not a market for bitumen. There is certainly not going to be carbon captured through the Pathways project because the only thing that carbon capture and storage has ever been proven to capture is government money all around the world.

We have to be serious about what we want to be if we are going to be a serious economy and look at a new world order. Step one is to put Canada first. We need to stop taking Canada pension plan money to spend it in other countries, start putting Canada first and put in strategic reserves for our natural resources.

Caroline Desrochers: Mr. Speaker, this is exactly what we are doing. We are putting Canada first and building Canada strong.

The Premier of Alberta supports this entire memorandum of understanding. The Premier of Saskatchewan supports it. The Premier of Ontario supports it. There is a reason why, and that is that it is a plan to lower emissions, unlock our natural resources and build a stronger, more sustainable and more competitive economy. RBC's Climate Action Institute said that it could position Canada and Alberta as a continental energy superpower thanks to a clear road map, a tight deadline and a low carbon boost.

I urge all members of the House to join us in supporting our plan so we can build Canada strong.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:48 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Tuesday, February 3, 2026

House of Commons			
The Speaker	5307		
ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS			
Certificates of Nomination			
Anandasangaree	5307		
Telecommunications			
Fancy	5307		
Mental Health			
Johns	5307		
Charitable Institutions			
Bailey	5307		
Religious Freedom			
Bailey	5308		
Questions on the Order Paper			
Lamoureux	5308		
GOVERNMENT ORDERS			
Business of Supply			
Opposition Motion—Food Affordability			
Berthold	5308		
Motion	5308		
Lamoureux	5309		
Beaulieu	5310		
Anstey	5310		
Johns	5310		
Kirkland	5310		
Lamoureux	5312		
Beaulieu	5312		
Johns	5312		
Leitão	5312		
Anstey	5315		
Perron	5315		
Gerretsen	5315		
May	5315		
Cobena	5316		
Beaulieu	5316		
Perron	5316		
Deschênes-Thériault	5318		
Goodridge	5318		
Lamoureux	5319		
Committees of the House			
International Trade			
Lamoureux	5319		
Motion	5319		
(Motion agreed to)	5319		
Business of Supply			
Opposition Motion—Food Affordability			
Motion	5319		
Bonin	5319		
Leitão	5320		
Bexte	5321		
Barsalou-Duval	5321		
McCauley	5321		
Lamoureux	5323		
Beaulieu	5323		
Gill (Windsor West)	5323		
Blois	5325		
Ste-Marie	5325		
Gallant	5325		
MacDonald (Cardigan)	5326		
Blois	5326		
Anstey	5328		
Barsalou-Duval	5328		
Fancy	5328		
Deschênes-Thériault	5329		
Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster—Meadow Lake)	5330		
Ste-Marie	5331		
Fancy	5331		
Bélanger (Sudbury East—Manitoulin—Nickel Belt)	5331		
Lamoureux	5332		
Beaulieu	5333		
Block	5333		
Poilievre	5333		
Leitão	5334		
Beaulieu	5334		
Hallan	5335		
Fragiskatos	5335		
Rood	5336		
Ste-Marie	5337		
MacDonald (Cardigan)	5337		
Belanger (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River)	5337		
Gladu	5338		
Barsalou-Duval	5339		
Deschênes-Thériault	5339		
Jansen	5339		
Lamoureux	5341		
Ste-Marie	5341		
Bailey	5341		
Bragdon	5342		
STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS			
“Every Child Matters” Bridge			
Johns	5342		
Women's Hockey			
Kelloway	5343		

Mill Closures	
Kronis	5343
Affordability Measures	
Sidhu (Brampton South)	5343
Fur Institute of Canada	
Calkins	5343
Home Show in Quebec City	
Lavoie	5343
Canada's 22nd Prime Minister	
Kusie	5344
International Development Week	
Fortier	5344
Southern Alberta Mustangs	
Caputo	5344
Thomas Fafard	
Bonin	5344
Iran	
Wilkinson	5345
Cost of Food	
Schmale	5345
Barbara “Mary” Charles	
Grant	5345
Conservative Party of Canada	
Doherty	5345
Black History Month	
Auguste	5345
Canada's 22nd Prime Minister	
Poilievre	5346
Aga Khan	
Noormohamed	5346

ORAL QUESTIONS

Taxation	
Poilievre	5346
Carney	5346
Poilievre	5346
Carney	5346
Poilievre	5346
Carney	5347
Poilievre	5347
Carney	5347
Poilievre	5347
Carney	5347
Poilievre	5347
Carney	5347
Rail Transportation	
Blanchet	5347
Carney	5347
Blanchet	5348

Carney	5348
Blanchet	5348
Carney	5348
The Economy	
Poilievre	5348
MacKinnon	5348
Poilievre	5348
MacKinnon	5348
Poilievre	5348
Hajdu	5348
Steinley	5349
van Koeverden	5349
Steinley	5349
Fragiskatos	5349
Kramp-Neuman	5349
McLean (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke)	5349
Kramp-Neuman	5349
Valdez	5350
Pensions	
Larouche	5350
Hajdu	5350
Larouche	5350
McLean (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke)	5350
The Economy	
Goodridge	5350
Valdez	5350
Goodridge	5350
Hajdu	5350
Gladu	5351
McKnight	5351
Rowe	5351
Thompson	5351
Anderson	5351
Fragiskatos	5351
Foreign Affairs	
St-Pierre	5351
Anand	5351
Automotive Industry	
Chambers	5352
Joly	5352
Chambers	5352
Joly	5352
Kirkland	5352
Joly	5352
Kirkland	5352
LeBlanc	5352
Khanna	5352
Zerucelli	5353
Khanna	5353
Zerucelli	5353
Borrelli	5353
Solomon	5353
Forestry Industry	
Deltell	5353

Joly	5353
Deltell	5353
Joly	5354
Diversity and Inclusion	
Coteau	5354
Valdez	5354
Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship	
Rempel Garner	5354
Diab	5354
Rempel Garner	5354
Diab	5354
Rempel Garner	5354
Diab	5355
International Development	
O'Rourke	5355
Sarai	5355
National Defence	
Bezan	5355
McGuinty	5355
International Development	
Boulerice	5355
Sarai	5355
Housing	
Kwan	5355
Robertson	5356
Presence in Gallery	
The Speaker	5356
Tragedy in Alberta	
The Speaker	5356

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Business of Supply	
Opposition Motion—Food Affordability	
Motion	5356
Bragdon	5356
Lamoureux	5357
Simard	5357
Stubbs	5358
Gerretsen	5358
Barlow	5359
Simard	5359
Greaves	5360
Sari	5360
Simard	5361
Bonk	5362
Johns	5362

Garon	5362
Barlow	5362
Lamoureux	5364
Simard	5364
Tolmie	5365
Steinley	5365
Lamoureux	5366
Stubbs	5367
Wagantall	5367
Lamoureux	5367
Steinley	5369
Simard	5369
Greaves	5369
Church	5370
Bonk	5371
Wagantall	5371
Greaves	5372
Bonk	5372
Lamoureux	5373
Steinley	5374
Division on motion deferred	5374

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Use of Federal Lands for Veterans	
Hirtle	5374
Motion	5374
Richards	5376
Greaves	5377
Anderson	5377
Gaudreau	5377
Block	5377
Gaudreau	5379
Kelloway	5379
Richards	5381
Johns	5382

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

Housing	
Kwan	5383
Desrochers	5384
Natural Resources	
Johns	5385
Guay	5386
Finance	
May	5386
Desrochers	5387

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