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Wednesday, February 4, 2026

Speaker: The Honourable Francis Scarpaleggia



CONTENTS

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

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, February 4, 2026

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayer

• (1400)

[*English*]

The Speaker: The hon. member for Okanagan Lake West—South Kelowna will be leading us in the singing of the national anthem today.

[*Members sang the national anthem*]

KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE ACT

(Bill C-223. On the Order: Private Members' Business:)

January 28, 2026—January 28, 2026—Deferred recorded division on the motion of Lisa Hepfner (Hamilton Mountain), seconded by the Honourable Karina Gould (Burlington),—That Bill C-223, An Act to amend the Divorce Act, be now read a second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations among the various party House leaders, and I believe, if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent for the following motion:

That, notwithstanding any standing order or usual practices of this House, Bill C-223, An Act to amend the Divorce Act, shall be deemed to have been read a second time on division and referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

[*Translation*]

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

There being no dissenting voice, it is agreed.

[*English*]

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

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

AURORA HOUSE

Hon. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for the past 10 years, Aurora House has provided safe

transitional housing and critical supports quietly, intentionally and necessarily from a confidential location in Beaches—East York for women and families who have experienced human trafficking, exploitation and gender-based intimate partner violence.

Operated by the Mennonite New Life Centre, Aurora House residents regain their footing with the support of a deeply dedicated team that provides trauma-informed care and the tools needed to heal and rebuild lives. However, the important work they do is at risk. As Erin Horrocks-Pope, project manager for Aurora House, put it, “As charitable giving declines and competition among many deserving organizations increases, the work they do has become, though no less critical, increasingly difficult to sustain.”

Late last year, Aurora House launched a new campaign: “Safety. Dignity. Stability.” It aims to raise \$100,000 for urgent capital upgrades and to maintain operations that support families 365 days a year. I am confident our east-end community will step up to support Aurora House's life-saving work ensuring that women and children fleeing violence have a safe and dignified place to rebuild their lives.

* * *

• (1405)

IRAN

Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Clarke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Ronald Reagan once said, “Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn't pass it on...in the bloodstream.” It has to be fought for. That is exactly what the brave protesters in Iran are doing right now.

It is hard, through the obscurity of Internet and telecommunications blackouts, to see exactly what is going on in Iran, but media and human rights organizations put the death toll at over 30,000. We simply cannot afford to turn a blind eye to the atrocities that are occurring right now in Iran. A government that slaughters its own people is weak and pathetic and must be stood up against. That is why we all must stand unequivocally behind the people of Iran for their freedom.

*Statements by Members***PUBLIC SAFETY**

Gurbux Saini (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to draw attention to a serious issue in Fleetwood—Port Kells. With the number of extortion cases on the rise, I met with constituents who shared their concerns about extortion and intimidation in Surrey. No one should live in fear for their safety or their livelihood. These acts undermine trust, threaten community well-being and place strain on those who are trying to build a better life.

I want my constituents to know that their voices have been heard. Addressing extortion requires strong co-operation between government and community leaders. I will continue working to support community safety and ensure that those responsible are held accountable.

* * *

IRAN

Melissa Lantsman (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the voice of freedom is rising as the brave warriors roar like lions and shine like the sun, determined to reclaim their country and topple the murderous regime in Iran. Sometimes that voice is loud, as it was when 150,000 people filled the streets of Toronto demanding justice, accountability and human rights in the birthplace of modern civilization. Sometimes it is quieter, whispered in the candlelight vigils or carried in the silent prayers of those fearing for their loved ones at home.

We face a choice: We can answer the call for action or let it fall on deaf ears. The government has chosen inaction. I urge those fighting for freedom and democracy to keep going, everywhere around the world. The day will come when the regime falls and the Iranian people will be free to live in their homeland. Until then, we will not be silent, we will not look away and we will never stop fighting for a free Iran and for a strong Canada, free of the IRGC agents that they let into our communities.

* * *

*[Translation]***150TH ANNIVERSARY OF COWANSVILLE**

Louis Villeneuve (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to draw the House's attention to an important celebration taking place this year in my riding: the 150th anniversary of Cowansville, under the direction of its mayor, Sylvie Beaugard.

Founded in 1876, Cowansville is a vibrant community known for its spirit of innovation, community and civic engagement. Throughout the year, residents will be gathering to celebrate their history and the contributions of the previous generations that helped shape the town.

This anniversary is also an opportunity to remember an important event in our national history. In the 1960s, Bruck Mills, in Cowansville, produced the first prototypes of the Canadian flag that was officially adopted in 1965. This shows how important local contributions are to Canada's history.

I wish all residents of Cowansville a happy anniversary.

*[English]***THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY OF CANADA**

Hon. Mike Lake (Leduc—Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 20 years ago, Canada elected a new Conservative government led by former prime minister Stephen Harper. The Harper legacy is one of true progress. It was a government that cut virtually every tax Canadians pay. It negotiated a record number of trade deals that are more critical now than ever. It navigated a global economic meltdown guided by the world-leading Harper-Flaherty economic action plan. It introduced the Muskoka initiative, widely recognized as one of the most impactful G7-G8 initiatives of all time. It launched life-changing programs, such as the registered disability savings plan and the ready, willing and able employment program.

By 2015, Canada had a balanced budget and, according to the New York Times, the richest middle class in the world. Today, that era may seem like a distant memory, but the story of our strong, principled, Conservative legacy offers Canadians hope for a better future, guided by another strong, principled, Conservative leader. We have done this before, and we can do it again.

* * *

● (1410)

AMYOTROPHIC LATERAL SCLEROSIS

Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, ALS is a progressive neurological disease with no cure. Nearly 4,000 Canadians are currently living with ALS, and each year about 1,000 more will be diagnosed, while another 1,000 will lose their lives to this devastating illness. An ALS diagnosis is life-changing for patients and their loved ones.

I recently met with my constituent, Christopher May, who was recently diagnosed. Despite the challenges ahead, Chris remains hopeful because Canada is home to world-class researchers and clinicians dedicated to improving treatment, care and outcomes for people living with ALS. We have the expertise and the capacity to lead. By strengthening national research efforts and supporting collaboration across institutions and sectors, we can accelerate discovery and expand access to clinical trials.

Investing in ALS research is an investment in innovation, in better health outcomes and in hope for families across the country. Together, we can work toward a future free of ALS.

COST OF FOOD

Steven Bonk (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, three years ago, the finance minister promised Canadians he would stabilize food prices at his flashy grocery summit. Since then, prices have gone up significantly. Lettuce is up nearly 40%. Coffee is up 33%, and beef is up 27%. That is just to name a few items.

Canada is now leading the G7 in food inflation at 6.2%. It is now twice as high as it was when the Prime Minister took office and twice as high as it is in the United States, and it gets worse. Canadians are now making 2.2 million visits a month to food banks. These visits have doubled under Liberal governments.

Instead of working to reduce food costs, the minister is announcing yet another temporary rebate, giving some about \$10 a week against grocery bills that are in the hundreds. The Liberals need to support our Conservative affordability plan, which would eliminate the industrial carbon tax and the Liberals' 17¢-a-litre standard fuel tax. It is time that the Liberals turned their rhetoric into results for Canadians.

* * *

[Translation]

MARC-ANTOINE DEQUOY

Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to celebrate the retirement of an Alouette who refuses to have his feathers ruffled. Marc-Antoine Dequoy is retiring after leaving his mark on the Montreal Alouettes. Although he was a defensive back in the team that won the 2023 Grey Cup against all odds, the broader public recently got to know him better through his appearances on television. The charismatic Marc-Antoine Dequoy, who also previously played for the Carabins, has shown that he is just as comfortable in the media as in the fourth quarter of a challenging game.

He was the Alouettes' ambassador to Quebeckers within a team that is making a real effort to promote the French language in a unilingual English environment. Of course, we cannot forget his impassioned plea during the Grey Cup, as he stood up for his team and for all Quebeckers. Having just won a Canadian championship within a heavily anglophone environment, he was very vocal in saying out loud what all francophones were thinking in a passionate speech that could have summed up Quebec's history: "Nobody believed in us, but look at us now! You can keep your English!"

* * *

[English]

MEDIA TECHNOLOGY IN BURLINGTON

Hon. Karina Gould (Burlington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, did members watch an NHL game last night or the House of Commons this past week? If so, they did so thanks to technology developed and built in Burlington, Ontario.

For decades, Evertz has helped shape how the world sees and understands major moments. The company has enabled news and live events to reach audiences in real time, and behind that success are about 1,800 Canadian workers whose expertise is in driving change across the industry. In January, I had the chance to tour its Burlington manufacturing facility and global headquarters to see first-hand

Statements by Members

how Canadian ingenuity, technology and skill are shaping the global media landscape. Evertz is Canadian first, a fully sovereign company, at a time when that matters more than ever.

To my colleagues in this place, every time they look into one of these cameras to speak to their constituents, they can know that they are doing so with technology developed and built in Burlington, Ontario.

* * *

COST OF FOOD

Dalwinder Gill (Calgary McKnight, CPC): Mr. Speaker, three years ago the finance minister promised to stabilize food prices, but since then the price of lettuce is up 39%, coffee is up 33%, beef is up 27%, baby formula is up 13%, and even canned vegetables are up 12%. Canada now leads all G7 countries in food inflation and has over two million food bank visits each month.

Food inflation is twice as high as when the Prime Minister took office. The industrial carbon tax and the Liberal fuel standard tax are driving up costs on farm equipment, fertilizers, food processing and transport, and the bill is passed down to Canadians at the grocery store.

Since they have no real plan to lower food costs, will the Liberals vote for our motion to introduce a food affordability plan that eliminates the industrial carbon tax and the fuel standard tax?

* * *

● (1415)

JACOB SAWATZKY SR.

Jake Sawatzky (New Westminster—Burnaby—Maillardville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honour the life and passing of my grandfather, Jacob Sawatzky Sr., whose story embodies the very best of Canada.

Born in Ukraine, he survived the Holodomor famine and Stalin's Great Terror, in which his father and many others in the family were killed. At 16 years old, he fled his village to find a new life. All he had was a bag of dry bread that his mother had given him.

My grandfather arrived in Canada alone, speaking no English and with little education. Canada gave him refuge, and he gave back. While working in a factory, he learned English, went back to school and earned a science degree from UBC. He then taught math and physics for nearly three decades, shaping generations of young Canadians.

Statements by Members

Today, I wear my grandfather's old tie in the chamber as a tribute to his values. He was proud of his family and forever grateful for a country where he could build a new life.

Rest in peace, Jacob Sawatzky Sr.

He will not be forgotten.

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FIREARMS

Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are moving forward with their gun confiscation scheme, while at the same time the Public Safety Minister admits that he cannot explain the logic of his own policy. More than \$700 million will be wasted, and he acknowledges that law-abiding gun owners are not the problem; criminals using illegal guns are.

The Trudeau Liberals promised fair compensation, but now the program is capped. Valuations are half what they were before, and only about 15% of the more than two million guns are actually expected to be compensated for.

This government continues to target the wrong people, despite the majority of Canada's provinces and territories and most law enforcement agencies officially rejecting any role in enforcing this misguided policy, meaning there is no one to even collect these guns.

Gun crime is up 130% while the Liberals fail to secure the border, reduce penalties for gun crimes and allow repeat offenders back on the streets. It is time for the government to scrap its wasteful, politically motivated, ideological program and invest in real public safety.

* * *

CAPTAIN STUART CAMPBELL

Sima Acan (Oakville West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with great sadness that I rise to honour the life and legacy of Captain Stuart Campbell of the Oakville Fire Department, who passed away at the age of 56 after a courageous battle with occupational cancer.

Captain Stu served the Oakville community for more than 30 years, spending most of his career at the Bronte fire station. He served with pride, courage, compassion, unity and honour, showing an unwavering commitment to his brothers and sisters at the Oakville Fire Department. His passing is a reminder of the dangers and occupational risks that our first responders face in the line of duty, and our duty in turn is to ensure the safety of our first responders.

On behalf of the people of Oakville West, I thank Captain Stuart Campbell for his service and mentorship to the community. He will be remembered.

To Stuart's wife and his two daughters, and to all who loved him, I offer my deepest condolences. I want them to know that his service, sacrifice and legacy will never be forgotten by this community.

CONSERVATIVE PARTY OF CANADA

Richard Bragdon (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are a resilient people who believe that if they work hard, care for their neighbours and contribute to their communities, they should be able to build a good life.

Canadians are now feeling overwhelmed and weighed down, wondering how they will afford a home, put food on the table or plan for tomorrow, but hope is not lost. It is found in our foundations as a nation, in the shared values that bind us together, and in the enduring belief that a better country is built through hard work, good policy and steady leadership.

Conservatives are united by our belief in shared dignity and opportunity. We believe governments should let Canadians thrive. We need to let the farmers farm, let the producers produce and let the workers work. They are the very ones who helped build this country, and they will be key to our nation's comeback.

When the House puts forward serious, effective ideas that truly help Canadians, Conservatives will work in good faith to fast-track those results, because we believe in Canada, and we will always put our fellow Canadians ahead of politics.

* * *

● (1420)

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Sameer Zuberi (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this February marks 30 years of Black History Month in Canada. We reflect on the historic barriers Black communities have faced in North America. We recognize the sacrifices made during the civil rights movement.

[*Translation*]

It is because of these men and women that we now have our fundamental rights and freedoms.

[*English*]

Today on Parliament Hill, we have many representatives from my riding: WIBCA, Youth Stars Foundation, Overture with the Arts, Playmas and many others.

[*Translation*]

I want to thank them for their contributions to our community. The leaders of these groups, like many others, are mentors for future generations.

[*English*]

They empower the next generation of Black leaders, and they pass on the legacy of the giants who came before them.

Oral Questions

This work cannot be done alone.

[*Translation*]

I encourage everyone to participate.

[*English*]

Support and lift others up, and help youth dream big and reach their full potential.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[*Translation*]

THE ECONOMY

Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, three years ago, the current Minister of Finance made a firm and enthusiastic commitment to stabilize food prices. As it turns out, it was all a big show that did not amount to much. Today, the cost of groceries continues to rise, and the current Prime Minister said that he could be judged on grocery prices. Well, he has failed. Canada has the worst food inflation in the G7. Prices are not falling. His plan is not working.

Why should Canadians believe this Prime Minister, when the last Liberal plan led to the worst food inflation in the G7?

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Minister of Transport and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today the House will likely decide to send a bill to the Senate that will provide up to \$1,800 in support to Canadian families to help them cope with affordability issues, particularly with regard to food and essential goods.

We urged the official opposition to support us on this. We are very pleased that they saw fit to do so. Today is a historic day for affordability in Canada.

Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, he says that today is a historic day for affordability. However, his GST credit is not going to lower the price of a single grocery item. That is not what making prices affordable is about. Making prices affordable is about lowering grocery prices. What they are going to do, and we agree on this point, is issue a coupon that amounts to the equivalent of \$10 off a \$300 family grocery bill. Most Canadians will not see a cent of that money.

This afternoon, since they seem to have run out of ideas, are they going to once again borrow from our Conservative agenda and vote in favour of our plan to make groceries affordable?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Industry and Minister responsible for Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have good news today. In fact, the Conservatives are going to vote in favour of our plan to help ordinary people pay for their groceries. It is an important plan. It means that the most vulnerable families across the country are going to receive \$1,800 each.

We want to thank the Conservatives for finally seeing the light and realizing that our plan works.

[*English*]

Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the finance minister promised three years ago that he had a plan to lower food prices. How is that working out? Since then, the cost of groceries has skyrocketed, with the price of lettuce up 40%, coffee up over 30% and the price of beef up over 25%. The recycled plan for a temporary rebate will not reduce the cost of a single item of food.

Their plan has failed, so why do the Liberals not support our food affordability plan to axe the industrial carbon tax, cut the fuel standards tax and boost competition in grocery stores to lower food prices for all Canadians?

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Minister of Transport and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is a big day. Today is the day when, if all goes well, we will be passing historic assistance for Canadian families grappling with affordability issues with respect to food and essential goods.

After much cajoling, the opposition finally decided to stop the games, stop the obstruction and allow this bill to move on to the Senate so we can get that aid to Canadian families now.

• (1425)

Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, most Canadians will get no benefit from this recycled plan. A small number will get about \$10 a week, but that will not make a dent in the over \$340 a week a family of four has to spend to buy groceries. The finance minister promised he would bring down grocery prices three years ago. He failed then, and he is failing again.

The Liberals' plan is not working, so why do they not vote for our food affordability plan to cut the industrial carbon tax, axe the fuel standards tax and finally lower grocery prices for all Canadians?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Jobs and Families and Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last fall, all the Conservatives did was quote Food Banks Canada. Over and over, they talked about Food Banks Canada. They failed to notice that Food Banks Canada recommended exactly what we are doing right now, which is to put more money in the pockets of those who need it the most.

Conservatives say they want to co-operate. Can they stop obstructing legislation that is helping Canadians get ahead? They need to be partners in this work. Canadians certainly are stepping up for each other. Why can they not step up for their constituents?

Oral Questions

Scot Davidson (New Tecumseth—Gwillimbury, CPC): Mr. Speaker, news reports this week confirmed what Canadians already know: Our economy is on life support. Because of Liberal mismanagement, we have had two consecutive quarters of zero economic growth. While our GDP is stagnant, grocery inflation keeps climbing. This year, it will cost \$17,600 to feed a family of four, nearly \$1,000 more than it did in 2025.

Why is it that under the Liberals, the only thing rising is the price of food?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Industry and Minister responsible for Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since September we have created 189,000 jobs. This is great news for Canada. That is more jobs created in Canada than in the U.S. We have the second-fastest-growing economy.

Let me give examples: Alstom, with 240 new jobs in Thunder Bay, 150 new jobs at Saint-Bruno-de-Montarville and 100 new jobs in La Pocatière; 330 new jobs at Bombardier; 300 new jobs at Vale-Glencore in Sudbury; at Vianode in St. Thomas, Ontario, a Conservative riding, 300 new jobs—

The Speaker: The hon. member for New Tecumseth—Gwillimbury has the floor.

Scot Davidson (New Tecumseth—Gwillimbury, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government could talk a glass eye to sleep, but it is the Liberals who need to wake up. Do they need to see how many more Canadians are on the street, shaking a coffee cup for change?

The government refuses to take the tax off food, refuses to boost competition and refuses to deliver a real plan for food affordability. Its rebate will not reduce the price of a single item at the grocery store.

Will the Liberals support our food affordability plan and deliver some real relief for Canadians?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Jobs and Families and Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the average family is saving \$16,000 a year on child care. Who refuses to support young families with the cost of living? It is the Conservatives across the aisle. Families are saving \$800 a year in food costs for their children at school. Who refuses to feed hungry children at school? It is the Conservatives.

Every step we take, they obstruct. They get in the way of the very things that not only experts but also their very own constituents are calling for. When will they get in line?

* * *

[Translation]

PENSIONS

Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, some pensioners have not received their OAS payments for nine months because of the Cúram software, and the government is ignoring them.

However, today we learned that the pensioners are not the only ones being ignored. The government is also ignoring the opinions

of its own officials. In an internal survey, more than half of them gave that software a score of one out of 10. Some 89% felt that Cúram had hindered, rather than improved, services to the public.

When will the Liberals pull their heads out of the sand and fix the problem?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Jobs and Families and Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, rolling out a new benefits delivery platform requires an adjustment period. The department is working tirelessly to ensure that staff have the tools they need to familiarize themselves with the new system and deliver benefits efficiently.

If anyone is experiencing problems with their benefits, I encourage them to contact Service Canada. I also invite them to contact my office directly so we can address their concern.

• (1430)

Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we have been sounding the alarm for months.

In a document provided to La Presse, the union said that Cúram is causing problems similar to the ones people experienced during the Phoenix fiasco, but on a broader scale. That is not all. According to the union report, a procedure clearly indicates that agents must not tell clients that payment delays or errors are related to Cúram.

Did the government order public servants to lie rather than resolve the problem?

Hon. Stephanie McLean (Secretary of State (Seniors), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the OAS transition is complete, and it came in under budget. More than seven million seniors are now receiving their benefits on time thanks to a modern system. The total cost of Cúram covers four separate projects. The \$6.6 billion is the amount that was allocated and approved for the project's life cycle.

Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there are seniors who have been waiting for their OAS pension for nine months. Meanwhile, we have learned that the government is not only pretending that everything is fine, but it is also not telling the truth to the media or to us when we ask questions. The government is asking public servants to lie to people and tell them that their problems have nothing to do with the Cúram software.

What should the Liberals' priority be: helping seniors or covering their own butts?

The Speaker: We do need to be mindful of decorum.

The hon. Minister of Jobs and Families.

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Jobs and Families and Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our office has contacted the member opposite, but has yet to receive a response. If they have urgent cases to resolve, I would ask them to contact my office so that we can answer their requests. I am ready to help my colleague's constituents.

* * *

[English]

SENIORS

Anna Roberts (King—Vaughan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, seniors built this country, and now they must make the tough decisions between buying groceries or medication. They cannot absorb these costs, and they cannot afford to skip meals. Three years ago the finance minister promised to stabilize food prices, which is another broken promise.

Canada has the worst food inflation in the G7. The Conservatives have the solution: Cut the industrial carbon tax, cut the fuel standard tax and give the supermarkets genuine competition.

Will the Liberals adopt our proposals and demonstrate empathy for our seniors so they can live in dignity?

Hon. Stephanie McLean (Secretary of State (Seniors), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the Conservatives want to know why we are not adopting their plan, the answer is simple: The only person who thinks it is going to work is their leader.

We are following the advice of Food Banks Canada. We are following the advice of experts. Let me tell the other side what seniors are saying. Dava Houston says, "Seeing a lot of talk about the Grocery Rebate helping 'no one.' As a senior, I disagree. This benefit is specifically targeted to help those of us on fixed incomes navigate high food prices. It's a floor for people who built this country and need it most." At least the Conservatives could stop talking it down.

Anna Roberts (King—Vaughan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals' recycled rebate does not address the high cost of groceries. Some seniors would receive only \$10 a week, which is less than the cost of a cup of coffee per day, which is up 33.6%. The \$10 savings is like receiving another coupon. The rebate is an admission of the failed policies of the Liberal government, and it would not change much for our seniors.

Again I will ask the government, will it take our proposal and use it to ensure that our seniors can live in dignity?

Hon. Stephanie McLean (Secretary of State (Seniors), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what will make a real difference in fighting food insecurity is ensuring that seniors have the money in their pockets that they need in order to be able to buy groceries and to buy toilet paper, coffee and these kinds of items over which the government has no control.

We are controlling what we can, and that is ensuring that seniors have the money they need in order to afford the essentials they need. That is also why we are ensuring that one million lower-in-

Oral Questions

come Canadians can access the benefits they are entitled to, with automatic tax filing.

We are ensuring that older Canadians get the money they need through the essentials benefit.

* * *

● (1435)

THE ECONOMY

David McKenzie (Calgary Signal Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while Liberals talk about elbows up, average Canadians see only the price of groceries up. Food price inflation has doubled since the Prime Minister took office. The percentage of seniors using food banks is up 22% over five years, forcing seniors to choose between meals and medication.

Conservatives want results. Will the Prime Minister work with us to boost competition in grocery chains, and eliminate the industrial carbon tax and the fuel standard tax to bring food prices down?

Hon. Eleanor Olszewski (Minister of Emergency Management and Community Resilience and Minister responsible for Prairies Economic Development Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have spent the last two months going on and on talking about food banks, but they really need to listen to them.

I was in Edmonton last weekend. I met with people on the ground at food banks, and they were praising the Prime Minister's announcement and saying what a huge benefit it would be to people actually on the ground in ridings in Alberta, including Conservative ridings.

Conservatives should support a benefit that would help 1.3 million Albertans, including those in Conservative ridings.

Connie Cody (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the grocery inflation crisis is tearing apart families and tearing apart our communities. I received a letter from a senior citizen in Cambridge whose son had to move back home because he could not afford the cost of living. He wants to get married but cannot even move out of his mom's home to buy his own, start a family, have children and be able to feed them.

With the cost of lettuce up 40%, beef up nearly 30% and canned vegetables up over 10%, there is simply no money left for anything else in life. The government has been all sizzle and no steak when it comes to food affordability.

When will the Liberal government stop with the empty words and start cooking up some real solutions to bring down the price of groceries?

Oral Questions

Hon. Ruby Sahota (Secretary of State (Combatting Crime), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the challenge is complex, real leadership meets it with more, not less. This is why, when it comes to food inflation, Canada's new government is doing more. We are building long-term solutions to pricing pressures and are making sure Canadians get the real relief they need right now. We are building stronger, more resilient supply chains and are increasing domestic supply and production to ensure that additional costs are not passed on to the consumer.

This will take time, but while we are doing that, we are also going to make sure Canadians get five years of support, over \$1,890 a month for a family.

Amanpreet Gill (Calgary Skyview, CPC): Mr. Speaker, three years ago the finance minister promised to stabilize food prices. He failed. Since then, the cost of lettuce is up 40%. Beef is up 27%. Baby formula is up 14%. Canada has the highest food inflation in the G7. Every month, 2.2 million Canadians are visiting food banks. Canadians are struggling. We want results.

Will the Liberals support our motion for a food affordability plan that removes the industrial carbon tax and the fuel standard tax, and increases competition in grocery stores, yes or no?

Peter Fragiskatos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have mentioned beef. They have mentioned coffee, fruits and vegetables. The Bank of Canada has affirmed what we already know; it made clear that import costs are crucial when it comes to food inflation. Which kind of import costs in particular is this? It is climate change, dramatic weather events around the world and domestically. It is obvious; when we have more flooding and more droughts, this affects food production. It affects the size of livestock as well.

Let us be serious about the solutions at hand. Let us work together to build up the economy. Canadians expect it. Let us meet this moment right now.

[*Translation*]

Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I encourage the Liberal government to go talk with Canadians and find out just how much they are suffering because of the cost of living. The Minister of Finance promised to stabilize food prices three years ago, but his plan has not worked. Food inflation in Canada has reached an all-time high, twice as high as in the United States. They need to stop trying to pull the wool over people's eyes.

Here is the Conservatives' solution: the affordability plan. Will the Liberal government support it and finally do something to help Canadians?

• (1440)

Hon. Nathalie Provost (Secretary of State (Nature), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this afternoon we will be voting at third reading on the Canada groceries and essentials benefit. I am very pleased about that. We are going to work together for Canadians by passing this measure and putting \$1,800 back in the pockets of families with four children. That is what it means to give purchasing power and control back to families, not to manufacturers, grocery stores or the system, but to families who will make their own decisions. That is

what Canadians want. They want to make their own choices, and we are going to let them. We thank the Conservatives for their support.

Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, three years ago, the Minister of Finance promised to stabilize food prices. Since then, the price of lettuce has gone up 40%, the price of coffee has gone up 34% and the price of beef has gone up 27%. Instead of lowering costs, the Liberals are rolling out another temporary rebate as a band-aid solution.

Will the Liberals finally turn things around and support our Conservative motion, which eliminates the industrial carbon tax, eliminates the fuel standards tax and strengthens competition in the grocery sector?

Hon. Nathalie Provost (Secretary of State (Nature), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is essential that Canadians have a choice in their spending. We believe in this very strongly, and so we are working with the Conservatives to get the Canada groceries and essentials benefit passed. At the same time, we are also rebuilding our economy to deal with a tariff war that nobody on that side ever talks about. We are addressing this system so we can give Canadians back their purchasing power. We must do this together.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot—Acton, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in Davos, the Prime Minister emphasized the importance of diversifying trade markets, and rightly so. However, he himself is blocking a trade agreement with Taiwan. Taiwan's representative in Canada has confirmed that all pages of the agreement have been initialled by both parties and that the document is ready and has been printed in three languages. All that is missing is the Prime Minister's signature. This agreement has been sitting on his desk for nine months.

Is Ottawa abandoning an agreement with a reliable partner because it is afraid of its new Chinese friend?

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, as our colleague correctly pointed out, the government is committed to expanding its partnerships around the world, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region.

Canada and Taiwan enjoy strong economic ties and a close relationship. While remaining consistent with our long-standing one China policy, we will continue to advance Canada's interests by diversifying our trade and strengthening our relationships with reliable partners around the world.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Taiwan is a reliable partner. It is a democracy and a market economy. It is a leader in green technology and AI, fields where trade would be good for Quebec. It is the sixth-largest economy in Asia.

It is exactly the kind of middle power that Canada should join forces with to counter the hegemony of giants, according to the Prime Minister's speech in Davos. However, it is the Prime Minister himself who is blocking the agreement with Taiwan to court China.

Why is the Prime Minister doing the exact opposite of what he said in Davos?

[English]

Hon. Maninder Sidhu (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are expanding our partnership around the world, including in the Indo-Pacific. Canada and Taiwan enjoy strong economic and people-to-people ties, consistent with our long-standing one China policy. We will continue to stand up for Canadian interests as we diversify trade and strengthen relationships with reliable trading partners around the world.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant South—Six Nations, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here we go again. This time, in Guelph, police warned the community that a high-risk offender with a history of violence and breaching court orders was released after pleading guilty to breaching probation. Police said he posed a danger, especially to women, and less than two hours later, he was arrested again.

This is weak Liberal bail law in action. Once again, the Liberals' principle of restraint put a dangerous offender back on the street.

Will the Prime Minister finally take public safety seriously and repeal Bill C-5 and Bill C-75?

• (1445)

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think it is important to look at what is in front of us right now, as we speak. We have a number of very important pieces of legislation that will address the issue that my friend opposite brought forward. There is Bill C-12, which is going through the Senate. There is Bill C-9. There is Bill C-14, which speaks to bail reform, as well as ensuring that there is consecutive sentencing. There is also Bill C-16. Again, I ask the members opposite to pass the legislation and make sure it becomes law.

Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant South—Six Nations, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this dangerous release happened for only one reason. Liberal soft-on-crime laws are still on the books, and the government refuses to repeal them. Time after time, Liberal laws put repeat violent offenders back on the street, ignore police warnings and put Canadians in harm's way. Conservatives, on the other hand, are ready to work with anyone in the House to put public safety first and end these dangerous policies.

Will the Prime Minister finally get serious about public safety and work with us to repeal these laws, yes or no?

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and Minister responsible for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, dangerous people who commit serious crimes should not be allowed to roam freely in our streets where they can reoffend. Now—

Oral Questions

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: The hon. minister can start again.

Hon. Sean Fraser: Mr. Speaker, they are going to regret their applause in a moment, I can assure members, and that is because when the member posed the question, he blamed the principle of restraint. Let me tell members something about the principle of restraint. It is the subject of a change in Bill C-14, the bail and sentencing reform act that the Conservatives have been obstructing for months. Despite calls from provincial governments, from municipalities and from experts in their field, they have been getting in the way—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: This is supposed to be an exchange of ideas.

The minister may continue with his answer.

Hon. Sean Fraser: Mr. Speaker, after months and months of Conservatives obstructing bail reform in this country, we have finally seen a spirit of collaboration. My only hope is that the spirit their leader seemed to embody during his opening remarks of this session will be what carries the day, instead of the nonsense we are seeing today in the House.

Clifford Small (Central Newfoundland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on January 27, Charlottetown police responded to a violent home invasion involving assault, an imitation firearm and a chemical irritant. Two individuals known to the victims were arrested. One of the accused is facing multiple charges, including, with no surprise, failure to comply with conditions of release and probation. The Liberal soft-on-crime principle of restraint continues to put dangerous offenders back on the street.

Will the government repeal Bill C-5 and Bill C-75 so that Canadians can once again feel safe in their homes?

Hon. Ruby Sahota (Secretary of State (Combatting Crime), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since taking government, we have had a tough-on-crime agenda. We have six different bills going through the House right now that are all tackling the situations the member mentioned.

It has been eight months since we put in place Bill C-2. We have been waiting on the Conservatives for their co-operation to pass lawful access measures that would help police in their investigations. We have been asking for help on cracking down on fentanyl and tackling organized crime, but they have been stalling and they have been obstructing all along. I hope they will get on board and work with us.

Michael Guglielmin (Vaughan—Woodbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week, a man in Woodbridge was gunned down in broad daylight. This week, a home in Vaughan was targeted for a shooting for the fourth time in five months.

Oral Questions

Now the York Regional Police chief has said that police service will not participate in the federal Liberal government's gun grab, because it does not address the underlying sources of gun crime. Most provinces and territories have opted out. Dozens of police services have now refused to participate.

With little support from the police and provinces, will the Liberal government finally end this ideologically driven scheme and focus on stopping illegal guns and repeat violent offenders?

• (1450)

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week when the Prime Minister met with first ministers from across Canada, all 13 of them unanimously asked for this House to pass Bill C-14. The party opposite is talking about being tough on crime, but it refused to pass the legislation that is required for bail reform, that is going to make consecutive sentences and that is going to ensure the safety and security of Canadians. That is enough talk. We need action.

I urge the party opposite to pass Bill C-14.

* * *

FIREARMS

Carol Anstey (Long Range Mountains, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while violent crime and extortion continue to rise across Canada, the government keeps targeting law-abiding Canadians instead of criminals. Most provinces and territories have told the government they will not participate in the Liberal gun buyback.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, the premier has been clear. The Liberals “should focus on criminals, not law-abiding hunters and our way of life.” Dozens of police services have said they will not help carry out this program. Even the minister responsible admitted in private this was a bad idea.

Will the Liberals end this wasteful scheme and stop the gun grab that punishes law-abiding Canadians?

Hon. Ruby Sahota (Secretary of State (Combatting Crime), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, like I said before, when it comes to food inflation as well, responsible governments do more. That is why we are also seeing an uptake in people wanting to surrender their prohibited weapons. Over 22,000 people have signed up to get their guns out of our communities. That is progress.

In addition to that, we have put major investments into our borders to catch illegal guns and get them off our streets. We have also put forward measures and legislation to help the police catch criminals and help them with their investigations.

The Conservatives have been obstructing all of those measures. I would ask them to allow Bill C-2 to come to a vote.

* * *

JUSTICE

Amandeep Sodhi (Brampton Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, from rank-and-file officers to police chiefs, law enforcement from across Canada has asked Parliament to quickly pass Bill C-14, the bail and sentencing reform act, to better address repeat violent offenders. From my own community of Brampton, Mayor Patrick Brown and

the Peel Regional Police commend the government on its work and for listening to our communities.

Can the Minister of Justice explain how Bill C-14, the bail and sentencing reform act, delivers on those requests and protects communities?

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and Minister responsible for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her advocacy for stronger criminal laws to help protect her community.

The reason members of her community are commending this bill is that they see the feedback that they provided in the process reflected in the text of the bill. It was through feedback from law enforcement that we figured out how to best deal with violent repeat criminals when bail hearings come up. It was through engagement with provincial governments that we better understood how we can improve the process in bail hearings and sentencing. I want to thank, in particular, Mayor Patrick Brown for his advocacy for tougher criminal laws.

By working together with provinces, municipalities and law enforcement, we can build safer communities for every Canadian.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, “Canada’s economy is on life support and [the] country is in recession watch”. That is the international headline in Bloomberg. GDP per capita was essentially flat in 2025, and the Bank of Canada expects just 1.1% growth next year. Businesses are postponing expansion, investment is forecast to be weak, and this is very bad news for Canada’s jobs. We need a significant transformational plan, but none appears in this legislative agenda from the government.

When will the Liberals introduce a plan to keep Canadians out of a recession?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Industry and Minister responsible for Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a lot of respect for my colleague, but she is not referring to all the important data. The data shows there has been an increase in wages year over year of 3.4%, while inflation was at 2.4%. Basically, wages are increasing more than inflation. At the same time, in December, the Bank of Canada maintained its interest rate at 2.25%, and the governor mentioned that the economy was proving resilient. We have created 189,000 jobs more than the U.S.

Oral Questions

Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): The bottom line is, Mr. Speaker, the threat of a recession is real, and nothing the government has done is going to address the economic issues we are facing. Statistics Canada reports manufacturing is being deeply impacted. In November alone, GDP fell 12.6% in the auto sector. That is thousands of layoffs already. Without significant action to grow the economy and protect Canadian jobs, Canada could very well fall into a recession. Conservatives have proposed lowering taxes, removing barriers so we can grow faster than ever and cutting red tape.

When will Canadians see a real plan to ward off recession and protect Canadian jobs from the government?

• (1455)

Hon. Wayne Long (Secretary of State (Canada Revenue Agency and Financial Institutions), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians cannot cash the Conservative leader's slogans.

Last week we announced the Canada groceries and essentials benefit that will put up to \$1,900 in the pockets of working families. On this side of the House, we have a leader with world-class business and economic experience. Their leader has never had a job in the economy.

Jacob Mantle (York—Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, economists said yesterday that the Canadian economy is on life support. While the Liberals may clap like trained seals for lower rates, those lower rates are not resulting in more growth. Respectfully, a GST rebate will not revive this patient. The emissions cap, the shipping ban and other anti-development laws are binding the hands of Canadians who would build our country.

Why will the Prime Minister not have the courage to stand up and remove them?

Hon. Tim Hodgson (Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me talk about some good news. The CER just announced that the Taylor to Gordondale pipeline is being built. The CER just announced support for the Sunrise pipeline. The pipe mill in Regina is opening to build pipe again.

We are building Canada strong.

Jacob Mantle (York—Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister enjoys illusions, as the Major Projects Office has not given approval to one project yet. Let me give him some other news. BNN Bloomberg reported that my home province of Ontario is the sick man of Canada, with lower standards of living than anywhere else in the country. In fact, by every objective measure, Ontario is doing worse now than it was when the Prime Minister was elected, and that is increasingly because they cannot get a deal with the United States. That is a serious question, and it deserves a serious answer.

I would ask the Prime Minister why there is no plan to deal with the U.S.

Hon. Tim Hodgson (Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will invite the member opposite to come to Darlington, where we are building the first SMRs in the G7, creating thousands of jobs.

We are a leader. We are building Canada strong.

Roman Baber (York Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, new research from Rosenberg says Canada's economy is on life support. Per capita GDP is falling. Construction is flat, and the economy may shrink by half a per cent. Food inflation is out of control, and billions of dollars are fleeing south. Because of these Liberals, Canada is now on a recession watch.

Conservatives are ready to work with the government to repeal anti-development laws to get our economy going. Will the Prime Minister work with us to build big and build quickly, or will his legacy be one of the worst economies in recent history?

Peter Fragiskatos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I call on Conservatives, yes, to work with us. We can work together for the betterment of this country.

What did we see yesterday? If the Conservatives do not want to listen to Liberals, that is fine. They should listen to Prime Minister Harper, who called on us in a moment of crisis, a moment of rupture for this country, to do what is right for Canada. We have an opportunity. We saw the Conservatives support the groceries and essentials benefit. Will they now support the budget, which could support his community and mine and all of ours? It is up to them. What are we going to do?

Roman Baber (York Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is almost a year since the election. The Prime Minister should be judged not by his words but by his actions. He did not get a trade deal. He doubled the deficit. No new pipelines have been approved. Interprovincial trade barriers remain. We have the highest rate of food inflation in the G7 with 2.2 million Canadians at food banks.

We need to start building pipelines and sell Canadian energy. Will the Prime Minister work with us to repeal Liberal anti-development laws, or will Canadians continue to suffer a Liberal economy that is on life support?

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Minister of Transport and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is a plan in front of the House to create \$1 trillion of investment in Canada. There is a plan before the House to continue to build the kind of infrastructure that my colleague just referred to. There is a plan before the House that would deregulate, that would free up, that would invest and that would make Canada the most attractive tax investment destination in the world. It is called the budget implementation act. If we bring that bill forward today, will that party support it, yes or no?

Oral Questions

• (1500)

[Translation]

Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent—Akiawenhrahk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the prestigious firm Bloomberg is not mincing words. It is reporting that Canada's economy is on life support and the country is in a recession.

It is not the Conservatives who are saying this, but rather Bloomberg. In fact, according to a Bloomberg article about housing in Canada, residential construction expenditures remained completely stagnant over the past year.

Canadians deserve better. We Conservatives are prepared to work with the government to reduce inflationary taxes.

Will the Liberals do it for the good of all Canadians, who want real results?

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, we are obviously very pleased with our colleague's offer to work with the government to improve Canada's economy, to ensure that we are a country that attracts historic investments from abroad and from within Canada in order to build a stronger, more resilient economy and to create jobs in all trades across Canada. I look forward to working with our hon. colleague and urge him to support the budget implementation act. That is the plan he just described.

Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent—Akiawenhrahk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians want real results. They are eager to see real results because Canada's economy has grown weaker during the Liberals' 10 years in office. That is the reality. Food inflation is affecting all Canadian families. It is the worst food inflation in the G7. The minister knows that. It is shameful. The Bank of Canada predicts that businesses will put off their expansion plans and investment will be low.

When will the government take real action to get good results for Canadian families?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Industry and Minister responsible for Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague knows full well that we have a plan and it is called the budget 2025 implementation act, no. 1. We have been seeing obstruction from the opposition, the Conservatives, for far too long. Unfortunately, in these tough times, where the geopolitical situation is very intense and families across the country are struggling to make ends meet, Canadians expect us to be able to work together.

Will the Conservatives vote in favour of the budget, yes or no? Will they stop filibustering the budget implementation bill?

Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister promised that Canada would see the strongest growth in the G7. One year later, nothing has been done to reduce red tape and no anti-development policies have been fixed. There are more and more barriers, and investment is slowing down. According to Bloomberg, Canada's economy is on life support. Workers are feeling the pinch.

Will the Prime Minister finally unveil a plan to remove the barriers that are preventing Canadians from building, investing and working?

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Minister of Transport and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what the people in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean, elsewhere in Quebec and across Canada really want is a plan: an economic plan, the Prime Minister's plan, the plan they voted for, the plan that is before the House.

The Conservatives are filibustering the Prime Minister's economic plan. We managed to get Bill C-19 passed so we can help Canadians. Now I urge the Conservatives to pass the budget implementation act, Bill C-15, without amendment. That is the Prime Minister's plan to build Canada.

* * *

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Tatiana Auguste (Terrebonne, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, February is Black History Month. It is an opportunity to pay tribute to Black Canadians who have helped build our country and shape our future. This year marks the 30th anniversary of its official recognition, and the theme is honouring Black brilliance across generations, from nation builders to tomorrow's visionaries.

Can the minister explain to the House why it is important to celebrate Black History Month each year and how the government promotes it across the country?

Hon. Marc Miller (Minister of Canadian Identity and Culture and Minister responsible for Official Languages, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by highlighting the member's achievement. She made history when she was elected in Terrebonne, as she is now the youngest Black MP in Canadian history. That is significant.

As she so eloquently stated, this year we are celebrating a month that honours the excellence of the Black community. We are supporting 85 initiatives and organizations that fight racism in order to build a stronger Canada, because Black history is Canadian history.

* * *

• (1505)

[English]

SCIENCE AND INNOVATION

John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is wild to hear the foreign affairs minister claim that they support science when the Liberals are literally attacking agricultural research. They are shutting down research centres in Lacombe, Indian Head, Guelph, Quebec City, Portage la Prairie and Cumberland County. Meanwhile, they spend \$19 billion on consultants, \$33 million on a prison farm and \$22 million on beans for women for empowerment in Congo.

Why is the Prime Minister dismantling the foundation of Canadian food security just to fund his foreign virtue signalling?

Hon. Heath MacDonald (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me be clear. Science plays an integral role and will continue to play an integral role in this country for agriculture and agri-food. We are maintaining our research and development presence in every single province, and the department continues to be the largest science service centre in this country, with 17 sites.

By streamlining our research, we are prioritizing high-impact areas, reducing duplication and better aligning our needs with our ranchers and farmers across this country.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are not maintaining; they are cutting and shutting. Workers at the Indian Head agricultural research farm are the latest to lose their jobs, thanks to the Liberal government. This research centre provides cutting-edge innovation on soil management, crop varieties, and disease and pest resiliency. It provides jobs for Canadian scientists and improves Canadian crop production to the benefit of Canadian farmers.

Meanwhile, the Liberals have sent hundreds of millions of Canadian tax dollars overseas for stupid, ideologically driven pet projects like \$8 million for gender-just rice farming in Vietnam. Instead of closing Canadian research centres that benefit Canadians, why not stop the phony foreign aid projects?

Hon. Heath MacDonald (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure if that member's memory serves him correctly, but I will go back to 2011 and 2012, which may jog his memory a little bit: A focused agriculture research presence should move away from scattered soil research, siloed projects and toward a mission-driven, outcome-oriented system that treats food production as a cornerstone of national security, economic resilience and climate adaptation. This is what we are hearing from our stakeholders. We are going to move agriculture forward, and we are going to make science and research a big part of it.

Blaine Calkins (Ponoka—Didsbury, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Liberals have repeatedly told Canadians to trust the science, but now they are firing the very scientists who help feed Canadians. The government is shutting down seven agriculture research centres across Canada, including the storied one in Lacombe. Meanwhile, the Liberals will waste \$742 million on a gun grab that police say will do nothing. That \$742 million that would keep the Lacombe research station open for 40 years.

With 2.2 million Canadians lining up at the food bank every month, why is this government so hell-bent on wasting cash on programs that experts say will not work and killing the programs that the experts say will?

Hon. Heath MacDonald (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, from talking to stakeholders across this country, we have a real opportunity to advance our research, and we will continue to do that. The department continues to be the largest agriculture researcher in Canada, but this opportunity for transformation in the research sector is most prominent in our agriculture and agri-food divisions. We are going to continue to invest

in agriculture and agri-research, partner with our academics, talk to our stakeholders and move forward with the best science in the world, as we have today.

Oral Questions

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THE ECONOMY

Bruce Fanjoy (Carleton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, residents in my riding of Carleton want to know what this government is doing to improve affordability. There is good news. Can the Secretary of State—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: The member is attracting all kinds of extraneous noise. We will let the member start from the top.

Bruce Fanjoy: Mr. Speaker, residents of my riding of Carleton are looking for serious leadership. They also want to see what this government is doing to improve affordability in this country. There is good news—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

• (1510)

The Speaker: I cannot hear a thing. I wanted to get out of here early today. We will try again. We are making progress.

The hon. member for Carleton, from the top, please.

Bruce Fanjoy: Mr. Speaker, this is why Conservatives keep losing.

Residents in Carleton want to know what the government is doing to improve the affordability of food. There is good news. Can the Secretary of State for the CRA and Financial Institutions please inform the House of the important measures the government is taking to improve affordability for Canadians?

Hon. Wayne Long (Secretary of State (Canada Revenue Agency and Financial Institutions), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is so nice to finally see real representation in Carleton. Conservative slogans do not feed families. That is why we cut taxes for 22 million Canadians, we cut the consumer carbon tax and last week we announced the groceries and essentials benefit, which would put up to \$1,900 in the pockets of working families. It is time for that party and that leader to stop the rhetoric, stop the slogans and join us to build Canada strong.

Business of Supply

SCIENCE AND INNOVATION

Jeremy Patzer (Swift Current—Grasslands—Kindersley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has admitted that a country that cannot feed itself has few options. However, the Liberal government is closing seven agriculture research facilities. Their research and development has a 35:1 return on investment for taxpayers. It is also crucial for growing crops to feed Canada and the rest of the world, despite our harsh climate.

With 2.2 million Canadians lining up at food banks every month, does the Prime Minister seriously think that it is a good idea to cut valuable research into how we can grow more food here in Canada?

Hon. Heath MacDonald (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when I have travelled around the country, I heard many times that we can do better in research and development. We will continue to build on that. We will listen to the professionals in this regard. We are not going to go down the path of not having science in this country. It is extremely important to our trade. It is extremely important to our agriculture and agri-food communities, and we are going to continue to build on that.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP): *Uqaqtittiji*, successive Liberal and Conservative governments have bungled fighter jet procurement for decades. Now, with Donald Trump threatening Canada's sovereignty and our NATO allies, New Democrats call on the Prime Minister to cancel all F-35 contracts and commit to purchasing the Swedish Saab Gripen.

The Prime Minister promised to make Canada less reliant on the American military. Will the Prime Minister make the switch, or did his Davos speech mean nothing?

Hon. David McGuinty (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as part of our generational investments in the Canadian Armed Forces, we are procuring a new fleet of fighter aircraft for the Royal Canadian Air Force. We review all procurement approaches to align with the best interests of Canadians and the needs of the Canadian Armed Forces. We are committed to procuring what the air force needs while ensuring economic benefits for Canadians. That is exactly what we will do.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I wish to draw the attention of members to the presence in the gallery of the Hon. Kelly Greene, Minister of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness for British Columbia.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—FOOD AFFORDABILITY

The House resumed from February 3 consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: It being 3:14 p.m., the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion of the member for Mégantic—L'Érable—Lotbinière relating to the business of supply.

Call in the members.

• (1525)

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

(Division No. 63)

YEAS

Members

Aboultatif	Aitchison
Albas	Allison
Anderson	Anstey
Arnold	Au
Baber	Bailey
Baldinelli	Barlow
Barrett	Bélanger (Sudbury East—Manitoulin—Nickel Belt)
Berthold	Bexte
Bezan	Block
Bonk	Borrelli
Bragdon	Brassard
Brock	Calkins
Caputo	Chambers
Chong	Cobena
Cody	Cooper
Dalton	Dancho
Davidson	Davies (Niagara South)
Dawson	Deltell
DeRidder	Diotte
Doherty	Dowdall
Duncan	Epp
Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster—Meadow Lake)	Falk (Provencher)
Gallant	Généreux
Genuis	Gill (Calgary Skyview)
Gill (Brampton West)	Gill (Calgary McKnight)
Gill (Windsor West)	Gill (Abbotsford—South Langley)
Gladu	Godin
Goodridge	Gourde
Groleau	Guglielmin
Gunn	Hallan
Hardy	Ho
Hoback	Holman
Jackson	Jansen
Kelly	Khanna
Kibble	Kirkland
Kmiec	Konanz
Kram	Kronis
Kuruc	Kusie
Lake	Lantsman
Lawrence	Lawton
Lefebvre	Lewis (Essex)
Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Lloyd
Lobb	Mahal
Majumdar	Malette (Kapuskasing—Timmins—Mushkegowuk)

Mantle
Mazier
McKenzie
Melillo
Moore
Morrison
Muys
Patzner
Poilievre
Rempel Garner
Richards
Rood
Rowe
Scheer
Seebach
Small
Stevenson
Strauss
Thomas
Tolmie
Van Popta
Viersen
Wagantall
Waugh
Zimmer — 137

Martel
McCauley
McLean (Calgary Centre)
Menegakis
Morin
Motz
Nater
Paul-Hus
Redekopp
Reynolds
Roberts
Ross
Ruff
Schmale
Shipley
Steinley
Strahl
Stubbs
Tochur
Uppal
Vien
Vis
Warkentin
Williamson

NAYS

Members

Acan
Ali
Anandasangaree
Bains
Bardeesy
Battiste
Beech

Bendayan
Blanchet
Blois
Brière
Carney
Casey
Champagne
Chang
Chatel
Chenette
Church
Connors
Coteau
Dandurand
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
d'Entremont
Deschênes-Thériault
Dhaliwal
Diab
Duguid
Earle
El-Khoury
Eyolfson
Fanjoy
Fisher
Fortier
Fragiskatos
Fry
Gainey
Gasparro
Gazan
Gill (Côte-Nord—Kawawachikamach—Nitassinan)
Grant
Guay
Gull-Masty
Hanley

Al Soud
Alty
Auguste
Baker
Barsalou-Duval
Beaulieu
Belanger (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River)
Bittle
Blanchette-Joncas
Bonin
Brunelle-Duceppe
Carr
Chagger
Champoux
Chartrand
Chen
Chi
Clark
Cormier
Dabrusin
Danko
DeBellefeuille
Deschênes
Desrochers
Dhillon
Duclos
Dzerowicz
Ehsassi
Erskine-Smith
Fancy
Fergus
Fonseca
Fortin
Fraser
Gaheer
Garon
Gaudreau
Gerretsen
Gould

Greaves
Guilbeault
Hajdu
Harrison

Hepfner
Hodgson
Housefather
Iacono
Jaczek
Joly
Kayabaga
Khalid
Koutrakis
Lalonde
Lamoureux
Lapointe (Sudbury)
Lattanzio
Lavack
LeBlanc
Lemire
Long
Ma
MacDonald (Cardigan)
Malette (Bay of Quinte)
May
McKelvie
McKnight
McPherson
Mendès
Miedema
Mingarelli
Myles
Nathan
Noormohamed
Ntumba
Olszewski
Osborne
Petipas Taylor
Powlowski
Ramsay
Robertson
Romanado
Sahota
Sarai
Savard-Tremblay
Schieffe
Sheehan
Sidhu (Brampton South)
Sodhi
Sousa
St-Pierre
Tesser Derksen
Thompson
Valdez
Vandenbeld
Watchorn
Wilkinson
Zahid
Zuberi — 195

Business of Supply

Hirtle
Hogan
Hussen
Idlout
Johns
Joseph
Kelloway
Klassen
Kwan
Lambropoulos
Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles)
Larouche
Lauzon
Lavoie
Leitão
Lightbound
Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga)
MacDonald (Malpeque)
MacKinnon (Gatineau)
Maloney
McGuinty
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
McLean (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke)
Ménard
Michel
Miller
Morrissey
Naqvi
Nguyen
Normandin
Oliphant
O'Rourke
Perron
Plamondon
Provost
Rana
Rochefort
Royer
Saini
Sari
Sawatzky
Sgro
Sidhu (Brampton East)
Simard
Solomon
Ste-Marie
Sudds
Thériault
Turnbull
van Koeverden
Villeneuve
Weiler
Yip
Zerucelli

PAIRED

Members

Anand
Kramp-Neuman
Fuhr
Leslie — 4

The Speaker: I declare the motion defeated.

*Private Members' Business***PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

● (1530)

*[English]***RELIEVING GRIEVING PARENTS OF AN ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN ACT (EVAN'S LAW)**

The House resumed from January 29 consideration of the motion that Bill C-222, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act and the Canada Labour Code (death of a child), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at second reading stage of Bill C-222 under Private Members' Business.

The question is on the motion.

● (1540)

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

*(Division No. 64)***YEAS**

Members

Aboultarif	Acan
Aitchison	Al Soud
Albas	Ali
Allison	Alty
Anandasangaree	Anderson
Anstey	Arnold
Au	Auguste
Baber	Bailey
Bains	Baker
Baldinelli	Bardeesy
Barlow	Barrett
Barsalou-Duval	Battiste
Beaulieu	Beech
Belanger (Desnethé—Mississippi—Churchill Riv- er)	Bélanger (Sudbury East—Manitoulin—Nickel Belt)
Bendayan	Berthold
Bexte	Bezan
Bittle	Blanchet
Blanchette-Joncas	Block
Blois	Bonin
Bonk	Borrelli
Bragdon	Brassard
Brière	Brock
Brunelle-Duceppe	Calkins
Caputo	Carney
Carr	Casey
Chagger	Chambers
Champagne	Champoux
Chang	Chartrand
Chatel	Chen
Chenette	Chi
Chong	Church
Clark	Cobena
Cody	Connors
Cooper	Cormier
Coteau	Dabrusin
Dalton	Dancho
Dandurand	Danko
Davidson	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Davies (Niagara South)	Dawson
DeBellefeuille	Deltell
d'Entremont	DeRidder
Deschênes	Deschênes-Thériault
Desrochers	Dhaliwal

Dhillon	Diab
Diotte	Doherty
Dowdall	Duclos
Duguid	Duncan
Dzerowicz	Earle
Ehsassi	El-Khoury
Epp	Erskine-Smith
Eyolfson	Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster—Meadow Lake)
Falk (Provencher)	Fancy
Fanjoy	Fergus
Fisher	Fonseca
Fortier	Fortin
Fragiskatos	Fraser
Fry	Gaheer
Gainey	Gallant
Garon	Gasparro
Gaudreau	Généreux
Genuis	Gerretsen
Gill (Calgary Skyview)	Gill (Brampton West)
Gill (Calgary McKnight)	Gill (Windsor West)
Gill (Côte-Nord—Kawawachikamach—Nitassi- nan)	Gill (Abbotsford—South Langley)
Gladu	Godin
Goodridge	Gould
Gourde	Grant
Greaves	Groleau
Guay	Guglielmin
Guilbeault	Gull-Masty
Gunn	Hajdu
Hallan	Hanley
Hardy	Harrison
Hepfner	Hirtle
Ho	Hoback
Hodgson	Hogan
Holman	Housefather
Hussen	Iacono
Idlout	Jackson
Jaczek	Jansen
Johns	Joly
Joseph	Kayabaga
Kelloway	Kelly
Khalid	Khanna
Kibble	Kirkland
Klassen	Kmiec
Konanz	Koutrakis
Kram	Kronis
Kuruc	Kusie
Kwan	Lake
Lalonde	Lambropoulos
Lamoureux	Lantsman
Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles)	Lapointe (Sudbury)
Larouche	Lattanzio
Lauzon	Lavack
Lavoie	Lawrence
Lawton	LeBlanc
Lefebvre	Leitão
Lemire	Lewis (Essex)
Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Lightbound
Lloyd	Lobb
Long	Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga)
Ma	MacDonald (Malpeque)
MacDonald (Cardigan)	MacKinnon (Gatineau)
Mahal	Majumdar
Malette (Bay of Quinte)	Malette (Kapusasing—Timmins— Mushkegowuk)
Maloney	Mantle
Martel	May
Mazier	McCauley
McGuinty	McKelvie
McKenzie	McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
McKnight	McLean (Calgary Centre)
McLean (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke)	McPherson
Melillo	Ménard

*Private Members' Business***CANADIAN MULTICULTURALISM ACT**

The House resumed from February 2 consideration of the motion that Bill C-245, An Act to amend the Canadian Multiculturalism Act (non-application in Quebec), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at second reading stage of Bill C-245.

The question is on the motion.

• (1550)

[*Translation*]

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

(*Division No. 65*)

YEAS

Members

Barsalou-Duval	Beaulieu
Blanchet	Blanchette-Joncas
Bonin	Brunelle-Duceppe
Champoux	DeBellefeuille
Deschênes	Fortin
Garon	Gaudreau
Gill (Côte-Nord—Kawawachikamach—Nitassinan)	Larouche
Lemire	Normandin
Perron	Plamondon
Savard-Tremblay	Simard
Ste-Marie	Thériault— 22

NAYS

Members

Aboultaif	Acan
Aitchison	Al Soud
Albas	Ali
Allison	Alty
Anandasangaree	Anderson
Anstey	Arnold
Au	Auguste
Baber	Bailey
Bains	Baker
Baldinelli	Bardeesy
Barlow	Barrett
Battiste	Beech
Belanger (Desnethé—Mississippi—Churchill River)	Bélanger (Sudbury East—Manitoulin—Nickel Belt)
Bendayan	Berthold
Bexte	Bezan
Bittle	Block
Blois	Bonk
Borrelli	Bragdon
Brassard	Brière
Brock	Calkins
Caputo	Carney
Carr	Casey
Chambers	Champagne
Chang	Chartrand
Chatel	Chen
Chenette	Chi
Chong	Church
Clark	Cobena
Cody	Connors
Cooper	Cornier
Coteau	Dabrusin
Dalton	Dancho

Mendès	Menegakis
Michel	Miedema
Miller	Mingarelli
Moore	Morin
Morrison	Morrissey
Motz	Muys
Myles	Naqvi
Nater	Nathan
Nguyen	Noormohamed
Normandin	Ntumba
Oliphant	Olszewski
O'Rourke	Osborne
Patzer	Paul-Hus
Perron	Petitpas Taylor
Plamondon	Poilievre
Powlowski	Provost
Ramsay	Rana
Redekopp	Reid
Rempel Garner	Reynolds
Richards	Roberts
Robertson	Rochefort
Romanado	Rood
Ross	Rowe
Royer	Ruff
Sahota	Saini
Sarai	Sari
Savard-Tremblay	Sawatzky
Scheer	Schiefke
Schmale	Seeback
Sgro	Sheehan
Shiple	Sidhu (Brampton East)
Sidhu (Brampton South)	Simard
Small	Sodhi
Solomon	Sousa
Steinley	Ste-Marie
Stevenson	St-Pierre
Strahl	Stubbs
Sudds	Tesser Derksen
Thériault	Thomas
Thompson	Tochor
Tolmie	Turnbull
Uppal	Valdez
van Koeverden	Van Popta
Vandenbeld	Vien
Viersen	Villeneuve
Vis	Wagantall
Warkentin	Watchorn
Waugh	Weiler
Wilkinson	Williamson
Yip	Zahid
Zerucelli	Zimmer
Zuberi— 331	

NAYS

Nil

PAIRED

Members

Anand	Fuhr
Kramp-Neuman	Leslie— 4

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried. Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

(Bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

Private Members' Business

Dandurand	Danko	McLean (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke)	McPherson
Davidson	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Melillo	Ménard
Davies (Niagara South)	Dawson	Mendès	Menegakis
Deltell	d'Entremont	Michel	Miedema
DeRidder	Deschênes-Thériault	Miller	Mingarelli
Desrochers	Dhaliwal	Moore	Morin
Dhillon	Diab	Morrison	Morrissey
Diotte	Doherty	Motz	Muys
Dowdall	Duclos	Myles	Naqvi
Duguid	Duncan	Nater	Nathan
Dzerowicz	Earle	Nguyen	Noormohamed
Ehsassi	El-Khoury	Ntumba	Oliphant
Epp	Erskine-Smith	Olszewski	O'Rourke
Eyolfson	Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster—Meadow Lake)	Osborne	Patzer
Falk (Provencher)	Fancy	Paul-Hus	Petitpas Taylor
Fanjoy	Fergus	Poilievre	Powlowski
Fisher	Fonseca	Provost	Ramsay
Fortier	Fragiskatos	Rana	Redekopp
Fraser	Gaheer	Reid	Rempel Garner
Gainey	Gallant	Reynolds	Richards
Gasparro	Gazan	Roberts	Robertson
Généreux	Genuis	Rocheport	Romanado
Gerretsen	Gill (Calgary Skyview)	Rood	Ross
Gill (Brampton West)	Gill (Calgary McKnight)	Rowe	Royer
Gill (Windsor West)	Gill (Abbotsford—South Langley)	Ruff	Sahota
Gladu	Godin	Saini	Sarai
Goodridge	Gould	Sari	Sawatzky
Gourde	Grant	Scheer	Schieffe
Greaves	Groleau	Schmale	Seeback
Guay	Guglielmin	Sheehan	Shiplay
Guilbeault	Gull-Masty	Sidhu (Brampton East)	Sidhu (Brampton South)
Gunn	Hajdu	Small	Sodhi
Hallan	Hanley	Solomon	Sousa
Hardy	Harrison	Steinley	Stevenson
Hepfner	Hirtle	St-Pierre	Strahl
Ho	Hoback	Stubbs	Sudds
Hodgson	Hogan	Tesser Derksen	Thomas
Holman	Housefather	Thompson	Tochor
Hussen	Iacono	Tolmie	Turnbull
Idlout	Jackson	Uppal	Valdez
Jaczek	Jansen	van Koeverden	Van Popta
Johns	Joly	Vandenbeld	Vien
Joseph	Kayabaga	Viersen	Villeneuve
Kelloway	Kelly	Vis	Wagantall
Khalid	Khanna	Warkentin	Watchorn
Kibble	Kirkland	Waugh	Weiler
Klassen	Kmiec	Wilkinson	Williamson
Konanz	Koutrakis	Yip	Zahid
Kram	Kronis	Zerucelli	Zimmer
Kuruc	Kusie	Zuberi— 307	
Kwan	Lake		
Lalonde	Lambropoulos		
Lamoureux	Lantsman		
Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles)	Lapointe (Sudbury)		
Lattanzio	Lauzon		
Lavack	Lavoie		
Lawrence	Lawton		
LeBlanc	Lefebvre		
Leitão	Lewis (Essex)		
Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Lightbound		
Lloyd	Lobb		
Long	Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga)		
Ma	MacDonald (Malpeque)		
MacDonald (Cardigan)	MacKinnon (Gatineau)	Anand	Fuhr
Mahal	Majumdar	Kramp-Neuman	Leslie— 4
Malette (Bay of Quinte)	Malette (Kapuskaing—Timmins—Mushkegowuk)		
Maloney	Mantle		
Martel	May		
Mazier	McCauley		
McGuinty	McKelvie		
McKenzie	McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)		
McKnight	McLean (Calgary Centre)		

PAIRED

Members

Anand
Kramp-Neuman**The Speaker:** I declare the motion lost.*[English]*

I wish to inform the House that because of the deferred recorded divisions, the time provided for Government Orders will be extended by 38 minutes.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1555)

[English]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Hon. Maninder Sidhu (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2) and consistent with the policy on the tabling of treaties in Parliament, I have the distinct honour of tabling, in both official languages, the treaty entitled “Agreement between the Government of Canada and the Government of the United Arab Emirates for the Promotion and Protection of Investments”, done at Abu Dhabi on November 20, 2025.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. David McGuinty (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2) and consistent with the policy on the tabling of treaties in Parliament, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the treaty entitled “Agreement between the Government of Canada and the Government of Japan Concerning the Transfer of Defense Equipment and Technology”, done at Ottawa on January 27.

* * *

[Translation]

PETITIONS

CAREGIVERS

Louis Plamondon (Bécancour—Nicolet—Saurel—Alnôbak, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour of tabling a petition today on recognition and support for family caregivers. These women and men play a vital role in supporting people with health conditions who are in the process of losing their autonomy or living with a disability. Their work eases some of the pressure on our health care system.

This petition is the outcome of a remarkable grassroots movement led by Geneviève Coutu of Sorel-Tracy, who I am happy to say is here in the gallery today. The petition gathered 13,035 electronic signatures and more than 3,600 paper signatures.

As a family caregiver of many years to her husband, who has Alzheimer's disease, she embodies the reality faced by so many families. The petitioners call upon the federal government to provide better recognition for caregivers while respecting the jurisdictions of the provinces, including Quebec. The Bloc Québécois fully supports these demands, and I invite all the parties to do the same.

The Deputy Speaker: Before continuing with the tabling of petitions, I want to remind members and the dean of the House that members are not permitted to call attention to the presence of people in the gallery. Only the Chair may do so. I know that the dean is well aware of the rules of the House.

CANADIAN FLAG

Hon. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is the first time in the 45th Parliament that I have risen to present a petition. I am presenting petition e-6685, signed by nearly 600

Routine Proceedings

Canadians. This petition stems from the efforts of a great Canadian, a veteran, retired captain Jocelyn Démétré.

I know I am not supposed to recognize any individual in the gallery, so I will not recognize the former captain in the gallery. However, I can say that he is a veteran, that he has written a book and that he works on behalf of veterans.

The petitioners are pointing out that “Canada does not have any laws prohibiting contempt of the flag, as many countries do, such as France, the United Kingdom and Switzerland”. The petitioners are calling on the “Government of Canada to introduce a bill to protect our Canadian flag from any action that would destroy or desecrate the national flag without lawful excuse”.

The Deputy Speaker: Before we continue with presenting petitions, I would like to issue another reminder. We cannot do indirectly what we cannot do directly. I know the member for Hull—Aylmer is well aware of the rules, as he previously served as Speaker of the House.

[English]

The hon. member for Riding Mountain.

• (1600)

PUBLIC SAFETY

Dan Mazier (Riding Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always an honour to present a petition on behalf of the citizens of Riding Mountain.

I rise for the fourth time on behalf of the people of Dauphin, Manitoba, to present a petition on the rising rate of crime. Residents of Dauphin and the Parkland region are demanding that the Liberal government repeal its soft-on-crime policies, which have fuelled a surge in crime throughout their communities.

Since 2015, there has been a 54% increase in violent crime and a 75% increase in sexual assaults across Canada. Petitioners are deeply concerned by what they read in the local papers, including a report from last week that the Dauphin RCMP arrested three men in connection to a crime spree of multiple incidents, including theft and armed robbery, all in a single day.

The people of Dauphin and the Parkland region demand that the Liberal government repeal its soft-on-crime policies, which directly threaten their livelihoods and their community. I fully support the people of Dauphin.

[Translation]

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Alexis Deschênes (Gaspésie—Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Lis-tuguj, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the people of Gaspé have been without Via Rail passenger rail service for over 12 years, a service that is essential for our community. Passenger rail service supports the regional economy, reduces greenhouse gas emissions and helps people get around. We are talking about 12 years of neglect by a Crown corporation that is largely funded with taxpayers' money and whose mandate includes connecting regions.

Routine Proceedings

I am therefore very pleased today to present petition e-6922, which has been signed by 3,437 people. This petition calls on the federal government to urge Via Rail to immediately restore passenger rail service between Matapédia and Port-Daniel-Gascons and gradually restore passenger rail service to Gaspé as soon as possible. I am very pleased to reiterate their reasonable expectations here in the House.

[English]

FLOOD MITIGATION

Sukhman Gill (Abbotsford—South Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to present a petition on behalf of the residents of Abbotsford—South Langley, who are increasingly concerned about the severe and ongoing flood risks facing our Abbotsford community.

These petitioners note that Abbotsford's low-lying geography along the Fraser River has led to repeated flooding that has caused millions of dollars in damage to homes, farms, businesses and critical infrastructure, while also disrupting vital supply chains far beyond our region. They warn against aging and inefficient flood protection infrastructure that is failing to meet today's realities, and point out that meaningful flood mitigation requires urgent investment; moderate, climate-resilient infrastructure guided by science; and community support.

The petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to take a seat at the table with the province and municipality, to invest in flood mitigation and monitoring, early warning systems and emergency preparedness for Abbotsford, and to deliver clear, actionable flood mitigation measures in the next federal budget.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Arpan Khanna (Oxford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise on behalf of petitioners from Oxford County who are concerned that the Liberal-Bloc amendments to Bill C-9 could be used to criminalize passages from the Bible, the Quran, the Torah and other sacred texts. The state has no place in the religious texts or teachings of any faith community, and freedom of expression and freedom of religion are fundamental rights that must be preserved.

They are calling on the Government of Canada to protect religious freedom, uphold the right to read and share sacred texts, and prevent government overreach into matters of faith.

BRAIN INJURY

Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise to present a petition from Canadians who are calling for urgent federal leadership on brain injury awareness, prevention and treatment.

The petitioners note that brain injuries can occur in many ways, from accidents to illness and strokes, and often result in serious physical, cognitive, emotional and behavioural effects. They further point out that brain injuries are frequently linked with other challenges, including substance use and homelessness, creating additional barriers for those affected. It is estimated that 1.6 million Canadians are living with a brain injury today, yet there is still no federal coordinated national response.

The petitioners therefore call upon the Government of Canada to develop a national brain injury strategy to improve awareness and prevention and to ensure better access to treatment, rehabilitation and recovery supports for Canadians living with the impacts of brain injury.

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the petitioners wish to draw the attention of the House to findings from international conservation organizations that point out that when we have marine protected areas, and Canada has committed to having 30% protected, there is a positive effect. The petition describes this as a positive spillover effect, where neighbouring fishing areas have larger populations of fish, larger sizes of individual fish and better catches.

Petitioners are calling on the House to look at what Fisheries and Oceans can do to protect our fisheries, grow our fisheries through marine conservation areas and ensure the marine protected areas are expanded.

● (1605)

NIGERIA

Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition from a number of constituents who are very concerned about the escalating attacks, kidnappings and killings affecting Christians and other communities in parts of Nigeria. These incidents have had devastating humanitarian consequences, including mass displacement of life, destruction of property and places of worship, and an acute insecurity for vulnerable populations.

The petitioners seek urgent and coordinated international action to protect civilians, uphold human rights and support peaceful co-existence in Nigeria.

CANADA POST CORPORATION

Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I also present a petition on behalf of 211 constituents who are concerned about Canada Post's announcement of the elimination of door-to-door service and postal services, which would impact seniors and rural parts of my constituency.

FARMLAND IN CLEARVIEW TOWNSHIP

Terry Dowdall (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise on behalf of the residents of Simcoe—Grey and, in fact, those all across the country.

The Department of National Defence purchased 700 acres off one farmer to build the over-the-horizon radar system. The people in the riding are not opposed to our military. In fact, they support the men and women. Base Borden is in my riding. However, they have concerns. This is prime farmland. In order to move to stage two, the department needs 2,600 more acres, which it will need to purchase off landowners who presently have no interest in selling. The petitioners have some deep concerns. It also follows along the Minesing swamp, so there are a lot of environmental issues on this particular land.

The residents are calling upon the Government of Canada to stop the building of any over-the-horizon sites on the already purchased property, prevent future acquisitions of prime farmland and the building of any over-the-horizon sites on the prime farmland of Clearview Township, and register the previously purchased property with the Ontario Farmland Trust.

We hear all the time in the House about the importance of food security. We understand national security. We just believe there are other sites available.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Jagsharan Singh Mahal (Edmonton Southeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House to table a petition on behalf of the constituents of my riding who want to force the Liberals to withdraw Bill C-9 and block the Liberal amendment that was passed in committee to remove the religious freedom defence clause from the Criminal Code.

The petitioners believe that the government is going to criminalize passages from the Bible, Quran, Torah and other religious texts. If allowed, it would prosecute those who deeply express their religious beliefs. Punishment for such a crime is up to two years. The state has no business in people's religious faiths, teachings and the beliefs that they hold deeply within their conscience. Therefore, the petitioners are seeking for the Liberals to withdraw Bill C-9, protect religious freedoms, uphold the right to read and share sacred texts, and prevent government institutions from interfering.

Connie Cody (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise today on behalf of the citizens of Cambridge to table a petition to withdraw Bill C-9. Petitioners request that the government uphold and protect freedom of religion and freedom of speech as these fundamental rights must be preserved.

Fred Davies (Niagara South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of Canadians who are concerned about the contents of Bill C-9 and its assault on religious freedom. Their fear is that Christians and other religious individuals who believe in the Bible will be told they are engaging in criminal activity.

On behalf of these citizens, I urge the government to withdraw Bill C-9 and protect religious freedom in Canada.

* * *

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 ask that all questions be allowed to stand at this time, please.

Government Orders

• (1610)

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

* * *

MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all notices of motions for the production of papers also be allowed to stand.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CANADA GROCERIES AND ESSENTIALS BENEFIT ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-19, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act, as reported (without amendment) from the committee.

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to order made on Monday, February 2, Bill C-19, an act to amend the Income Tax Act, is deemed reported without amendment and deemed concurred in at report stage on division.

The House will now proceed to the consideration of Bill C-19 at the third reading stage.

Hon. Ruby Sahota (for the Minister of Finance and National Revenue) moved that Bill C-19, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act, be read the third time and passed.

[Translation]

Steve Lavoie (Beauport—Limoilou, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to split my time with the member for Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam.

The Deputy Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Steve Lavoie: Mr. Speaker, today we are debating an issue that directly affects the daily lives of millions of Canadians, specifically, the ability to feed one's family, pay for groceries and meet basic needs with dignity. Behind the numbers, the budget tables and the partisan debates, there is a very real human reality. There are parents who count every dollar at the checkout, seniors who worry about seeing their savings dwindle and workers who, despite their efforts, feel as though the cost of living is rising faster than their wages.

Government Orders

My speech today will be divided into two parts.

I would first like to take a few minutes to talk about my riding, Beauport—Limoilou, because the decisions we make here must be based on the practical realities of the communities we represent. Beauport—Limoilou is a rich and diverse riding. It is home to families, workers, seniors, young people and a large proportion of people living alone. This riding brings together two distinct living environments that exemplify urban diversity.

There is Beauport, a predominantly residential area that is home to many families. In several neighbourhoods in Beauport, nearly one in three households is made up of families with children, which explains the importance placed on schools, local services and quality of life.

Then there is Limoilou, a vibrant, dense urban area with deep roots in community life. One fact worth noting is that Limoilou is the part of Quebec City with the largest number of seniors living alone. In some neighbourhoods, more than half of all households are single-person households. This has real-world impacts. Living alone often means living on one income and spending a greater share of the budget on housing and everyday expenses. Most Limoilou residents are renters, so housing is a particularly important issue.

Despite their differences, Beauport and Limoilou share common concerns. Overall, the riding has a significant share of households that spend more than 30% of their income on housing. Beauport—Limoilou is also a riding with a strong community spirit. Local organizations play a vital role in supporting citizens and maintaining social bonds, particularly in dense urban areas.

This snapshot of Beauport—Limoilou reflects the reality of millions of Canadians. Last Friday, I visited the organization *Entraide Agapè*, which is located 400 metres or so from my constituency office. It is a food bank that needs our help. This organization provides support to more than 100 people a week, with the assistance of over 100 volunteers.

Over the holidays, I visited almost every private seniors' residence in my riding. What did they tell me? They told me to think of them. They told me not to forget them. Today, I want them to know that we are thinking of them. We are thinking of everyone.

We cannot forget the fact that, even within a single riding, needs vary and must be taken into account in our collective thought process. The government has already found ways to support citizens, particularly in terms of housing, income support and services. Other supports can and must continue to be discussed here in the House, in light of the reality on the ground. With that in mind, I will continue to reflect on the measures we have put in place and those we can still improve for Beauport—Limoilou and the country as a whole.

The global economy is volatile. Supply chains have been weakened by the pandemic, extreme weather events are becoming more frequent and widespread, and geopolitical tensions continue to affect food prices. On top of that, hard-working people who contribute to our society are feeling less able to afford the necessities of life. Bill C-19 was designed with them and millions of others across the country in mind. While overall inflation is moderating,

food inflation remains high. Low- and moderate-income households are still the hardest hit. In light of this reality, our government has made a clear choice to take targeted, responsible and effective action.

● (1615)

Bill C-19 amends the Income Tax Act to create the Canada groceries and essentials benefit. This new benefit builds on an existing and well-known mechanism, the GST credit, to quickly provide financial support to those who need it most. This is a meaningful solution that will really help people. It is the best vehicle to reach Canadians quickly.

In practical terms, this measure will provide a one-time top-up payment equal to a 50% increase in the annual 2025-26 value of the GST credit in the spring of 2026. It will provide immediate, tangible support to millions of families. Starting in July 2026, the value of the benefit will be increased by 25% for five years.

In total, \$11.7 billion will be invested over six years to support more than 12 million Canadians. This will provide up to an additional \$402 to a single individual without children, \$527 to a couple and \$805 to a couple with two children. These amounts are not theoretical. In Beauport—Limoilou, they mean more balanced meals, less financial stress and more flexibility to deal with unforeseen circumstances.

A key aspect of this bill is that it is simple and efficient. Recipients will not have to fill out complex forms or take additional steps. All Canadians need to do is file their taxes. This support will be issued automatically, on a quarterly basis, which helps ensure predictability and stability for households.

This benefit does not replace our other support measures. It is the newest addition to a coherent suite of public policies aimed at improving affordability. These policies include the Canada child benefit, the guaranteed income supplement for seniors, the Canada disability benefit and Canada's national school food program. I should also mention the Canadian dental care plan, since 27,055 Canadians in my riding are already enrolled.

In the riding of Beauport—Limoilou, where the median household income is about \$60,000 a year, that number is very telling. It shows two things: first, that these programs meet a real need on the ground, and second, that we must step up our efforts to reach out to the many other Canadians who are eligible for these programs.

Government Orders

Some will say that these measures do not go far enough, but we cannot forget that food banks, community organizations and front-line experts have clearly called for direct support for food and essentials. Bill C-19 answers that call. These measures, combined with the Canada groceries and essentials benefit, form a strong safety net for households. These are conscious policy choices made in response to what we have heard and practical needs on the ground.

Bill C-19 is not just a short-term response. It is part of a broader vision of economic resilience. In addition to providing direct support to households, our government is investing in Canadian food processing, strengthening our supply chains and supporting our agricultural producers. These investments are a critical part of stabilizing prices in the long term and making us less vulnerable to global shocks. Bill C-19 is one more tool to give them the support they deserve.

This bill asks the House a simple question. Are we prepared to provide meaningful support to Canadians in need? Are we prepared to take tangible action to improve accessibility?

Personally, I think the answer is clear. Yes, we must act. Yes, we must support families, seniors, workers and vulnerable people. I urge all MPs to support Bill C-19, not for partisan reasons, but out of a sense of responsibility, solidarity and social justice, because, ultimately, making life more affordable—

• (1620)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Swift Current—Grasslands—Kindersley.

[*English*]

Jeremy Patzer (Swift Current—Grasslands—Kindersley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the cost of groceries continues to rise quite rapidly. When we go to the grocery store, it is quite alarming how expensive just one bag of groceries is. Conservatives certainly support the concept of helping people be able to buy those groceries, but the bill would not actually lower the cost of groceries.

The Liberals would be borrowing money to give to Canadians to help them buy groceries. With the way the benefit works, it would basically work out to an additional \$10 a week for Canadians. We know that \$10 does not buy much of anything at the grocery stores these days. Would the member not agree that trying to lower the cost and the price of groceries would be a better idea than borrowing money to give to Canadians?

[*Translation*]

Steeve Lavoie: Mr. Speaker, in life, we only control what we can control. What we can control is putting money back in the pockets of our constituents. That is what we are doing now in the easiest and fastest way. We trust Canadians to use that money where it is needed.

The other night, at a committee, I was listening to economists discussing and questioning certain things. There were calls for the payments to be monthly instead of quarterly. My reply was that Canadians do not care about whether they are going to get the money every month or every quarter. What they want to know is if they are going to get it at all, because they need it. That is what people are telling me on social media. They need that money.

This money is on top of the programs we have already established, like the food programs, the dental care programs and the programs to help seniors. We are making sure Canadians have more power.

Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette—Manawan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, obviously, the Bloc Québécois strongly supports this measure. It will help those who need it. I have two questions for my colleague.

First, this measure will cost nearly \$12 billion over six years, and the first payment will cost \$3.1 billion. Why did the government not think to include this in the budget it tabled just three months ago? We want to have a clear picture of public finances so we know where we are headed. We already have a \$78-billion deficit. Why was this not taken into consideration?

My second question relates to the answer my colleague just gave. Yes, people welcome the fact that they are receiving more money, but if they received this money every month, it would be even more helpful. Why? Those who need it use it to pay for groceries. When the benefit is paid out every three months, people max out their credit cards and accumulate interest. If it were paid out every month, they would have to pay far less interest. Why not make it a monthly payment?

Steeve Lavoie: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to hear that there is no partisanship here. This measure will be adopted for the people, for Canadians. As for the second question concerning quarterly or monthly payments, that is exactly what I was talking about earlier.

Unfortunately, some people or members are out of touch with reality at times. I had children, and government benefits were paid quarterly. No one ever heard me or my spouse ask why they were paid quarterly and not monthly. What we got out of it was predictability. We could budget for those benefits. We could include them in our budget. It made no difference whether they arrived every three months or every month.

The important thing here, in this debate, is to make sure that Bill C-19 passes so that the money gets into people's pockets. That is what they asked me to do. That is what is important, not whether the money is paid out monthly rather than quarterly.

• (1625)

Pauline Rochefort (Parliamentary Secretary to the Secretary of State (Rural Development), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very impressed by the way my colleague is defending the interests of his riding of Beauport—Limoilou.

I was wondering if he could elaborate on the main recommendation of Food Banks Canada.

Government Orders

Steeve Lavoie: Mr. Speaker, the recommendation was to help Canadians. I see this in my riding. I checked recently and I found that 27,000 people in my riding are enrolled in the dental care plan. We know that just as many still need to register. That is a real need.

As for food banks, I visited Entraide Agapé, which is just a few steps from my office. The people who were there need assistance. The centre itself needs staff and volunteers; it needs funding and help from us.

We will be helping them with Bill C-19. We will be able to provide direct assistance to food banks so that they can help people put food on the table.

[*English*]

Ron McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Beauport—Limoilou for sharing his time with me.

It is my pleasure to take part in this debate today on Bill C-19, the Canada groceries and essentials benefits act. As we all know, advanced economies around the world are facing complex economic challenges, and Canada is no different. Rising protectionism in the form of tariffs, supply chain disruptions and climate change are all posing significant challenges to the Canadian economy, and Canadians are feeling the impact in their daily lives.

In response, our new government is moving Canada's economy from reliance to resilience, but we understand that some of the biggest long-term payoffs in this transformation will take time to be felt. To ensure Canadians have the support they need right now, we have introduced a series of new measures to limit pressures on costs, including making groceries and other essentials more affordable.

The bill I am here to talk about today will help more than 12 million low- and modest-income Canadians afford day-to-day essentials. The support will be indexed to inflation and builds on the goods and services tax credit to provide \$11.7 billion in additional financial assistance over six years. To help address affordability challenges, the benefit will provide a one-time top-up payment equal to a 50% increase in the annual 2025-26 value of the GST credit. This support will be paid out as early as possible this spring. It will deliver \$3.1 billion in immediate assistance to individuals and families who are already getting the GST credit.

There is more. In addition, the value of the Canada groceries and essentials benefit will increase by 25% for five years starting in July 2026. This expansion will deliver another \$8.6 billion in support over the 2026-27 to 2030-31 period and will ensure the benefit goes to 500,000 new individuals and families. Taken together, these measures will provide up to an additional \$402 to a single individual without children, \$527 to a couple and \$805 to a couple with two children. At these levels, our government will be offsetting grocery cost increases beyond the overall inflation rate since the pandemic.

Let me provide a couple of examples of what this assistance would look like. A single senior with \$25,000 in net income would receive a one-time top-up of \$267 plus a longer-term increase of \$136 for the 2026-27 benefit year, for a total increase of \$402. In total, this senior would receive \$950 for the 2026-27 benefit year, including the top-up. A couple with two children with \$40,000 in

net income would receive a one-time top-up of \$533 plus an increase of \$272 for the 2026-27 benefit year, for a total increase of \$805. In total, they would receive \$1,890 for the 2026-27 benefit year, including the top-up.

After the one-time payment is made in the spring of 2026, eligible families and individuals will receive the enriched regular payments under the Canada groceries and essentials benefit as of July 2026. The benefit payments will arrive quarterly to ensure families can use the funds to help with their day-to-day expenses. To simplify this benefit for Canadians, recipients will not need to apply for the additional payments, but will be required to file their 2024 tax return to be able to receive the top-up. Recipients will need to file their 2025 tax return to receive the increased Canada groceries and essentials benefit payments as of July 2026.

As we know, this benefit is one example of the many ways we are supporting Canadians during these unprecedented times. It will be in addition to existing benefits, such as the Canada child benefit, the Canada disability benefit and the guaranteed income supplement, which are already providing relief to millions of Canadians.

• (1630)

The government is committed to limiting pressure on everyday costs for Canadians. Budget 2025 outlined how we will spend less on government operations and cut waste so we can invest more in growing our economy and protecting essential programs and initiatives that make life more affordable. There are programs and initiatives like the national school food program, which we are making permanent so that it can continue providing meals for up to 400,000 children every year. We are renewing the Canada Strong pass to help families and young people travel and explore Canada for less, and we are launching automated federal benefits that will reach up to 5.5 million low-income Canadians for the 2028 tax year.

Bill C-19 also builds on measures we have introduced to lower costs for Canadians and protect essential programs like cutting taxes for 22 million middle-class Canadians, eliminating the GST for first-time homebuyers on new homes under \$1 million, lowering the GST for first-time homebuyers on new homes between \$1 million and \$1.5 million, and cancelling the federal consumer carbon tax.

Government Orders

Affordability measures, especially those related to food, require immediate support for Canadians. As previously mentioned, it is estimated that 12.6 million individuals and families would benefit from the new Canada groceries and essentials benefit, representing a material support to Canadians who need it the most while the government's plan to build the strongest economy in the G7 takes effect.

The government is focused on building a stronger economy to create more career opportunities and higher wages. In parallel, we are limiting cost pressures to make life more affordable. That is how we will empower more Canadians with greater certainty, security and prosperity, now and into the future.

I urge all hon. members to pass Bill C-19 without delay, so that we can ensure Canadians get this much-needed relief as soon as possible.

Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals say they are trying to help Canadians who need assistance because of the crisis that they have created in this country with affordability. We know that the cost of food and groceries has increased exponentially and that it is creating a real hardship for many Canadian families.

Does the member not realize that there is a much simpler way to address the problem than just another social program, and that the problem really could be resolved quite easily if the Liberals would be committed to eliminating the industrial carbon tax, the fuel standard tax and the front-of-package labelling tax, which are costing manufacturers a lot of money and being passed on to the consumer?

Ron McKinnon: Mr. Speaker, I would not agree with the causes of the high price for food that the hon. member mentioned. It is more realistic to understand that the high prices for food at this time are due more to tariffs, climate change and things like that. This program is not intended to be a magic bullet that will solve all the problems. This is a program that will help people to weather the storm while our other major undertakings take root and prosper.

• (1635)

[*Translation*]

Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette—Manawan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, of course, we support this measure, which targets the people who need it most. However, I have two questions.

First, why not make the payment monthly? Receiving the payment every three months could cause some people to accumulate credit card debt for three months, and they would have to pay interest on that. If they received a cheque every month, that could reduce the interest they pay on their credit cards. I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on that.

Second, the government presented its budget just a few months ago. Why did it not include this measure, which will cost several billion dollars, in its budget plan so that we could get a comprehensive picture of the public finances? We are talking about a deficit of \$78 billion, plus a few billion extra this year. Why did the government not include this measure in the budget?

[*English*]

Ron McKinnon: Mr. Speaker, I will refer to my predecessor, who answered the question about whether payments are monthly or quarterly. It is a practical matter of getting things out in an efficient and effective manner.

In terms of the overall budget that we presented before Christmas, it still has to be passed. It still has to go through all the steps it needs to go through. This is faster. This will allow us to deal with some of the intermediate problems that we are going to face over the coming months in a much quicker way.

Pauline Rochefort (Parliamentary Secretary to the Secretary of State (Rural Development), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate how my colleague for Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam outlined all the measures the government has encouraged to make life more affordable for Canadians. I am very interested in knowing how the citizens in his riding are responding to these measures.

Ron McKinnon: Mr. Speaker, I believe that my constituents are very happy with the results that we are producing. I have heard very solid and promising comments from people. They are very excited to see the outcome of the budget when it happens, and certainly, in the interim, to see measures like this take effect.

Kelly DeRidder (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite did a very good job of giving scenarios of who would get this credit. What was not mentioned, though, is that less than 30% of the population will actually be supported by this.

That being said, the government has looked to the opposition for support to pass this, which we will. Why was the same collaboration not extended to us, as the opposition, when we wanted to address the root cause of grocery prices, which would support 100% of Canadians by actually reducing grocery prices?

Ron McKinnon: Mr. Speaker, I would say that we are always open to collaboration with the opposition benches. We are looking for solutions for Canadians and moving things forward in a coherent and efficient manner.

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the question to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment is as follows: the hon. member for Riding Mountain, Finance.

Leslyn Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to seek unanimous consent to share my time with the member for Edmonton Southeast.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member have unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Leslyn Lewis: Mr. Speaker, I want to begin today not with statistics but with the lived experiences of people from my riding, Haldimand—Norfolk, and also from the residents of Canada.

Government Orders

A constituent recently told me about standing in the checkout line at the grocery store and slowly watching the price climb and climb. Knowing how much money she had in her bank account, she slowly started to put items back to save herself embarrassment. The items that she was putting back were not treats for the family or luxury items; they were basic food items she needed for sustenance.

A family shared that they stopped buying meat regularly. They eat chicken occasionally, and beef has become rare in their household of four. The change in their diet has not come by choice; they have had to adopt it out of necessity.

A single dad told me something that no parent should have to share: He eats less so that there's enough food for his kids to eat. When parents are skipping meals so that their children do not go hungry, something in our country is deeply wrong. It is not about families budgeting better or making lifestyle choices; it is about dignity.

A father called my office last week to tell a story, and he was in tears. He told us that he had a good job and income, but for the first time, his wife had to go to the food bank. The sense of shame that he felt because he was no longer fully able to provide for his family brought him to tears and to call my office to share his story.

Canadians are struggling to understand why life has become so unaffordable so quickly. Canadians were promised a dream that if they worked hard, they could earn a good living and at least be able to afford the basic necessities, such as food. They worked, planned, sacrificed and budgeted carefully, but still they are falling behind. When groceries become a breaking point, we are no longer talking about affordability; we are talking about survival.

The government has presented Bill C-19 as a solution to the affordability measure. However, Bill C-19 would send money after the prices of groceries have already risen. It would do nothing to lower grocery prices: It would not reduce the price of producing or transporting food, and it would not increase competition, which would lead to lower grocery prices. This bill merely treats affordability as a household income problem, not a cost of living problem.

The government falsely concludes that by spending a few dollars on Canadians through a rebate, the cost of living problem that was caused by inflationary spending and unnecessary fuel tax and industrial carbon tax will be resolved by these rebate cheques. Canadians are smart, so they know that this is not going to solve the problem. They know that a rebate does not make chicken cheaper, a benefit does not lower the cost of bread, and a top-up does not reduce the fuel cost embedded in every item on the grocery store's shelf.

People tell me plainly when they call my office that the money is gone before the month is even over. Families are left asking, "Why is food still expensive if the government promised to make food more affordable?" That question matters, because if it goes unanswered, it erodes public trust. The solution to food insecurity is to bring down the cost of food, plain and simple: Make food that we need for our daily survival more affordable.

• (1640)

Being able to afford food is human dignity. Let us speak honestly for a moment about what food insecurity does to the average person. It creates stress. It creates anxiety. It creates shame. Knowing they are struggling to feed themselves and their family members is something that can bring a person to tears, like that gentleman who called my office.

Parents do not talk openly about skipping meals; they hide it. Children feel the stress of survival when there is not enough food to go around. Even when parents are hiding it from them, the children know there is something happening in the household. Meals get smaller. Choices get narrower. Nutrition suffers. This is not just an economic issue. It is also a public health issue, a mental health issue, a social cohesion issue. No rebate can undo the damage that is caused to someone's dignity when they cannot afford to feed themselves and their family.

If we are serious about the food affordability crisis, we must be honest about the causes. Food prices are driven by energy and fuel costs that have excess taxation, such as the fuel standard tax and the industrial carbon tax. They are driven by transportation costs and taxes on the industry and also by regulatory burdens. They are driven by carbon charges embedded throughout the supply chain and also by weak domestic food-processing capacity. Every one of these costs shows up on the shelf and makes food more expensive, yet Bill C-19 removes none of these causes.

One of the quiet injustices of an approach that gives Canadians a food rebate, almost like giving them a food stamp, is that many struggling families get left out. Working families who are struggling often get nothing. Families who are not well off but earn just above the eligibility requirement receive no benefit. There are hard-working families and individuals who are doing everything right, yet they are still falling between the cracks. Canadians do not want handouts. For those Canadians seeking real affordability, a government rebate will not help them do better and be able to afford food, but permanently lowering food prices will have an immediate impact.

In closing, I will end the same way I began. We have a food affordability crisis. Parents are skipping meals. Families are cutting protein out of their diets, and Canadians are quietly putting food back on the shelves at the grocery stores. Canadians need relief that lasts. They want their dignity back, and they do not want their survival to be based on government subsidies. They want to live with dignity in a country they love. Canadians need better than rebates. They need lower prices, honest policy and solutions that address causes, not a band-aid solution or a temporary cheque that robs them of their dignity.

• (1645)

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga (London West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it does sound like my hon. colleague supports this measure and she is going to support it, because this is what Canadians want in this moment. Why would we spend more time discussing a bill we know we are going to support? Canadians need it right now. She just talked about the many people in her riding, even families, who do not even qualify for this measure. She understands the environment people are in right now.

Why wait instead of just voting for this bill so that it can move fast? Why are Conservatives so stuck on obstructing?

Leslyn Lewis: Mr. Speaker, we spend time on things that are important to Canadians. We spend time on explaining how things that impact their daily lives and their survival will play out so they can understand, because they pay our salaries. It is very important that we have a debate on real substantive issues, not just band-aid solutions. When people are going to food banks in the hundreds of thousands, when people's dignity is lost, it is important that we spend the time to get it right.

[*Translation*]

Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette—Manawan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have two questions for the member.

The government is proposing a measure that we welcome and support because it will really help people, but it is going to cost a lot of money. Why did the government not include that measure in the budget that was tabled just a few months ago so that we could see the overall fiscal plan? We were already talking about a \$78-billion deficit. This measure will add an extra \$3.1 billion for this year and nearly \$12 billion more over five years. Why does my colleague think that the government did not include this measure in the budget?

Also, my colleague touched on this at the beginning of her speech: Should these payments not be monthly so people have more cash flow, rather than going into debt over a longer period and incurring interest charges?

• (1650)

[*English*]

Leslyn Lewis: Mr. Speaker, these are very good questions, and that is why we are here discussing this issue. The hon. member asked why these payments were not made monthly. People call my office daily, telling us that at the end of the month they do not have enough for food. A rebate is not going to do it. A rebate is not going to be the solution.

Government Orders

This should have been something that was contemplated in the budget, because affordability measures are so important. For example, the industrial carbon tax is something that could easily fix the food affordability crisis if it was just removed, as we have asked for as Conservatives.

Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting. The Liberals always stand up and say that Conservatives are obstructing. I will remind our colleagues, as they heckle me, that the House does not belong to them. It belongs to the constituents of the 343 members of Parliament, those who voted us in to be their voices in the House. Regardless of what they want to say, we will ask the questions that we need to. We will do the due diligence.

I am hearing on the ground in Cariboo—Prince George that this benefit would essentially be just a coupon. The cost of groceries has gone through the roof. The Liberals are blind to this fact as they live in whatever fairy tale land they live in, but it is impacting our constituents immeasurably.

What are some of the things that my hon. colleague's constituents are saying on the doorsteps when she is back in her riding of Haldimand—Norfolk?

Leslyn Lewis: Mr. Speaker, my constituents find that when we have an authentic, genuine question that we are debating and members refer to it as obstructing, they are offended by the fact that we are not taking their concerns seriously. I have had people, and grown men, on the phone in tears because they cannot feed their families.

This is not an obstructionist issue. We have to get it right. We have to be there for Canadians. They are depending on us. It is a basic human right, a basic human dignity, to be able to feed our families and feed ourselves. We have to make sure that we spend the time to get this issue right.

Jagsharan Singh Mahal (Edmonton Southeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians do not measure government success by press conferences, talking points or rebranded programs. They measure success by what they see when they stand at the checkout line in their local grocery store.

In Edmonton Southeast, families tell me the same thing again and again: They used to worry about what they wanted to buy, but now they worry about what they can afford. Parents are putting fewer fresh items in their carts. Seniors on fixed incomes are stretching meals. Young people are skipping groceries to pay rent. Students are skipping meals altogether. These are not isolated stories. They are the realities of life under the Liberal government.

The Prime Minister himself said that he should be judged by the cost of groceries. By that standard, the government has failed.

Government Orders

Today we are debating Bill C-19, the so-called Canadian groceries and essentials benefit act. The Liberals are presenting this bill as a solution to the cost of living crisis. In reality, it is a temporary rebate meant to cover up a permanent problem created by the government.

Let us be clear about what Bill C-19 would do. It would expand the GST credit by 25% over the next five years and would add a one-time 50% top-up this June. Conservatives support relief for families that are struggling, but the House should not be pretending that mailing another cheque would solve the root cause of why groceries have been so expensive in the first place.

Justin Trudeau introduced a nearly identical policy in 2022, doubling the same tax credit. At the time, the Liberals promised it would help affordability; it did not. We know it did not because since 2022, this inflationary crisis has not stopped. Grocery prices kept climbing, and families kept falling behind. Here we are again with the same failed Liberal idea, rebranded under a new Liberal Prime Minister.

The problem is not that Canadians do not have enough rebates. The problem is that the Liberal government has driven food inflation out of control. Canada is now the food inflation capital of the G7. Food prices are rising faster here than in any other major advanced economy. Food inflation is now roughly twice as high as it is in the United States. Under the government, food costs are up 6.2% year over year. Grocery prices are up 5%, and restaurant prices are up 8.5%.

These are not abstract numbers. Canadians see it aisle by aisle, item by item, every time they shop. A GST rebate would not cancel out a 21% increase in ground beef or, worse, a 40% increase in coffee. It would not make infant formula more affordable for parents who are already stretched to the limit.

The government's approach is simple. It raises the costs with one hand, and then offers rebates with the other and pretends that it is helping. Every dollar the Prime Minister and the Liberal government spend comes from Canadian pockets, and Canadians are feeling it.

The Prime Minister admitted, when he announced this legislation, that he does not have a solution to stop food inflation. That should alarm everyone. Food inflation is not an accident. It is a direct result of Liberal policies, massive deficits, reckless spending and hidden taxes that drive up the cost of producing, transporting and selling food. The government is running a \$78-billion deficit. Government spending has increased by roughly \$90 billion. These inflationary deficits drive up the cost of everything, including groceries.

On top of that, the Liberals have layered tax after tax onto farmers, truckers and food processors. The industrial carbon tax raises costs for food producers. The fuel standard tax adds about 17¢ per litre to the price of gas, which drives up transportation costs. The Liberal food packaging tax increases costs at every step of the supply chain. Farmers pay more to grow food. Truckers pay more to ship it. Grocery stores pay more to keep their shelves stocked, and in the end, Canadian families pay more at the checkout.

• (1655)

The government claims to be helping Canadians, but its own policies are making food more expensive. The consequences are severe: A quarter of Canadian households are now considered food-insecure. Nearly 2.2 million people visited food banks every month last year. A recent food survey found that almost 30% of students are skipping meals because they cannot afford to eat. According to MNP, an accounting firm, 71% of Canadians expect their cost of living to rise in 2026, and 41% of Canadians say that they are \$200 or less away from bankruptcy.

This is not a functioning economy; this is a cost of living crisis. This crisis is not just hurting families; it is also hurting small businesses and local restaurants. Last year alone, 7,000 restaurants closed across Canada. This year another 4,000 are expected to shut their doors. These are family-run businesses. These are jobs in our communities. These are places where neighbours gather. They are disappearing because no one can afford to eat out and because operating costs have become unbearable under Liberal policies.

In Edmonton Southeast, local business owners tell me they want to keep prices affordable but cannot keep up with rising rent, rising fuel costs, rising taxes and rising food prices. The Liberals' answer is yet another rebate.

Conservatives believe Canadians deserve real solutions. We support measures that bring immediate relief, including the GST rebate announced in Bill C-19, but relief alone is not enough. We must fix the policies that caused this crisis. Conservatives have put forward clear, concrete proposals, and the Liberals have voted them down.

We would scrap the Liberal food packaging tax, eliminate the industrial carbon tax and the fuel standard tax that adds 17¢ per litre at the pump, and reverse inflationary deficits that drive up prices across the country. We would cut red tape for farmers so they could grow more food at lower cost, and boost competition in the grocery sector so Canadians can get better prices. We would lower the cost of growing, transporting and selling food, not subsidize the damage after the fact.

In short, Conservatives would lower prices permanently, not temporarily send cheques while inflation keeps rising. Instead, all that Canadians are getting from Liberals are temporary band-aid solutions. While Conservatives will support the bill, the bill itself is not enough, and we will continue to fight against inflationary Liberal policies and work for Canadians.

Government Orders

• (1700)

Dominique O'Rourke (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Guelph is the home of the Ontario Agricultural College and the Ontario Veterinary College. The University of Guelph is Canada's food university. Guelph is the home of Farm & Food Care Ontario, the OFA, Ontario Pork, Ontario Beef and the Grain Farmers of Ontario. We are the home of Cargill and Maple Leaf, with whose representatives I met earlier this week. We know food in Guelph.

My comment is that I am perplexed that the members opposite have voted against the productivity superdeduction in budget 2025 that will allow food processors to immediately deduct new equipment or new buildings. They voted against investments in infrastructure in our ports and rails, all things that improve our supply chain, so I would invite them to support trade expansion and all the measures that would really help improve our supply chain and drive down food prices.

Jagsharan Singh Mahal: Mr. Speaker, I did not hear a question in the member's comments. Again, my answer to the comments is that we as Conservatives believe in real solutions. We do not believe in the bandages that Liberals are the masters of putting on when they are out of touch with the real challenges that people face.

When they face those challenges at the door, the Liberals come up with rebates and other bandages to cover up the situation. This is not going to work. They have to listen to Canadians and their problems. I wish the member would go to her local grocery store, check out the prices and draw a comparison from the last five years. She would get the answer.

[Translation]

Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette—Manawan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is this: When the government implements measures like this one to reduce the tax burden, does my colleague prefer measures that target people with lower incomes, meaning those who need it most, or does he prefer measures that help everyone, such as the tax cut that was announced in Bill C-5 and included in the budget?

Speaking of which, what does my colleague think about the fact that this bill was not incorporated into last fall's budget?

[English]

Jagsharan Singh Mahal: Mr. Speaker, my colleague asked a valid question. The bill, as far as I understand, would cover fewer than 30% of Canadians who have been really struggling. Some families would not even be covered under its conditions. On top of that, it would increase the deficit by an additional \$12 billion. Nobody knows where that money would come from. Would the money be reprinted as in Justin Trudeau's time, or is there any plan B for the government?

With regard to the second part of my friend's question about why this was not added to the budget, the Liberals are in a better position to say why they did not disclose their intentions at that time.

• (1705)

Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last night I was out with the member for Winnipeg North at Carleton University. We were debating in front of

some students at a great event. I know that many members probably watched it on livestream while it was happening. During that debate, my colleague across the way was so eager to tell the students about how many programs the government has put in place, yet what the students reported to us in conversations before, after and during the debate is that they are struggling with the affordability of food, as well as with rent and with concerns about job opportunities.

It is striking that what Liberals are offering is, "We've got all these new programs," but the reality on the ground is that in the midst of that, food prices, the real pain students are experiencing, continue to go up.

What does the member think about the failure of the Liberals to actually solve the problem?

Jagsharan Singh Mahal: Mr. Speaker, that is the core issue. The Liberals are out of touch with reality. They are out of touch with the real issues Canadians are facing. Rather, they come up with rebates and other bandage solutions that their predecessors already tried and that failed. They still have not learned that lesson, and they want to keep on repeating those mistakes.

[Translation]

Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask for unanimous consent to split my time with my colleague from Côte-Nord—Kawawachikamach—Nitassinan.

The Deputy Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Jean-Denis Garon: Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to the debate and I can see that people here are getting worked up. The Liberals and the Conservatives are shouting at each other. I am surprised by that, because this motion was adopted unanimously. We adopted it at first and second readings of the bill, which was sent to committee. We are now at third reading. I think that we can offer legitimate criticisms of the government, supply chain management, taxation and all sorts of things, and I agree with some of those criticisms, but, in the context of this bill, I think that we all already agreed that we should help people in the very near future.

This measure has two components. The first is a 25% increase for several years in the GST rebate cheque that goes out every three months. The second component is a one-off cheque. The Minister of Finance and National Revenue is proposing to send a cheque to people before June because of the high cost of living and the high cost of groceries. There has been a dramatic increase in the cost of living. However, this may not be the ideal way to design such a policy. I think it would have been better if the government had permanently increased the GST rebate, but this is what the minister chose to do.

Government Orders

Yesterday, I put the minister on notice. As members know, I am an idealist. I am not cynical. I believe in human goodness. I told the minister that we were familiar with his one-off cheques. We all remember the \$500 cheque for seniors before the 2021 election. We remember the fake carbon rebate cheques in 2025. I asked him if his election signs would be ready when the cheques go out in June. He assures me that this is not the case. I hope we can believe him. I was pleased that he confirmed that. I think it is in the public interest. I am taking a chance and trusting a Liberal. Time will tell whether I was right. It is the beginning of a new year. We in the Bloc Québécois are full of good faith.

A number of things happened yesterday in committee when we were studying this bill. As my colleague from Joliette—Manawan noted several times, we asked the minister why he was not considering making the cheques monthly. As I pointed out in committee, economic theory suggests that this would be a good thing. The government is increasing the GST rebate cheques by quite a bit. It is getting to be quite a lot of money, because people buy groceries every week.

Earlier, I saw the member for Beauport—Limoilou get very emotional. He practically poured his heart out to us, saying that people need the money, that it is important they get the money and that the timing of the cheque is not that important. Why are OAS and GIS benefits paid out once a month? Why is it that the benefits that go to those who have the least cash in their pockets and who need it most urgently are paid out monthly? Why is this benefit, which is getting a name change to reflect its enhanced role, not being paid out on a monthly basis? The minister told me that it was too expensive to administer but, in the same breath, he said that his government is very happy because the money is automatically transferred into people's bank accounts. The Liberals need to think about that. I say this for the benefit of the hon. member for Beauport—Limoilou, because he has mentioned that two or three times.

People are going to get their money because we are unanimous. What we are saying is that the form of the transfer is important and we think it deserves some thought. These people spend their time telling us that we never make any suggestions, that all we do is complain. We are saying that they have done well but that the money needs to be paid out faster, more frequently, and then they turn around and tell us that the only thing that matters is getting money to the people and it does not matter how often they get their cheques.

When I was growing up, my father would sometimes tell me that I needed an attitude adjustment. He did not say that very often, because I did not often deserve it, but he would sometimes tell me that I had a bad attitude. In this case, the government has managed to get unanimous support, and yet it is still attacking us and yelling at us. I think this is a good time to suggest an attitude adjustment. That is my dad talking, and he is a really great guy.

We have to consider the cost of the measure, of course. This raises the question about seniors. For several years now, we have been calling for an end to the two classes of seniors. The retirement age in Canada is 65. However, seniors aged 65 to 74 do not receive the same OAS amount as those aged 75 and over. For a long time now, the minister has been saying that it is too expensive, that he cannot afford it and that helping people would bankrupt the government.

What he is not saying is that he has made a political choice not to help seniors and not to put an end to this discrimination. He says he cannot afford it.

• (1710)

However, today, he is announcing \$4.1 billion for next year for the one-time cheque and the payments. The measure would cost about \$3.9 billion or \$4 billion. The minister is confirming that not helping seniors, particularly by not ending this discrimination, is a deliberate political choice. The Liberals will have to take responsibility for this as of today because they have given us the proof.

Yesterday, in committee, the minister criticized the opposition and did not answer questions. I thought he was quite harsh on my Conservative colleague who asked him a question. I do not recall the province in question, and the minimum wage differs from one province to the next. However, my Conservative colleague asked the minister whether, in his view, two parents earning minimum wage who have three children and who receive family benefits would be eligible for the cheque. The minister looked through his notes, he looked through his things, he had sticky notes everywhere. She replied for him that the answer is no. Although we agree with the measure, it is appropriate to criticize how it is being carried out so we can improve it for next time.

The minister started attacking the opposition and refusing to answer questions. University colleagues of mine who were watching the committee meeting asked me why we allowed a minister to behave like that instead of answering questions, considering our parliamentary privilege. The minister went on the attack, saying that we never propose anything. He told us something worth remembering though, especially coming from that minister. He told us that we never showed interest in the long term, that the only thing we cared about was the thing right in front of our noses, and that we did not give a second thought to the long term.

I asked him a question. Last night, in committee, I reminded him that when he was the industry minister, he promised us that the government would attract foreign grocery chains to Canada, because there were only five here. I asked him where we could find the new chain that the government had convinced to set up shop. He replied that the problem in Canada is that shopping centre leases contain exclusivity clauses, that he had abolished them in his legislation and that that was why there were no new grocery stores.

Canada's Minister of Finance believes that there is an oligopoly in the grocery sector—everyone make a note of this—because there is a shortage of shopping centres in Canada. According to the minister, grocery stores do not want to have a storefront, they do not want to buy buildings, they do not do business with real estate trusts. No, they swear by our malls. When the minister goes to the United States, he tells these companies to come to Canada, and they tell him they do not like our malls. That is what the Minister of Finance of Canada, a G7 country, said.

Government Orders

I asked the minister to name a single measure the government could implement to improve competition in Canada's food retail sector. Not only did he not answer, but he came back and told us that we are not interested in the long term, when in fact, if there is one thing that really develops over the long term, it is competition. That is long-term work. We are not being short-sighted.

I pressed the minister again on this point, and how did he respond? He had a hard time and it took him several seconds. He rambled for a while and ended by saying that he would ask the Competition Bureau to be vigilant. Canada's Minister of Finance was saying that we, the opposition members, are just whining and that we are not interested in the long term.

In 1984, the year I turned two and the member for Bécancour—Nicolet—Saurel—Alnôbak was first elected, there were 13 major grocery store chains in Canada. Today, there are five, and I am being generous by including Walmart and Costco. In the regions, in our villages, there are few options nearby, especially for people who do not have a car and who cannot get around easily. Today, there are five. That is what the minister told us while he was saying that we were not interested in the long term.

Yes, we want to help people. Yes, we know it is urgent. However, this government suffers from a serious lack of vision, as I demonstrated today.

• (1715)

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to hear my colleague talk about how important the long term is. I am also pleased to hear that the Bloc will support us in the short term to help people who need it right now.

As for the long term, we know that climate change has an impact on food prices. However, on December 3, when we voted on whether to implement a national strategy for flood and drought forecasting, the member voted against it, as did his Bloc Québécois colleagues. I asked his colleagues questions about it yesterday, and they raised the issue of a supposed infringement on provincial jurisdiction. However, on June 5, 2024, the same member, who was present in the House, voted in favour of the same bill, as did all Bloc members. I looked it up.

I have one question. What happened between 2024 and 2025 to make improving flood and drought prevention in this country problematic somehow? We know that it can have an impact, particularly on the cost of food.

Jean-Denis Garon: Mr. Speaker, that is quite the question. My colleague is referring to the bill introduced by the member for Terrebonne, which did not amend any section of any act. The purpose of the bill was to have Ottawa do what it is already doing.

In my riding, the people of Sainte-Marthe-sur-le-Lac have experienced flooding. The Liberals wanted the people of Sainte-Marthe-sur-le-Lac to have a nice app to let them know that it was raining when there was already 10 feet of water in their homes.

What is step number one when talking about climate change? Do not buy pipelines. Tax carbon. Make sure people pay the right price for pollution. Take action. We call that scientific consensus.

My colleague will soon be defending his doctoral thesis. He must know about this. It is called scientific consensus. That is what we should do instead of engaging in petty partisanship like this: not buy pipelines.

[*English*]

Pat Kelly (Calgary Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last night at the finance committee, the member put some very good questions to the finance minister, and his responses were shameful. The minister did not answer, really, any opposition MPs' questions during his entire hour-long appearance. It was a shameful display from a minister unwilling to answer questions and explain his bill to Canadians.

I want the member to have a chance again to talk about the commitment the minister made that he would bring stability to the prices of groceries. He said that in 2023. Nothing has happened. He was asked pointed questions about competition, which he failed to answer.

[*Translation*]

Jean-Denis Garon: Mr. Speaker, we know that no one can be asked to do the impossible. We cannot ask the minister to move mountains, although the minister has an unfortunate tendency to create expectations that are impossible to fulfill.

It is true that the Conservatives questioned him about this in committee yesterday. I say this in a non-partisan way. It is a fact that tensions sometimes rise in committees. It is a fact that the questions are sometimes difficult, although at times the ministers ask for it.

When a minister avoids answering a question, wastes time or tries to prevent a member from the other side from asking questions, the result is frustration and a disservice to democracy. We sometimes get the impression that we are being denied our privilege as parliamentarians to ask questions, and situations like that can sometimes create unnecessary tension.

Regardless of my opinion that some of the Conservatives' questions yesterday were not very good, I think that the Minister of Finance did not always act in the service of democracy. I hold him in very high regard, and I think he can do better.

• (1720)

Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette—Manawan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Mirabel for his eloquent speech. He addressed a number of topics related to the bill. I would like to hear his thoughts on a few things.

First, he pointed out that we are in a kind of oligopoly when it comes to food retailers. He noted that their numbers have declined over the past few decades. How is that putting pressure on people's grocery bills?

Government Orders

Second, the Bloc Québécois has often suggested increasing the GST credit. Can my colleague expand on that a little more? Finally, why was this measure not included in the budget?

Jean-Denis Garon: Mr. Speaker, very quickly, at the height of the inflation crisis in 2022, when inflation was at 6%, 7%, 8%, the Bloc Québécois had called for that. We also called for the frequency of the cheques to be increased.

At the time, the minister said that was inappropriate. All of a sudden, for the same reasons, it became appropriate. As the saying goes, it helps to sleep on it. The minister needed several hundred nights to sleep on it. We congratulate him for seeing common sense.

The Minister of Finance has reformed the Competition Act, but I think it should have been done a long time ago. Indeed, Canada has a serious competition problem in the retail sector, but also throughout the entire supply chain.

Marilène Gill (Côte-Nord—Kawawachikamach—Nitassinan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak following my colleague from Mirabel. I plan to take a slightly different approach in my speech, in that my speech will focus more on my riding.

My colleague talked about how this measure could look like an election gimmick. He even asked the Minister of Finance if he had his election signs ready. I want to echo what my colleague was saying, because there are many ways the government could help the entire population, and the unilateral policies look a lot like a marketing ploy on the part of the government, which is boasting about the fact that it is going to help some 12 million Canadians and Quebecers.

For years, everyone has been hammering home the point that people are struggling to make ends meet and put food on the table. Whether in Canada or Quebec, the situation is different depending on the community. Not all communities have the same level of wealth. Not all families have the same income or the same salary. Not all of them live in big cities. My colleague mentioned Costco and Walmart. In a riding like mine, sometimes people do not even have a grocery store within a three-hour drive. I will let my colleagues figure out how expensive that can be and what it means for folks in Côte-Nord—Kawawachikamach—Nitassinan.

That being said, a number of things in my riding could have had a considerable impact. When we talk about the cost of living, of course, the whole issue of groceries comes to mind. Now, we are being told that GST credit increase, as shown, will not be available to everyone. Furthermore, it will not be available quickly. People will have to wait three months. However, when people need money, when they want to eat, there is no time to waste. If people want to make a budget, they need to know how much money they are going to receive so they can stretch it out for the time it takes. I am really talking about stretching it out. I know that the election campaign was about 10 months ago, but I want to show how capable we are of acting fairly quickly to resolve certain situations, in ways other than some marketing stunt like this, even though we agree and we want to put more money in the pockets of Canadians and Quebecers. That is certain.

The fact remains that there are other ways to help. My colleague mentioned the issue of seniors, for example. Some of them are in vulnerable situations. They are still being discriminated against by the government, yet the government refuses to correct that mistake, its discrimination. That would be a good start. Any change in the tax system that would allow seniors to work would be welcome. Many want to work, but feel that they cannot because any money they make—which could help them make ends meet and put food on the table—would get clawed back. That is one example for seniors. I am in a constituency where there are many seniors in vulnerable situations, living with the challenges that come with rural constituencies like mine. People have to travel 300, 200 or 100 kilometres to get services that will never match what is available in large centres.

When it comes to employment insurance, I say the same thing every time: We need a reform. Once again, the government has been bragging about how it will undertake a reform. It has been 10 years, now going on 11. The Liberals have said in every one of their election platforms that they were going to reform the employment insurance system. It is getting ridiculous. Again, EI is a little bit different everywhere, but in a riding like mine, where many people rely on seasonal industries and there are many seasonal workers, a reform is necessary. These people cannot make it through the whole year.

What the government is doing is preventing people from living in and occupying certain areas. At a time when we are talking about sovereignty and matters of national security, the government is displacing people from their land and driving them out of rural regions like mine. That is one way of doing things, and it kills industries. It can kill industries like the fishery, for example. It harms tourism, of course. The forestry industry is also affected. We should not be looking down on these industries because they are what help communities like mine thrive. Summer is really difficult these days, and I will talk more about the forestry industry later. There is really a need.

● (1725)

Obviously, we would like this to be developed, including secondary and tertiary processing, so that everything does not need to be sent out and people can work all year round. When you live in a region like the Lower North Shore, for example, where there are not necessarily roads connecting every village, where there are fishers with a few processing plants, it is hard to develop while in a constant state of survival. Food prices are not the same as in Montreal or even in certain parts of my riding. We are already facing huge challenges. People do not have the money to invest and grow. They need a big helping hand, more than just a GST rebate.

I said I would come back to forestry. The same goes for the forestry sector. In my riding, some communities are emptying out. It may be an exaggeration to say that entire towns are emptying out, but in places like Port-Cartier, where Arbec is located, and Baie-Comeau, where Domtar is located, hundreds of jobs have been lost, including indirect jobs related to these activities.

Government Orders

There are jobs where the government is telling workers that it will not help them at all. These people have no money left in their pockets. They may have to leave the region. Some have already quit and left. The economy is being destabilized right now, particularly in the forestry sector in my region. It is happening in other places also and some of my colleagues are seeing it as well. This is not helping people put food on the table. People are leaving the regions because of a lack of measures. The government is unable to stimulate the economy. It is not even able to maintain the precarious situations that existed before. Once again, a GST credit will not do any good.

Instead, why not implement a program to temporarily keep workers on the job until disputes are resolved, like the tariffs imposed by the U.S. or the CUSMA renegotiations that will be taking place later on? We remain very vulnerable, and this is yet another blow.

I mentioned EI, seniors and forestry. I would also add temporary foreign workers to the list. It may seem strange to bring this up now, but while it was not a question of cheques being taken away or reducing GST credits, the measures announced by the government in 2024 are having a real impact on our region. The people who came here to work helped companies develop. Some of these businesses, in certain sectors, are not even sure whether they will be able to stay open. They may have to close down or slow down production, simply because they can no longer manage.

The Bloc Québécois is asking for something very simple. Earlier, someone said that all the Bloc does is criticize. That is not true. We have made proposals. Why not put a moratorium on the temporary foreign worker cap? That would give them time to make other arrangements. Can we have discussions about what could be done to allow these people, who are already well established in our regions, to remain there? Our population is declining. I want people to be able to stay in my region, but the message we are sending them is that fishing and forestry are bad.

Nothing is being done for seniors. Like I said earlier, my riding has a lot of seniors. As for young people, the same thing goes for them. Income tax credits could be provided to help young people. Nothing was said about housing. All of these things are interconnected. There is more to it than groceries alone. What people spend on groceries is money not spent on housing. There are a lot of factors involved.

I could also mention Nutrition North Canada. People forget that in some places, especially in indigenous communities, in northern regions like mine or in remote areas, food prices are already extremely high, and nothing has been resolved. Nothing was resolved before we started talking about it more in connection with certain urban or non-indigenous communities. Things are still the same in my riding: In the north, in indigenous communities, everything is already extremely expensive. No help is on the way, and prices keep going up for them too. Some programs should be reviewed. Once again, the GST cannot fix these situations. It is a band-aid solution, a marketing ploy.

I also talked about indigenous issues. I am now the indigenous affairs critic. Perhaps some people forget about these communities too often, because food insecurity affects them, too. I would like everyone to really pay attention to this. I said that it affects those

communities, and it has for a long time. This is nothing new. The housing we are talking about is really not a new issue for them either.

The Bloc Québécois supports a measure like this one, but we believe that the government can do better. In any case, we can see that it is increasing its deficit by \$3 billion, an amount that will climb to \$12 billion, simply to get some good press. Meanwhile, people have basic needs, such as housing and food, and they need help with that now. The Bloc Québécois is proposing solutions to achieve that.

• (1730)

Caroline Desrochers (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing and Infrastructure, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have a lot of respect for my colleague. I know she works hard for her constituents.

I am a bit surprised to hear her say that we are not doing anything about affordability when her party keeps blocking measures that the government is putting in place to try and make life more affordable for people.

It is a shame that she calls the Canada groceries and essentials benefit a marketing ploy. I think she is forgetting about all the other measures it includes, like investments in the agri-food sector to increase production. I was pleased to hear her say that the Bloc Québécois was going to support this measure.

Now, the big question is this: Will the Bloc Québécois support the budget implementation act, which will really make a difference in people's lives?

Marilène Gill: Madam Speaker, as an elected official, I believe that we can make a difference every day in our work for our constituents, for Quebecers, for Canadians. Of course, we will see what happens when it comes time to vote. I think that sometimes voting against certain measures also sends a signal to do better. It is one way of sending that message.

Obviously, we are willing to admit when a measure is good. At the same time, measures should be designed to reach as many people as possible. There are other targeted measures that could also be worth looking at. I do not think it is going to solve anything. That is basically the message I was sending. I understand that there is good faith, but I do not think this is going to solve the issue.

Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, obviously, the price of groceries is very high because of Liberal policies. It is higher than in other countries. In our opinion, the industrial carbon tax has contributed significantly to the increase in grocery prices. I would like to hear my colleague's opinion on this tax. Does the Bloc Québécois support our position that this tax should be eliminated?

Government Orders

Marilène Gill: Madam Speaker, I might actually turn that question back over to my colleague. I agree that prices are high. For me, the important thing is to find a solution. If building pipelines and increasing oil and gas consumption means that we pay a carbon tax, I imagine that the more appropriate thing would be to reduce that consumption and production so that we do not have to pay the tax.

Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech and for her excellent work. She raised a number of important points, and I want to pick up on a few of them. Of course we agree that this GST credit was necessary. However, I think we need more meaningful measures, which are being discussed in our ridings.

I would like to give my colleague the opportunity to talk more about the issues the Liberals are dragging their feet on, such as real EI reform. I know she can attest to the fact that, at the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, the Liberals do not really want this reform, which was proposed some time ago. It could really help some people and would be much more transformative than the GST holiday.

I would also like to come back to the issue of foreign workers. I know that a group of chambers of commerce was here earlier this week to talk about how essential these workers are to supporting businesses in the regions. I will give my colleague the opportunity to talk about these two measures, among others.

• (1735)

Marilène Gill: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question. I would also like to commend the organization Action-Chômage Côte-Nord, which is working tirelessly to make elected officials aware of the need to modernize the Employment Insurance Act. My colleague Louise Chabot, who is no longer a member of Parliament, introduced a bill in November 2024 to completely overhaul EI. We do not need to have the Bloc Québécois's name on it, though. If the government wants to take it on and amend the act, the bill is ready. The consultations have been done. We are ready.

However, I must say that this is an excellent example of how the measure fails to meet the needs of people back home who work in seasonal industries. The government is talking about issuing a cheque for a small amount every three months. However, people cannot make it through the year because they cannot work, there is no investment and they do not have access to EI. I must say, if I could choose, I would rather have support that would help me feed my family year-round.

Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Madawaska—Restigouche.

I am pleased to speak today in support of Bill C-19, an important measure that aims to provide Canadians with a tangible way to cope with the cost of living, particularly the cost of groceries and essentials. This bill will amend the Income Tax Act to increase the maximum annual amounts of the GST credit by 50% for the 2025-26 benefit year. It also provides for an additional 25% increase in these amounts starting in the 2025-26 benefit year, for a period of five years.

The need for the new Canada groceries and essentials benefit is simple and clear. It will help more than 12 million Canadians afford everyday essentials, starting in the spring of 2026. We know that lower-income Canadians are struggling to absorb the rising cost of food and other basic expenses. Prices remain too high, and this reality is evident in all our communities.

The cost of living is a major concern for Canadians, and no less for our government. For us, affordability is a key priority of action, and we are constantly on the lookout for concrete solutions to address the challenges confronting households. The GST credit increase and this new benefit are other examples of our determination, in an uncertain world, to focus on things within our control by taking direct action to put more money back in the pockets of Canadians and make life more affordable.

This benefit builds on the existing GST credit to provide additional support amounting to \$11.7 billion over six years. Our goal is to provide a one-time top-up as soon as possible in the spring of 2026. This one-time payment alone will deliver \$3.1 billion in additional support to individuals and families already receiving the GST credit. Starting in July 2026, the 5-year 25% increase in the Canada grocery and essentials benefit will deliver \$8.6 billion in additional support between 2026 and 2031. In all, these measures amount to \$402 additional dollars for a single person with no children, \$527 for a couple with no children and \$805 for a couple with two children. These amounts are intended to directly offset the increased cost of groceries, which has outpaced the overall rate of inflation ever since the pandemic.

To illustrate the impact this measure will have in concrete terms, a single senior with \$25,000 in net income would receive a one-time top-up of \$267 plus a longer-term increase of \$136 for the 2026-27 benefit year, for a total increase of \$402. In total, this person would receive \$950 for the 2026-27 benefit year. Similarly, a couple with two children with \$40,000 in net income would receive a one-time top-up of \$533 plus an increase of \$272 for a total increase of \$805. In total, this family would receive \$1,890 for the 2026-27 benefit year.

After the one-time top-up payment is made in the spring of 2026, eligible families and individuals will receive the enriched regular payments as of July 2026. These payments will be made at the start of each quarter to permit timely access to the funds to help families with day-to-day expenses.

• (1740)

These amounts will be in addition to existing benefits like the Canada child benefit, the Canada disability benefit and the guaranteed income supplement.

Government Orders

It is important to note that recipients will not have to apply to receive these additional payments. However, they will need to have filed their 2024 tax return to receive the one-time payment and their 2025 tax return to receive the increased payments starting in July 2026.

In my riding of Alfred-Pellan, this measure will have a very real impact. Alfred-Pellan is home to many families, workers, newcomers and seniors who live alone. These are hard-working people who contribute to the vitality of our community and who are telling us very clearly that the cost of groceries is putting increasing pressure on their budgets. For these households, a few hundred extra dollars can have a real and immediate impact.

I also want to mention the other important measures announced by the Prime Minister in conjunction with the announcement for the Canada groceries and essentials benefit. These measures are part of a comprehensive approach to address food insecurity, support farmers and strengthen supply chains.

They include setting aside \$500 million from the strategic response fund to help businesses address the costs of supply chain disruptions without passing those costs on to Canadians at the checkout line.

These measures also include creating a \$150-million food security fund for small and medium enterprises and the organizations that support them, as well as providing \$20 million to the local food infrastructure fund to ease immediate pressures with food banks.

In addition, we are taking measures to lower the cost of food production, such as accelerated depreciation for greenhouse buildings and the development of a national food security strategy to tackle the root causes of food insecurity by strengthening domestic food production and improving access to affordable, nutritious food.

The cost of groceries and essentials is still too high. Too many Canadians are still struggling to put food on the table. Affordability pressures, particularly those associated with food, demand an immediate response. That is why our government is taking action through concrete, responsible solutions to make life more affordable.

The new Canada groceries and essentials benefit will deliver real help to thousands upon thousands of Canadians. We estimate that 12.6 million individuals and families will receive this benefit, which provides material support where it is most needed. I therefore urge all members to support Bill C-19 in order to offer tangible relief to Canadians.

• (1745)

Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry—Soulanges—Huntingdon, BQ): Madam Speaker, I listened carefully to my colleague's speech, and I think he knows full well that the Bloc Québécois will support Bill C-19. We heard from a lot of members of my party who have indicated that we will be supporting this bill.

There is one issue that keeps coming up that I am really concerned about. We get a lot of calls in our riding offices from people who say that they need more income to be able to meet their obligations and pay their monthly bills. I am wondering whether my col-

league thinks that the measure would have been even more effective if the payments were made monthly instead of quarterly. Many people are borrowing money or living off their credit cards so that they can pay the bills.

If the GST credit was paid every month, it might better support people who live at home and who really struggle to make ends meet at the end of the month. Does my colleague not agree that it would be better to issue the payments monthly rather than quarterly?

Angelo Iacono: Madam Speaker, this bill is in addition to the Canadian dental care plan, \$10-a-day child care, Canada's national school food program and the middle-class tax cuts. This is not an isolated measure. It is part of a coherent plan to improve affordability. That is the important thing. The important thing is not when the amount will be paid, but that an amount will be paid, whether quarterly or monthly.

The important thing is that the Government of Canada is taking action to meet a vital need.

[*English*]

Hon. Ruby Sahota (Secretary of State (Combatting Crime), Lib.): Madam Speaker, a lot of comments have been made about the essentials benefit as though it is the government's only measure. I want to hear some more insight into what the long-term measures in the bill consist of.

[*Translation*]

Angelo Iacono: Madam Speaker, this support, this help, will make a big difference for people in need. It is not just for food banks. It can also help pay rent or other expenses. It really meets a need for all vulnerable families. It is clear that this is going to help 12 million Canadians.

The important thing is that there is support that will help 12 million Canadians. The important thing is that Canadians will get to decide how they will spend the money to meet their needs.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague how today's announcement regarding Bill C-19 fits into a broader strategy to address the cost of living in Canada. In other words, how will it help Canadians deal with the rising cost of living and how will it strengthen food security? This is not a stand-alone measure. It is part of a plethora of other measures that really help Canadians.

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

Government Orders

Angelo Iacono: Madam Speaker, Bill C-19 is not ideological. It is pragmatic. It puts money in the pockets of Canadians who need it quickly and efficiently.

This is not about scoring points. It is about who is prepared to deliver results for Canadian families. We are taking action, not leaving Canadians to suffer economic consequences.

• (1750)

[English]

Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, when we are talking about food costs, we have to look at the corporate profits. I know big grocery stores are making big profits.

Where I live, in coastal British Columbia, when it comes to fish and independent fish harvesters, a lot of the quota licences are held by a handful of fishers. We call them slipper skippers or armchair fishers because they hold the licences and then lease them out to fishers, who do not actually make very much money. As well, the consumer ends up paying more money.

Does my colleague agree that this model needs to be changed, that anybody out fishing should be making the profit and that this would lower prices for consumers at the end of the day?

[Translation]

Angelo Iacono: Madam Speaker, hundreds of thousands of Quebeckers, including many seniors, will benefit directly from this measure. In Laval, in Alfred-Pellan, single seniors will receive up to \$950 for the 2026-27 fiscal year.

A refusal to approve this assistance on ideological grounds would be difficult to explain to Quebeckers and Canadians who are struggling to pay for groceries.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Madam Speaker, today we are discussing an important bill that will roll out the Canada groceries and essentials benefit. This benefit is based on the existing GST credit. It will put more money in the pockets of Canadians who need it most. People with low or modest incomes will see an increase in the amount of money they receive. We are doing this because we recognize that there is a real need to help people.

When I travel around my constituency, people talk to me about the cost of living. It is a top issue for Canadians. As a government, we have a duty to listen and take action to meet people's needs. That is why the objective of this measure is to provide immediate assistance to those who need it most. It is part of another package of measures we have put in place, in the 2025 budget and over the past few years, to help Canadians cope with the rising cost of living.

If we really want to have a long-term impact, we need to address the root causes that are making groceries more expensive today. I am very pleased that our government has announced it intends to develop a food security strategy. The goal is to increase domestic food production and ensure that more of the food on our plates comes from Canada. I would love to see more chicken from Upper Madawaska, more potatoes from Grand Falls and more vegetables from growers like Légumier du Madawaska or Jardins de Georges

in Saint-Quentin on my plate. To do that, we need to create incentives to help our food businesses.

Why is it important to reduce our dependence on international imports? When we look at the causes of food inflation, we see that there are a number of factors that go beyond Canada's borders. I am thinking in particular of disruptions to supply chains around the world that may be caused by the post-pandemic context, but also by global conflicts happening around the world. I am also thinking of the tariff disputes that are affecting supply chains and the cost of food. Also, when we import a lot of our food, like most of our produce, which comes from abroad in the winter because of our climate, fluctuations in exchange rates will have a significant impact on the price of groceries. In short, if we really want to address the root causes of rising grocery prices, we need to improve food security and help Canadian businesses increase their production.

Given the tariff war, we have earmarked \$500 million in the strategic response fund to help food sector businesses cope with tariff shocks. The aim is to help these businesses avoid passing on the financial impact of tariffs to consumers at grocery store checkouts. Similarly, we have earmarked \$150 million in the regional tariff response initiative to support the food sector.

As we develop our strategy, we will also review the rules surrounding unit product labelling in grocery stores. Our goal is to help Canadians make informed grocery choices and give them a good idea of the price they will pay at the checkout. We will also review competition rules. In particular, we will ensure that the Competition Bureau has more oversight over the activities of food sector businesses. Why are we doing this? It is because fair competition ultimately benefits consumers by creating downward pressure on prices.

We will also introduce tax incentives to encourage the construction of more greenhouses in Canada. As I mentioned earlier, we face a challenge here in Canada in that, with the winter, we cannot produce as many fruits and vegetables as we would like throughout the year. We want more greenhouses so that we can produce food all 12 months of the year here at home. More specifically, we will be rolling out immediate expensing for greenhouses acquired on or after November 4, 2025, and that become available for use before 2030.

This is a whole suite of measures. More measures are coming that will ensure that Canada has a proper food security strategy to address rising food costs. This is a top priority for Canadians, and it is also a priority for our government to respond to the challenges caused by soaring prices.

Government Orders

If we want to strengthen Canadians' purchasing power in the long term, it is important to strengthen the Canadian economy. Last spring, we were elected with a mandate to make the Canadian economy stronger, more resilient and unified.

• (1755)

From day one, we got down to work. We eliminated the federal barriers to interprovincial trade. Our Prime Minister travelled around the world to forge new trade partnerships with different countries and to attract foreign investment to Canada. We also included tax incentives in budget 2025 to encourage investment. For example, entrepreneurs who want to buy equipment to boost their productivity will be able to deduct more pieces of equipment on their tax returns. We also included various measures in budget 2025 to encourage innovation, such as the enhancement of the scientific research and experimental development tax incentive program. These are practical measures that increase our Canadian businesses' productivity and thus strengthen our economy.

We also announced our buy Canadian policy because we believe that the federal government must be its own best customer. We have a lot of purchasing power, and we want to use that power to benefit Canadian businesses. In practical terms, that means government investments in infrastructure. We announced a whole series of historic investments in infrastructure and housing in budget 2025, and we want to prioritize Canadian materials, such as our softwood lumber and steel. Softwood lumber is an important industry in my riding of Madawaska—Restigouche because it is at the heart of our local economy. As a government, we feel it is important to be there for the industry when it is struggling. That is why we implemented a strategic response fund to help softwood lumber companies deal with the current tariff crisis.

Why am I talking today about the need to strengthen the Canadian economy and build a stronger economy? The idea is that a stronger economy benefits everyone. With a stronger economy, all Canadians will have a shot at better career and employment opportunities, higher wages and therefore increased purchasing power. All the work we are doing to transform and strengthen the Canadian economy is for the benefit of all Canadians so that, in the medium and long term, everyone can increase their purchasing power.

Today, we are discussing the Canada groceries and essentials benefit, which is a measure based on income. I would like to mention an initiative that we put in place in budget 2025 that will help ensure that the money we are offering truly makes it into the pockets of Canadians who need it most.

We have a problem right now, which is that millions of low-income Canadians do not file an income tax return, often because of a lack of resources or support or out of the mistaken belief that they do not need to file if they have a low income. As a result, millions of Canadians are missing out on essential federal benefits that they are entitled to. I am thinking here of the new Canada groceries and essentials benefit in particular, but also of the Canada child benefit, the Canada workers' benefit and all of the other income-related federal benefits.

The solution we came up with was to introduce automatic federal benefits starting in the 2026 tax year. This program will be phased in and fully implemented by 2028. This will help an estimated 5.5

million Canadians. We are talking about people who often have very low incomes; these benefits will significantly improve their lives. The people affected will first have the opportunity to review a pre-filled income tax return and confirm whether the information is correct. Then, the Canada Revenue Agency will be able to automatically submit a tax return on their behalf. Of course, if they want to file their own tax return, they can do so. This measure is really targeted to help people who are not currently filing a tax return and therefore losing access to essential benefits that can help meet their needs.

Lastly, I want to mention that the benefit that will be implemented by Bill C-19 is part of a whole suite of measures to help Canadians deal with the cost of living. I am thinking in particular of the middle-class tax cut that we announced at the beginning of our mandate last spring. I am also thinking of the national school food program, which we are making permanent in budget 2025, the Canada child benefit, the affordable child care program, the Canadian dental care plan and all the other social measures we have put in place over the past few years.

• (1800)

Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry—Soulanges—Huntingdon, BQ): Madam Speaker, as always, I greatly appreciated the speech by my colleague across the floor. It is a pleasure to hear him speak. He is a new MP, and I honestly think that he has learned a lot, very quickly.

I know that my colleague is a thorough and hard-working member of Parliament who knows his files. In his speech, he said that budget measures had been announced to help people. I wonder why, three months after the budget was tabled, a budget measure is being introduced in a separate bill. My colleague is well aware that the Standing Committee on Finance is currently studying Bill C-15, which implements the budget that was presented.

Why did his government not include this measure in its budget three months ago?

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: Madam Speaker, the cost of living and affordability are top concerns for Canadians. We want to listen to Canadians and meet their needs on an ongoing basis.

Government Orders

In budget 2025, we implemented a number of measures that directly address the issue of the cost of living. I am thinking of the middle-class tax cut, the school food program becoming permanent, and the investments we will be making in infrastructure, including affordable housing. Budget 2025 already includes a whole suite of measures to directly address the cost of living. I hope we will see it back in the House very soon so we can pass it at third reading.

With respect to the measure we are currently studying, we brought it forward because we realized that people needed help right now. Budget 2025 includes several measures to transform and strengthen the Canadian economy and enhance purchasing power in the long term. In the meantime, we wanted to make sure that Canadians got help right now. This is yet another measure that will put money back in the pockets of Canadians right away.

[*English*]

Chak Au (Richmond Centre—Marpole, CPC): Madam Speaker, once again, we have seen this before. The Liberal government is trying to address a structural problem by providing short-term relief measures. As we have seen in the past, when these kinds of measures are temporary and short-lived, they do not help the cost of living. While these programs are being offered, the cost of living is still rising.

I want to challenge the government to provide one example of these kinds of measures creating long-term, sustainable and measurable reductions in grocery prices. If this has not worked before, why would the government believe that this time it would work?

[*Translation*]

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: Madam Speaker, I would like to remind the member that his party supports Bill C-19, from what I understand, and I think it is a welcome measure that will receive unanimous support in the House.

My colleague talks about structural problems. In fact, I would say that a bigger structural problem is our Conservative colleagues' unwillingness to help Canadians in need. Every time we propose measures to help Canadians cope with the cost of living, our official opposition colleagues vote them down. We want to make the school food program permanent, but they oppose it. That in itself is not surprising, because their leader has been opposing it for years and has been saying that the school food program will serve to feed the bureaucracy rather than the children. I would invite my opposition colleagues to visit schools and see how this program is really making a difference. More than 400,000 children now have access to healthy meals in the morning.

The Conservatives opposed the Canadian dental care plan and the affordable child care program. Speaking of the affordable child care program, one of the first speeches given by the Leader of the Opposition in 2005 was to oppose public funding for child care. When it comes to structural problems, I would say that the bigger problem is our Conservative colleagues' unwillingness to help Canadians in need.

• (1805)

Caroline Desrochers (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing and Infrastructure, Lib.): Madam Speaker, day after day, the opposition parties tell us that we are not doing enough

on affordability. It seems a bit ironic to me that both Conservative Party and Bloc Québécois members are constantly voting against the measures we are putting in place to make life more affordable for Canadians.

The tax cut for 22 million Canadians, the national school food program for children, our investments in affordable housing, the automatic payments that my colleague talked about, and removal of the GST for first-time homebuyers all come to mind. All of these measures are part of the budget implementation act that we are trying to put forward and that members of the opposition are trying to block in a parliamentary committee by playing procedural games.

I would like my colleague to tell me what impact these shenanigans are having on the people in his riding due to the fact that we are unable to pass the budget and they are unable to access these affordability measures.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: Madam Speaker, I think that everyone who cares deeply about Canadians should work to pass this budget, which will tackle infrastructure needs, help with the cost of living and address the housing shortage.

We are at a critical moment in Canadian history. We want to transform the Canadian economy to make it stronger and more resilient in order to increase our purchasing power. We are facing a tariff dispute we did not ask for, but we answered it with budget 2025.

This budget includes essential measures for the well-being of Canadians. I believe that, as parliamentarians, instead of filibustering, we should focus on passing the budget implementation bill as quickly as possible for the benefit of Canadians.

[*English*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): Pursuant to order made on Monday, February 2, Bill C-19, an act to amend the Income Tax Act, is deemed read a third time and passed on division.

(Bill read the third time and passed)

Hon. Ruby Sahota: Madam Speaker, I believe that if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent to see the clock at 6:08 p.m. so we can start Private Members' Business.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

*Private Members' Business***PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS***[English]***CRIMINAL CODE**

Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC) moved that Bill S-233, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (assault against persons who provide health services and first responders), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Madam Speaker, before we get going, my granddaughter is at home watching as we speak. If you will indulge me, I would love to say hello to my granddaughter, Ren, and to tell her that I love her and will see her soon. I know she is watching. At five years old, she is already watching CPAC.

I stand before my colleagues frustrated. I am frustrated that we are here, once again, talking about an issue that is non-partisan.

I rise today to speak on behalf of the hundreds of thousands of brave men and women who protect and serve our communities each and every day. They run into burning buildings. They run towards gunfire. They heal our broken bones. They hold our hands as we take our final breath. They are our silent sentinels: nurses, health care workers, firefighters, paramedics, EMTs and correctional officers.

These are the Canadians who hold our country together. When we dial 911, they pick up. They respond with no questions asked, yet for at least the decade that I have been here on the Hill, they have been asking for a single thing. It is that we protect them, just as they protect us. They put their safety, their comfort and their lives on the line each and every day when they go to work, and they do so knowing and expecting that they are going to face rising incidents of violence, assault and harassment. That is not part of their job description, and it is unacceptable. Nowhere in their job description does it say that they should sign on to a life of violence, abuse and harassment.

If colleagues can sense the frustration and the emotion in my voice, it is because I have sat with nurses. I have sat with paramedics who have had their lives threatened. I have sat with the families of first responders who have been killed on the job. All they are asking for is a simple thing, that we stand with them.

If some of this speech sounds familiar, it is because we have all been here before. My bill, Bill C-321, passed at all stages in the last Parliament. We studied it again because Bill C-321 was born out of a study from the first session of the 42nd Parliament, "Violence Facing Health Care Workers in Canada". All parliamentarians came together to say, with recommendations, that this bill, which was Bill C-321 in the previous Parliament and is now Bill S-233, should be passed, that we should be doing something and standing up for those who stand for us.

I get frustrated. The message I got, which originally asked me to please refer to this document and put forth a piece of legislation, hangs heavy on my shoulders. It was a message from a paramedic who had responded to a call at a residence. The family of the victim proceeded to throw the paramedic down a set of stairs, break her ankles and beat her to the point where she gave up. If that sounds shocking to members, it is but one of, if not hundreds, thousands of

messages and stories that I have heard over the last five years of pushing for this bill.

• (1810)

We have nurses who are running a campaign called "Code Black and Blue". The nurses launched a campaign against violence in the workplace. That was last fall. The Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions said that it cannot stand for this any longer. During its lobby days over the last decade, the International Association of Fire Fighters' number one ask was to do something against the rising acts of violence against them. Last Parliament, this bill passed at all stages, but what happened? Parliament was prorogued, so it fell off the Order Paper. This could be law today.

When passed, Bill S-233, or Bill C-321, would act as a strong deterrent, a powerful deterrent, to those who would seek to commit violence against our frontline heroes. It would signal to first responders and health care workers that their Parliament values them, that we as leaders in our country value them, that we are looking out for them and that the justice system will protect them.

Now, as it stands, a high percentage of those incidents go unreported because they know that they will not be followed through on. What would Bill S-233 do? It would amend the Criminal Code concerning assaults against persons who provide health services and first responders. It would amend the Criminal Code to make an offence against a health care professional or a first responder an aggravating factor upon sentencing.

There is always a time for partisanship in the House, but over my tenure, I have proven, I think, that when it comes to mental health, when it comes to standing up for those who stand up for us and who protect us, I will work collegially across party lines to get something done. I did that with Bill C-321. The NDP brought forth amendments. The Bloc brought forth amendments, and so did the Liberals. We agreed to them. That is why Bill C-321 passed.

When we got back after the last election, Senator Housakos in the other House and his Liberal colleagues, Liberal senators or the independent senators, the former prime minister Justin Trudeau-appointed senators, got together and out of the ashes, they rose and supported Bill S-233 because they knew how important it was that we as a House send this message, that we as a House stand with those who put their lives on the line every day.

Private Members' Business

I had hope, when it passed unanimously last fall, that we would be able to do something swiftly here in the House. I had hope because I believed in all of us, in the power of the 343 members of Parliament who were here. I believed the Liberals when they said that they wanted to work together to get things done for Canadians. However, every step of the way for the last three or four months, I have been disappointed. As a matter of fact, I have had somebody on the other side in leadership tell me that they guess we are just going to have to wait.

My friend, Paul Hills, a paramedic from Saskatoon, dedicated the last decade to trying to get something like this bill passed. I cannot tell members how heartbroken and disappointed he was when he worked across party lines to try to get something done, and then was told it was not going to get done.

We could have passed Bill S-233 in the waning days just before Christmas break, and it would be law today. The nurses, firefighters and paramedics, those who put their uniforms on every day in protection of all of us, would have that protection and would know that we stand with them, but no. Once again, partisan politics takes place. I have begged and I have pleaded. If any members in the House have watched question period before, I am almost down on both knees talking with the government House leader, pleading with him over this.

• (1815)

I understand that there is precedence and so on, but the bill has been agreed upon and has been studied. We are going on six years. Ten years it has been asked for.

When we talk about violence against our first responders and health care professionals, we are talking about real people in real communities: our families, my family. My youngest daughter is a psychiatric nurse. I get choked up talking about it because of the stories I hear.

There is no protection. They go to work every day simply trying to help others, yet they are increasingly being met with fists, knives, threats and abuse in return. Last fall a nurse in British Columbia was punched and kicked, knocked unconscious, simply trying to take somebody's blood pressure. In Ontario a nurse was attacked with a knife and a machete.

Across Canada the incidents of violence against frontline workers have surged. Nurses report being punched, kicked, spat on and threatened. Paramedics are assaulted while they are trying to save lives. Firefighters are attacked at emergency scenes. Correctional officers face daily threats, and institutions are already stretched beyond capacity. I do not even want to get into the nightmare they work in, because it is staggering. I would never want to do that. I think I can handle myself, but I would never want to work in that situation.

In many hospitals across the country, nurses will tell us that violence is now considered part of the job. That is shameful. Imagine if we had to deal with that each and every day. Would we come to work if we knew we were going to get punched, spat on or kicked, or have our life threatened? In emergency departments, staff are trained not only in trauma care but also in how to de-escalate physi-

cal threats. Paramedics now routinely wait for police backup before responding to calls that once would have been considered routine.

Firefighters cannot not respond to dangerous situations. Regardless of what is presented before them, they have to respond, yet there is nothing backing them up, nothing that is protecting them in the eyes of the law if they are beat up, kicked, punched and so on. They are told very often that it is part of the job and to just move on. This is not normal, and it should not be accepted as normal, yet there are games that are going on in the House.

I think if I can leave the House with any request for members, it is to please work with their party, with their side. I do not care if it has my name on it. I do not care if it has a Conservative name on it. I really do not. My request is for us to stand together and pass the bill.

No Canadian should go to work wondering whether they will come home safe at the end of their shift. No nurse should have to fear being attacked while caring for a patient. No paramedics should be assaulted while providing life-saving treatment. No firefighters should be threatened while responding to an emergency. No correctional officers should be injured simply for doing their job, yet that is exactly what is happening each and every day.

This is why Bill S-233 is so important and matters. The legislation, if passed, would send a clear and unambiguous message that when someone assaults a person who is providing health care or emergency services, that offence will be treated with the seriousness it deserves.

With the last bit of time I have left with the bill, I will remind the House why we are here: our nurses, our paramedics, our firefighters, our first responders. They lay it on the line every day for us. They get up every morning knowing they are going to experience life-changing events, but no one is there to stand up for them.

I urge all members to please take it upon themselves to get Bill S-233 passed at all stages. We can work together on this. Lives depend on it.

• (1820)

Hon. Ruby Sahota (Secretary of State (Combatting Crime), Lib.): Madam Speaker, we have always supported the member's cause when it comes to the bill. It is noble what the member is proposing. However, in 2021 the Liberal government, in Bill C-3, passed aggravating factors when it comes to health care workers. Therefore, when an offence is committed against someone because they are providing health services, including personal care services, that is already seen in our Criminal Code as an aggravating factor.

I, too, met with nurses on the Hill yesterday, and the violence against health care workers does continue. It is very concerning. It is something I would like to solve, but I think there is a missing piece of the puzzle, because the crime exists in the code, but police are not charging. They think it is a waste of court time. They do not think it is going to lead anywhere. I would say that there is a provincial element and responsibility in the administration of justice, as well as a policing law enforcement responsibility to enforce the law and lay charges, and a responsibility for the courts not to dismiss these cases.

I am wondering if the member would agree that, in order to really and truly protect our health care workers, we have to all work together at the federal and provincial levels to make sure, even after the passage of the bill, that it would actually get applied, because what we are seeing now is that it absolutely is not.

• (1825)

Todd Doherty: Madam Speaker, as a matter of fact, we worked with the ministers of public safety and justice at that time on Bill C-3. In their own words, they said that Bill C-321 was complementary to Bill C-3, because Bill C-3 did not go far enough. The two bills, between them, covered exactly what we needed to do.

It is not a single line; it is a stand-alone paragraph when it comes to assaults. Bill C-3 did not go far enough, but Bill C-321 took it to the next level, which is why we took amendments from the Liberals, the NDP and the Bloc to get Bill C-321 passed. At that time, the minister of justice and the minister of public safety and security were in support of Bill C-321.

[Translation]

Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette—Manawan, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. I would also like to thank him for sponsoring this bill. As we know, people who work in health services and as first responders do essential work. As we see in the media, they are increasingly facing acts of violence. I have a lot of family members who are paramedics, and they have talked to me about this. My friend Louis-Olivier Roussin, the operations manager at Ambulance St-Gabriel, came to the Hill a few months ago to raise awareness about this issue. It is therefore important to get this bill passed.

Why is it so urgent to get it passed? I know my colleague touched on this in his speech. I would like him to expand on why he thinks it is important to pass it now, without delay.

[English]

Todd Doherty: Madam Speaker, why do we need to do this? It is because each and every day, nurses, doctors, paramedics and firefighters put their uniform on and go to work, but trust me when I say that there will be lives lost. Somebody will lose their life; it could be a nurse, or it could be a paramedic in the back of an ambulance. The challenge we have right now is that there is not enough meat in the Criminal Code to ensure that the attacker gets charged at the highest level and that the full weight of the law is behind the victims.

Bill S-233 targets a specific part of the Criminal Code that deals with assaults. It does not talk about 25 duties and functions; it is specific to health care workers and first responders over the course

Private Members' Business

of doing their job. It is about an aggravating circumstance for assault against persons who provide health services and against first responders.

The bill needs to be passed now. Every day we delay is another life of a paramedic, a first responder or a nurse in jeopardy. We need to put teeth behind the Criminal Code and be able to stand with them.

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, just to pick up on the last point the member put on the record, in terms of a delay, I remember, back in December and November, literally pleading with the Conservative Party to allow the passage of Bill C-14. Bill C-14 goes even further—

An hon. member: It does not.

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, it does. It goes further than Bill S-233. I suggest to members that, collectively, the House would have helped all Canadians, because it was part of the bail reform legislation. All of Canada could have benefited by the passage of that legislation. I do not know how many times I stood in my place and challenged the Conservatives to allow that legislation to pass. For weeks and weeks in advance, I challenged the Conservatives. I said we could give a gift to Canadians by having the bill pass before the end of the year.

As for the issue the member raises, I take it very seriously. During the years I was an MLA, I was the health care critic and the justice critic. I understand the pressures that are put on paramedics and on our law enforcement officers. I can say that every member of the Liberal caucus appreciates and understands the need for legislation that will add that additional protection. Every Liberal member of the House does.

I would like to believe that all members of Parliament would be sympathetic to it. That is why we incorporated it into Bill C-14. To understand why Bill C-14 did not pass, the Conservative caucus needs to look in the mirror and take responsibility for that. That is the truth. We all know that.

The crime package that the Prime Minister and this cabinet and government brought forward to the House of Commons incorporates everything from protecting health care workers and first responders, in a very real way, to issues such as serious bail reform and reinstating minimum sentences, reinstating literally a dozen or more, not to mention dealing with issues such as fentanyl.

An hon. member: That is unbelievable.

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, the member is right. There is so much there that is of substance. The reason it did not go through is that the leader of the Conservative Party's political agenda is more Conservative-based. I respect that the member stands and says we should not make this political.

Private Members' Business

I am frustrated. I am frustrated as a member of Parliament because I saw the opportunities. Much like, as he said, he pleaded, I pleaded with the Conservative Party to get the legislation passed on behalf of the government. I stood here and said we would sit until midnight for the last two weeks of the session to deal with substantial legislation, including Bill C-14, which would have delivered for our first responders. The Conservative Party refused to sit until midnight. Conservatives complained about not being able to debate legislation, but when they were provided the opportunity, they did not allow the debate. They should not try to convey that the government does not understand the issue. We understand the issue, and that is why we are so passionate about seeing the legislation get advanced.

If we look at the first responders and the responsibilities they have and the abuse they have taken, it gives the justification. That is the reason the current Prime Minister made it a priority issue and incorporated it into Bill C-14. In the city of Winnipeg, it has gotten to the degree that the nurses union actually greylists health care facilities, giving a warning—

An. hon member: In your riding.

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, no, it is not in my riding. It is just south of my riding. It is greylisting hospital facilities because they are not safe. What that does is amplify what the Secretary of State for Combatting Crime mentioned in her question.

• (1830)

This is not just Ottawa passing laws. This is something for which the provinces need to step up, as well as municipalities, which are responsible for law enforcement. When we talk about the desire to protect first responders, it is important that all the stakeholders appreciate and understand that it is different levels of government coming to the table.

I like to believe that Ottawa is doing that, and tonight we are seeing both the official opposition and the government, in a very passionate way, expressing why we support our first responders. I am encouraged to see that sort of support coming from the official opposition.

We are not too late. This is second reading of this particular private member's bill, but there is an opportunity for us to have legislation that would take care of this issue before the end of February. I argued two or three months ago that it could have been done at the end of December. There is no reason we could not do it before the end of this month. All we need is co-operation from the Conservative Party to stop the filibuster on Bill C-14.

When we talk about Bill C-14, law enforcement officers, every provincial and territorial government, political parties in all areas, although I am not too sure about the Greens, but the major political parties are all behind Bill C-14. I do not know where the opposition to it is coming from, outside of the official opposition here on the floor of the House. That is why we hear the frustration from the government House leader or other members when they talk about how there is substantial legislation before us, and it continues to be filibustered.

The member spoke eloquently, passionately and emotionally about first responders, calling on the government to take some action. I would hope that we would see that same passion in the Conservative caucus when they talk about the government agenda dealing with some of the crime legislation. In particular, I mean Bill C-14, but there is also the other crime legislation, such as Bill C-2; Bill C-9, the hate legislation; Bill C-14; and Bill C-16, which we recently debated. I suggest it would make us world-class in how it would recognize femicide by boosting it to first degree. It would reinstate many mandatory minimums. Whether it is what we are talking about tonight, bail reform or what Bill C-16 would do, these are ideas that Canadians as a whole support. Canadians in Conservative ridings support these initiatives.

As such, my appeal to members opposite is to recognize what the introducer of this particular bill has talked about, but to also do a comparison between Bill S-233 and Bill C-14. We would find that Bill C-14 would even go further than Bill S-233 in dealing with and supporting first responders. That is not to mention many other aspects of the criminal code, like that bail reform.

We do have an opportunity, a very real and tangible opportunity, but we need to see more co-operation and less filibustering.

• (1835)

[*Translation*]

Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry—Soulanges—Huntingdon, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to rise to speak to Bill S-233. However, before I begin my speech, I want to draw attention to this tartan I am wearing, which is certified and registered in Scotland. It was made by two weavers in my riding who are members of the *Guilde des Tisserands du Suroît*. They wove this tartan and gifted it to me in celebration of the 150th anniversary of the City of Salaberry-de-Valleyfield. When I received it, I promised them that I would honour their work of art by sharing it with all my colleagues in the House of Commons, as I am doing now. I would like to thank Johanne and Pierrette, who are truly incredible weavers. I am so proud, I must say, to show off this tartan to everyone here in the House.

I understand that we are debating a bill that we have already debated in the House, but it had a different number at the time. That bill that made it through all the legislative stages, but unfortunately died on the Order Paper because of prorogation. We already know that the bill enjoyed broad consensus in the House and in the Senate.

It is a shame, because I was listening to the speech by the member for Winnipeg North and I got the impression that Bill S-233 was being used as a bargaining chip to punish the Conservatives for not co-operating on other bills. I find that completely unfair, because it is a privilege to be randomly selected to introduce a private member's bill. I find it deeply unfair for it to be treated this way.

The Bloc Québécois agreed to fast-track Bill S-233 so that it could be passed quickly. It is unfortunate that the Liberals did not give their support to allow the bill to be passed quickly.

Private Members' Business

It all started with recommendation 3 of a report from the Standing Committee on Health. It stated that the Criminal Code should be amended to require a court to consider as an aggravating factor for sentencing purposes the fact that the victim is a health care professional. This is a small amendment to the Criminal Code, but it is highly important considering who it is meant for.

Right now, a number of sections guide judges in terms of aggravating factors. I am referring here to assault, assault with a weapon or causing bodily harm, aggravated assault and causing bodily harm. However, there is no specific offence that states that an attack on a health care professional or a first responder constitutes an aggravating factor for the purposes of sentencing. That is what the bill does. It is a matter of clarifying this issue.

I heard the member for Winnipeg North say that this is not just a federal matter, that first responders and health care professionals are experiencing violence, and that there is also shared jurisdiction between the provinces and the federal government. I would say to him that the federal government does indeed have the means to give more to the provinces in its health transfers so that the health care sector has the tools to deal with this surge in violence and assaults on health care workers and first responders.

I often say this, but I am a social worker and manager at the Montérégie-Ouest integrated health and social services centre. I can say that I have seen very serious situations. I will describe some of these situations because I think it is important to understand how important this bill is, as well as how important it is to prevent violence against health care professionals and first responders.

• (1840)

There are things that I never saw in my practice until very recently. I was re-elected six years ago. Before that, I was a manager. I managed seniors' residences. Seniors are staying in residences longer now, and they often struggle with dementia, and the fact is that dementia, especially frontal lobe dementia, often leads to aggressive and violent behaviour directed at health care workers.

I had to deal with situations where a Garda company security guard had to be hired to protect health care workers from being attacked or assaulted by residents. These incidents were not necessarily premeditated, but a consequence illness.

When it gets to the point where taxpayer dollars need to be spent on hiring guards to protect staff members from being hit, kicked, bitten, pushed or injured, a lot of tax dollars get spent on staff security. I think that managers sometimes agonize over the need to do more with less and sometimes feel compelled to cut back on these guards' hours, for example, just to balance their budget.

The member for Winnipeg North said that the provinces need to take responsibility. I cannot help but respond to that by saying that the primary responsibility lies with those who have too much money and who spend it in areas that fall under Quebec's jurisdiction, those who do not do what it takes to give the provinces the means to also look after their health care professionals and first responders.

Like the member for Cariboo—Prince George, I have witnessed all sorts of situations. Police officers and firefighters are now often

accompanied by social workers who can help calm down angry individuals or individuals with mental health issues who are in crisis and behaving very violently toward the first responder. Practices are changing and health care professionals are being hired to support first responders, but that costs money.

Of course, the bill does add the aggravating factor, and we agree with that, but we must not forget the main point. We also need to support health care professionals upstream and support first responders when they intervene on the ground. However, there are only so many ways to do that. This can be done by adding specialized crisis intervention personnel trained to deal with someone who is displaying completely disordered behaviour, for example. It could be someone who is intoxicated and wants to attack an ambulance attendant, firefighter or even a police officer, for example, who arrives at a scene where they must intervene.

There is a reason why, in Montreal, for example, police officers are often accompanied by a social worker or specialized educator when they respond to situations involving domestic violence, disordered behaviour or mental health issues, in order to help defuse the crisis. It is precisely to avoid aggression and injury to first responders.

It absolutely boggles my mind that facts like those are not enough to convince the government to provide Quebec and the provinces with better service delivery support. As we know, health and social services consume a large portion of the budgets of Quebec and the provinces. This stubborn refusal to increase the health transfer is causing considerable harm to health care professionals and first responders, not to mention the people who require the services and assistance of skilled professionals.

In closing, I want to thank the member for Cariboo—Prince George for his determination, and I encourage him to pursue his discussions with the government in order to convince the Liberals to reverse their decision and allow a shorter legislative process for passing Bill S-233.

• (1845)

[English]

Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is always a privilege to stand and speak in the House on behalf of my constituents.

I want to start off by thanking the member for Cariboo—Prince George for his efforts in trying to get this bill at least back to where it was in the previous Parliament, as Bill C-321. We want to recognize the good work that he has done so far, and also that it was unanimously approved by all parties at that time.

Private Members' Business

What is disappointing to me is that it was very clear from the comments made by the member for Winnipeg North that the Liberals are using this piece of legislation as a weapon to get what they want passed as their legislation. It is very unfortunate that it has become partisan like that.

A serious country protects those who serve it. The rule of law must be clear and fair, especially when violence is directed at people who show up every day to keep Canadians safe, healthy and alive. Nurses, paramedics and first responders do not choose their moments of risk; they accept them as part of their responsibility to the public. When the law fails to clearly recognize that reality, it sends the wrong message to offenders, victims and the professionals who hold our essential services together.

Bill S-233 reflects a Conservative commitment to restoring common sense, accountability and respect for those who stand on the front lines in our communities. It is deliberately narrow: It deals only with assault offences that already exist in the Criminal Code, applies only at the sentencing stage after a person has been found guilty, and applies only to clearly defined victims: people providing health services, including personal care workers and first responders doing their jobs.

Bill S-233 directly continues the work of Bill C-321 from the previous Parliament, as I mentioned before. It is back before us because of the prorogation of Parliament, not because Parliament rejected it. That matters, because this bill passed the House of Commons unanimously.

The problem that this bill addresses exists across the country and looks the same everywhere. Violence against health care workers and first responders is not limited to one province, one riding or one hospital. Nurses and paramedics report high levels of assaults in emergency rooms, long-term care facilities, community clinics and pre-hospital settings. These are not rare events; they are predictable, recurring parts of frontline work.

What is the cause of the crisis faced by our frontline workers? It is a direct result of over a decade of Liberal policies that have weakened bail, normalized repeat violent offending and flooded communities with hard drugs. Liberal catch-and-release bail policies, particularly under Bill C-75, have returned repeat violent offenders to the streets under the least onerous conditions, often within hours or days. These are frequently the same individuals whom police officers, paramedics and emergency room staff encounter again and again, not as one-time offenders but as chronic sources of violence and instability.

Through decriminalization experiments and taxpayer-funded hard drug distribution, the Liberal government has enabled an environment in which first responders are routinely dispatched into volatile, unpredictable and violent situations that are driven by severe addiction. First responders now carry naloxone as a daily operational necessity and administer it repeatedly to revive individuals overdosing from fentanyl, often in the same locations and involving the same people.

Across Canada, nearly 50,000 people have died from opiate overdoses since 2016, and there has been a 200% increase in yearly deaths. In British Columbia alone, 1,700 people died from toxic

drugs in the first nine months of 2024. Police have reported that roughly half of all hydromorphone seizures were diverted from so-called safe supply programs.

This is the environment to which nurses, paramedics and police officers are sent. They are required by duty to enter spaces shaped by failed Liberal policies, weakened bail, normalized repeat offending and a drug epidemic that has made frontline service more dangerous than at any point in our recent memory. Bill S-233 responds to this reality by ensuring that the law properly recognizes the heightened risk and vulnerability faced by those who must confront the consequences of these decisions on the ground.

Assaults against health care workers and first responders while they are doing their jobs are especially serious, because they occur at the very moment that help is being delivered. When a nurse approaches a patient, or when a paramedic answers a call, they are there to help, not to fight or defend themselves. People who serve in these roles are the ones who run toward danger while others are running away.

● (1850)

In my early twenties, I served as a volunteer first responder, as a driver and an attendant for an ambulance, providing patient care on the way to the hospital with training and exposure to emergency and hospital settings. That experience made it clear to me how vulnerable first responders are on duty. In an ambulance or at an emergency scene, first responders cannot control the environment or walk away when violence erupts. They stay because that is what the job requires.

What has changed since that time is the level of danger. Liberal bail and drug policies have made frontline work far more volatile. Repeat violent offenders, drug-induced psychosis and fentanyl-driven crime are now routine encounters. Bill S-233 recognizes that change and would ensure that the law reflects the situation today.

Private Members' Business

We see that same reality in health care settings. Recently in Winnipeg, at the St. Boniface Hospital, a nurse was assaulted in a hospital parkade. She was not in a remote location. She was not acting recklessly. She was at her place of work in the course of her employment. The response from nurses' representatives was not surprise but frustration. They said violence and abuse have become commonplace in hospitals and that workers are being pushed out of workplaces that cannot guarantee basic public safety. That is exactly what this bill would address at sentencing. When someone assaults a person who is required by duty to stay in a dangerous situation, the law should recognize their increased vulnerability and the wider harm that follows from it.

The harm also does not end with the individual victim. Violence in hospitals, ambulances and emergency scenes disrupts critical services from frontline workers. That is why this bill is about protecting essential public functions. Health care is not a private transaction. It is a public good that every community relies on.

Emergency services face the same pressure. First responders who expect violence operate under constant personal risk. If they become overcautious, they are even further at risk. Response times may be slower. In emergencies, those delays can have serious consequences. As a result, the standards of patient care plummet and Canadians are left waiting for the help they need. Over time, this does more harm than good. People begin to question whether those who serve the public are able to provide them with the help they need.

Support for Bill S-233 comes from the people who know the problem best. Nurses' organizations have publicly backed this bill because it reflects what their members deal with every day on the job. Paramedic leaders have said the same. Paramedics often work alone or in small teams in unpredictable and uncontrolled situations under intense time pressure. They are unsafely exposed, and they know it.

The people doing the work have identified a real failure in how violence against them is treated and deterred. Most importantly, this bill is not about being tougher for the sake of it. It is about role-based vulnerability. Health care workers and first responders face danger because of a service they provide. In a crisis, they cannot walk away. Their job requires them to stay, even when the situation turns violent.

Bill S-233 would fully protect individualized sentencing. Every case is still judged on its own facts and merits. Judges continue to look at the details of the offence and the offender. Mitigating and aggregating factors are still weighed together. Proportionality remains the standard, and judicial discretion is not weakened.

Across professions, frontline workers agree on one thing: Violence has become normalized, and the legal response has fallen behind. Bill S-233 would respond to that reality carefully and responsibly. At this point, there is no uncertainty left. Parliament has already studied this bill. Parliament has already agreed to it. The only question that remains is whether we are prepared to finish that work. Every delay sends a signal not just to offenders but to the nurses, paramedics, firefighters and first responders who show up every day and are told, in practice, that their safety can wait. That is not a neutral choice. It is a decision, and it has consequences.

Passing Bill S-233 now is how Parliament would affirm that violence against those who serve the public, who serve us, would be treated with the seriousness that it deserves. It is how we restore clarity, consistency and confidence in the law for our frontline workers.

● (1855)

Ben Carr (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to rise today to speak to Bill S-233, an act to amend the Criminal Code with respect to assault against persons who provide health services and first responders. At its core, Bill S-233 seeks to strengthen protections for the people who serve our communities every day, by requiring sentencing courts to treat as an aggravating factor in five assault-related offences against health care workers and first responders the fact that those offences are committed in the course of their duties.

I want to begin by thanking my colleague in the other place for bringing the bill forward, as well as the member for Cariboo—Prince George, who previously introduced a similar measure in the last Parliament. Their work has helped to ensure that this important issue remains squarely before us in the House of Commons. These initiatives give us an opportunity to speak about an issue that affects all Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

We are all impacted, because every day, Canadians depend at some point in our lives on the ability to call for help in an emergency situation and know that somebody will respond. Whether it is a firefighter, a paramedic, a police officer or a health care professional, these individuals are there for us in moments of crisis, vulnerability and fear. That is why the sponsor of the bill referred to health care workers and first responders as everyday heroes. I agree wholeheartedly. They show up, often at great personal risk, so the rest of us can be safe.

While speaking about the bill, I am thinking about a number of people in my hometown of Winnipeg. That includes the Winnipeg Fire Paramedic Service chief, Christian Schmidt, as well as the Winnipeg Police Service chief, Gene Bowers, and members of their teams. I am very proud to say that on my beer league hockey team, The Mermen, with whom I have played for many years, there are two individuals to whom I want to give a shout-out here in the House of Commons today: a firefighter, Brad Russell; and a police officer, Jay Murray, who put their lives on the line every day to keep us safe in the city of Winnipeg.

Private Members' Business

I also think of my mother, who is a health care professional, a family doctor for many years who switched over the course of the past decade to helping people fighting addiction and mental health challenges. In the course of that line of work, things can be very challenging, and health care professionals also need protection that legislation of this kind can offer.

I want to emphasize that this issue should not and does not fall along partisan lines. The Minister of Justice made this clear during question period last fall when he stated his willingness to work across party lines to advance measures that protect first responders as quickly as possible. I believe that sentiment is widely shared in the House. Ultimately, the question before us is not whether we should act but how best to do so.

As members know, Bill S-233 proposes to address the issue by creating a new aggravating factor that would apply where the victim of certain assault-related offences against a health care worker or a first responder is engaged in the performance of their duties. The offences captured include uttering threats, assault, assault with a weapon or causing bodily harm, aggravated assault, and unlawfully causing bodily harm.

At the same time, it is important to situate Bill S-233 within the broader legislative context currently before Parliament.

The government has introduced Bill C-14, the bail and sentencing reform act, which as of today is before the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. Bill C-14 also addresses violence against health care workers and first responders, but it does so through a broader and more comprehensive approach, in my view. Specifically, Bill C-14 would expand an existing aggravating factor in the Criminal Code, one that currently applies to offences committed against health care workers and personal care workers, to explicitly include first responders.

Importantly, this aggravating factor would apply to all Criminal Code offences, not only to a defined subset of assault-related offences. This distinction matters. Under Bill C-14, courts would be required to consider the aggravating factor of not only assaults but also of other serious forms of criminal conduct directed at frontline workers, including intimidation, criminal harassment or other offences that may arise in the course of their duties.

In other words, while Bill S-233 focuses on specific assault-based offences, Bill C-14 would ensure that protection would not depend on the technical classification of the offence but rather on the reality that a frontline worker was targeted while serving the public. Both bills share the same objective, which is to denounce violence against health care workers and first responders, and to ensure that sentencing reflects the seriousness of that conduct. The difference lies in scope and coherence.

● (1900)

I will leave to the committee a more detailed examination of the legal interaction between these two bills, including questions of overlap and statutory interpretation. However, I believe it is fair to say that Bill C-14 provides a clearer and more unified framework by embedding this protection within the general sentencing regime of the Criminal Code. Beyond the legislative mechanics, we must not lose sight of why this issue demands our attention, and I think

the hon. colleagues who have spoken before me today have done a very good and sincere job of laying that out.

Following the introduction of Bill C-14, the Minister of Justice noted, “Good ideas don’t come from closed door meetings—they come from conversations with people on the ground.” That rings especially true here. Health care workers and first responders have been telling us consistently and urgently that violence has become an increasingly common part of their working reality. This is something I hear in Winnipeg, reflected back to me in conversations I have with stakeholders on an ongoing basis.

In November, here, the International Association of Fire Fighters held its Canadian legislative conference. Representing more than 350,000 firefighters and emergency medical workers across Canada and the United States, the IAFF has repeatedly called for stronger protections against threats and violence. According to a survey of its affiliates, 13% reported incidents of violence during responses to structure fires, and 40% reported violence during medical calls over a five-year period. These are deeply troubling figures.

Firefighters are not alone. In Ontario's Peel Region, data showed that paramedics reported an incident of violence every 18 hours, a physical assault every 36 hours and physical harm every nine days over a one-year period. Here in Ottawa, a survey of paramedics revealed that every respondent has experienced violence on the job. More than one-third face violence or threats monthly, and for more than one-fifth it is weekly. These are not isolated or regional anomalies; they reflect a national problem that deserves a national response.

How can we reasonably expect that these professionals will deliver urgent and often life-saving care if they must constantly fear for their own safety? The answer, of course, is that we cannot. Our justice system must send a clear and unequivocal message: Violence against those who respond to emergencies will not be tolerated. When seconds can mean the difference between life and death, our society cannot accept that those who rush toward danger are themselves targeted by criminal behaviour.

Denunciation matters, consistency matters, and clarity in the law matters. This is why I believe the work of the committee will be essential. It will allow parliamentarians to hear directly from frontline workers, legal experts and stakeholders, and to ensure that Parliament adopts the most effective tools available to address this problem.

In closing, I support the objective of better protecting health care workers and first responders. At the same time, I believe that Bill C-14 offers a broader and more comprehensive approach, one that ensures consistent protection across all Criminal Code offences and clearer guidance for our courts. Taken together, these efforts demonstrate Parliament's shared commitment to protecting those who serve our communities and to ensuring that our criminal justice system responds firmly, fairly and coherently when they are harmed. I look forward to the committee's study of this bill and to continuing this important work on behalf of the everyday heroes who protect us.

I am just thinking about a conversation I had, again with Winnipeg's fire and paramedic chief, a few months ago. They showed me a video of the training exercises Winnipeg police officers, paramedics and firefighters will go through for dealing with someone who is undergoing a meth psychosis. This is unfortunately a very common occurrence in our streets these days. One of the things we are seeing is that it takes a significant number of first responders, upwards of 12, 13 or 14, in order to deal just with one individual. While undergoing this psychosis, these individuals are unfortunately very dangerous and unpredictable, and they can even take on forms of superhuman strength whereby they are able to pose a much greater risk and threat to those who are trying to assist them. The essence of this legislation is critical, and I look forward to a continued debate and the ultimate passage, I hope, of Bill C-14.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

• (1905)

[English]

FINANCE

Dan Mazier (Riding Mountain, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister promised fiscal responsibility. Instead, he delivered an \$80-billion deficit.

My question is very simple: Can the government tell Canadians how much they will pay in interest on the national debt this year?

Peter Fragiskatos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my colleague is an experienced member, and I know how much he cares about the economy and his community. Of course he is immersed in these issues, as we all are.

To reassure him, I would point to the December 5 statement issued by the International Monetary Fund. The IMF, one of the most respected multilateral organizations in the world, said a great deal about Canada's current fiscal position. It said that the fundamentals

Adjournment Proceedings

are very strong, first of all. How could they not be with a AAA credit rating and with a debt and deficit that is the lowest in the G7?

If we look at inflation, we find that the rate of inflation is well within the Bank of Canada's guideline and is currently sitting at 2.4%. We have battled inflation over the years. At one point it was, I think, in excess of 8%. We have brought it down significantly through a targeted approach. Granted, that was first pursued by the previous government. Now Canada's new government is embracing fiscal responsibility, making sure that we do exactly what is needed to steer the country during this very difficult time.

Earlier in the House of Commons today, during question period, I talked about a rupture that the Prime Minister articulated very well at Davos. We have a great deal to do, and certainly an approach focused on fiscal responsibility, investment and making sure that we are building up the country, focusing on infrastructure, in particular, to get our goods and resources to market. That is exactly what will secure our future going forward.

• (1910)

Dan Mazier: Madam Speaker, the member did not answer my question. I asked how much the interest on the national debt would cost Canadians this year.

However, now we know why the Liberals will not say it out loud. It is because Canadians will pay more than \$55 billion every year just to service the debt. This is an unbelievable amount. That is more money spent on interest than on health care transfers.

Why is the government helping bankers and bondholders instead of doctors and nurses?

Peter Fragiskatos: Madam Speaker, that is interesting. I am tempted to talk about the Conservative record on health care. I will not because, as I say, I think we need to embrace these issues.

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

Peter Fragiskatos: Madam Speaker, it is a touchy subject for the Conservatives.

We need to embrace these issues wherever possible with a lack of partisanship and be serious about the issues of the day.

Yes, there is debt and deficit in this country, as there is in every democracy, but again, we can look to the International Monetary Fund. If it is not the IMF that the members want to look to, they can look at the World Economic Forum and what was shared there by the participants about Canada's current fiscal reality and the economy going forward.

Adjournment Proceedings

We have a very good situation. I would also invite colleagues across the way to think seriously about supporting budget 2025. The member talks about health care. There is an initiative in there that would allow for infrastructure dollars to go toward community initiatives like hospitals, for example. If he is interested in how—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): We are done.

The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:12 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Wednesday, February 4, 2026

Keeping Children Safe Act

(Bill C-223. On the Order: Private Members' Business:)	5389
Scheer	5389
Motion	5389
(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee)	5389

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Aurora House

Erskine-Smith	5389
---------------------	------

Iran

Lawrence	5389
----------------	------

Public Safety

Saini	5390
-------------	------

Iran

Lantsman	5390
----------------	------

150th Anniversary of Cowansville

Villeneuve	5390
------------------	------

The Conservative Party of Canada

Lake	5390
------------	------

Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis

Bittle	5390
--------------	------

Cost of Food

Bonk	5391
------------	------

Marc-Antoine Dequoy

Champoux	5391
----------------	------

Media Technology in Burlington

Gould	5391
-------------	------

Cost of Food

Gill (Calgary McKnight)	5391
-------------------------------	------

Jacob Sawatzky Sr.

Sawatzky	5391
----------------	------

Firearms

Motz	5392
------------	------

Captain Stuart Campbell

Acan	5392
------------	------

Conservative Party of Canada

Bragdon	5392
---------------	------

Black History Month

Zuberi	5392
--------------	------

ORAL QUESTIONS

The Economy

Berthold	5393
MacKinnon	5393
Berthold	5393
Joly	5393
Strahl	5393
MacKinnon	5393
Strahl	5393
Hajdu	5393
Davidson	5394
Joly	5394
Davidson	5394
Hajdu	5394

Pensions

Normandin	5394
Hajdu	5394
Normandin	5394
McLean (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke)	5394
Larouche	5394
Hajdu	5395

Seniors

Roberts	5395
McLean (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke)	5395
Roberts	5395
McLean (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke)	5395

The Economy

McKenzie	5395
Olszewski	5395
Cody	5395
Sahota	5396
Gill (Calgary Skyview)	5396
Fragiskatos	5396
Godin	5396
Provost	5396
Gourde	5396
Provost	5396

International Trade

Savard-Tremblay	5396
LeBlanc	5396
Brunelle-Duceppe	5396
Sidhu (Brampton East)	5397

Public Safety

Brock	5397
Anandasangaree	5397
Brock	5397
Fraser	5397
Small	5397
Sahota	5397
Guglielmin	5397

Anandasangaree	5398
Firearms	
Anstey	5398
Sahota	5398
Justice	
Sodhi	5398
Fraser	5398
The Economy	
Dancho	5398
Joly	5398
Dancho	5399
Long	5399
Mantle	5399
Hodgson	5399
Mantle	5399
Hodgson	5399
Baber	5399
Fragiskatos	5399
Baber	5399
MacKinnon	5399
Deltell	5400
LeBlanc	5400
Deltell	5400
Joly	5400
Martel	5400
MacKinnon	5400
Diversity and Inclusion	
Auguste	5400
Miller	5400
Science and Innovation	
Barlow	5400
MacDonald (Malpeque)	5401
Scheer	5401
MacDonald (Malpeque)	5401
Calkins	5401
MacDonald (Malpeque)	5401
The Economy	
Fanjoy	5401
Long	5401
Science and Innovation	
Patzer	5402
MacDonald (Malpeque)	5402
National Defence	
Idlout	5402
McGuinty	5402
Presence in Gallery	
The Speaker	5402

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Business of Supply

Opposition Motion—Food Affordability	
Motion	5402
Motion negated	5403

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Relieving Grieving Parents of an Administrative Burden Act (Evan's Law)

Bill C-222. Second reading	5404
Motion agreed to	5405
(Bill read the second time and referred to a committee) ..	5405

Canadian Multiculturalism Act

Bill C-245. Second reading	5405
Motion negated	5406

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

International Trade

Sidhu (Brampton East)	5407
-----------------------------	------

National Defence

McGuinty	5407
----------------	------

Petitions

Caregivers

Plamondon	5407
-----------------	------

Canadian Flag

Fergus	5407
--------------	------

Public Safety

Mazier	5407
--------------	------

Rail Transportation

Deschênes	5407
-----------------	------

Flood Mitigation

Gill (Abbotsford—South Langley)	5408
---------------------------------------	------

Religious Freedom

Khanna	5408
--------------	------

Brain Injury

Johns	5408
-------------	------

Fisheries and Oceans

May	5408
-----------	------

Nigeria

Dalton	5408
--------------	------

Canada Post Corporation

Dalton	5408
--------------	------

Farmland in Clearview Township

Dowdall	5408
---------------	------

Religious Freedom

Mahal	5409
-------------	------

Cody	5409
------------	------

Davies (Niagara South)	5409
------------------------------	------

Questions on the Order Paper

Lamoureux 5409

Motions for Papers

Lamoureux 5409

GOVERNMENT ORDERS**Canada Groceries and Essentials Benefit Act**

Bill C-19. Report stage 5409

Motion for concurrence 5409

Motion agreed to 5409

Sahota 5409

Bill C-19. Third reading 5409

Lavoie 5409

Patzner 5411

Ste-Marie 5411

Rochefort 5411

McKinnon 5412

Falk (Provencher) 5413

Ste-Marie 5413

Rochefort 5413

DeRidder 5413

Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk) 5413

Kayabaga 5415

Ste-Marie 5415

Doherty 5415

Mahal 5415

O'Rourke 5417

Ste-Marie 5417

Genuis 5417

Garon 5417

Deschênes-Thériault 5419

Kelly 5419

Ste-Marie 5419

Gill (Côte-Nord—Kawawachikamach—Nitassinan) 5420

Desrochers 5421

Genuis 5421

Larouche 5422

Iacono 5422

DeBellefeuille 5423

Sahota 5423

Deschênes-Thériault 5423

Johns 5424

Deschênes-Thériault 5424

DeBellefeuille 5425

Au 5426

Desrochers 5426

(Bill read the third time and passed) 5426

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**Criminal Code**

Doherty 5427

Bill S-233. Second reading 5427

Sahota 5428

Ste-Marie 5429

Lamoureux 5429

DeBellefeuille 5430

Falk (Provencher) 5431

Carr 5433

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS**Finance**

Mazier 5435

Fragiskatos 5435

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