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# Standing Committee on Finance

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Chair: Karina Gould





## Standing Committee on Finance

Tuesday, February 3, 2026

• (1830)

[English]

**The Chair (Hon. Karina Gould (Burlington, Lib.)):** I call this meeting to order. Welcome to meeting number 21 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance.

Pursuant to the order of reference of Monday, February 2, 2026, the committee shall commence consideration of Bill C-19, an act to amend the Income Tax Act.

I would like to welcome Minister Champagne. He is joined by the assistant deputy minister of the tax policy branch, Maude Lavoie.

With that, Minister, you have five minutes for opening remarks. Please go ahead.

[Translation]

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Finance and National Revenue):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Colleagues, it is a great pleasure to be with you this evening.

I would like to thank Ms. Lavoie for joining me. She does extraordinary work at the Department of Finance.

I am pleased to speak today to begin the committee's study of Bill C-19, Canada groceries and essentials benefit act.

[English]

The fact that we're here today is, in my view, a credit to what the House can accomplish when we work together for Canadians.

I want to thank Mrs. Lantsman for putting the motion forward so that we can move forward together.

As a minister, I've seen first-hand how bills can become sidetracked and sometimes bogged down via the legislative process or because of partisan politics. In this case, however, the fact that all parties, really, came together to unanimously expedite Bill C-19 demonstrates a willingness to have a serious response to a serious moment. Canadians, after all, expect nothing less of each and every one of us.

I would like to thank every member of this committee and, in fact, every member of the House for putting partisanship aside and Canadians first.

Canadians watching at home will know that Bill C-19 is part of our response to a rapidly changing and increasingly uncertain

world, one that is leaving economies, businesses and workers under a cloud of uncertainty.

[Translation]

Canada's new government is focused on what we can control. That is why today, in Bill C-19, we are proposing measures that will enable us to build a stronger economy and, certainly, a more resilient economy.

We do know, however, that our generational investment plan presented in budget 2025 is going to take a few years, and we also recognize the need for more immediate and targeted measures to help Canadians who are under the pressure of daily expenses and who need immediate support.

We also know that while inflation has slowed since its postpandemic peak, food inflation remains persistently high. This is due to several factors: global supply chain disruptions caused by tariffs, geopolitical upheavals and, of course, climate change, which have all contributed to higher food prices.

[English]

Once again, we are focused on what we can control. I'm pleased to report that, while we tackle structural issues, the Canada groceries and essentials benefit will put hundreds of dollars in the bank accounts of more than 12 million Canadians. It will deliver real help to those struggling with the cost of groceries and everyday essentials.

[Translation]

This new benefit will replace the GST credit, but more importantly, it will be more generous.

The GST credit, as I mentioned, is a tax-free payment that is made four times a year to help low and modest-income individuals and families. This is one way to make our tax system fairer. However, for many Canadians, because of the rising cost of food, this assistance is no longer enough.

What we are proposing is to increase this benefit by 25%. In addition, this year we will add a one-time payment equivalent to 50% of the current benefit.

What people needed was immediate support. That is why our government will offset the rising cost of groceries, which exceeds the overall inflation rate since the pandemic and averages \$782. That is precisely what we are trying to offset in order to help Canadian families. At the end of the day, it is going to make a significant difference.

[English]

Right now, a person living alone who is eligible for the GST credit can receive a maximum of \$543 per year. The same person would get approximately \$950 in total from the one-time payment during the 2026-27 benefit year thanks to the changes we are proposing. For a couple with two children, the amount would increase from approximately \$1,086 to \$1,890. This is real money that will make a tangible difference in the lives of millions of Canadians.

All of this, Madam Chair, is guided by an understanding that affordability is a central measure of a country's economic success. In fact, we are already seeing progress. Wages are growing faster than inflation and have been doing so for 33 consecutive months.

• (1835)

Some expenses, such as gas prices, child care fees and cellphone bills, have come down.

[Translation]

For the time being, the cost of groceries and other essentials remains high, and that is why we are taking targeted and responsible action.

[English]

In conclusion, we want to make sure Canadians feel the benefits of our country's economic growth and that Canadians feel real benefits in their wallets and at their kitchen tables. That's our plan.

I want to thank members for voting unanimously in favour of the motion.

We'll take questions.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

We will begin our round of questioning with Ms. Lantsman for six minutes, please.

**Melissa Lantsman (Thornhill, CPC):** Thank you.

Thanks for coming, Minister.

I want to take you back to 2023. You were a minister; there was a Liberal government, a lot of the same things. You held a summit, and five of the largest grocers agreed to help “stabilize food prices”. That's what you said.

Can you tell me how much Canada's overall food inflation has gone up since that date?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** I would say, first of all, thank you for putting the motion forward. I think this is welcomed by Canadian families.

This is tough work, as you know, and this is work in progress. That's why today you see we're taking concrete measures to help Canadian families—

**Melissa Lantsman:** Minister, with all due respect, you took concrete measures before. In fact, they were the exact same concrete measures.

It's 7.83%. You promised “price stability”. Those are words from 2023, when you were a minister in the Liberal government. Is a

7.83% increase in food prices since this promise your definition of stability, yes or no?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** I would say that what we did was unprecedented in the country's history. You may recall that I was, I think, the first minister of industry to call the CEOs of the major grocery chains in Canada, and I asked them—

**Melissa Lantsman:** That's correct. Food prices have gone up since then.

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** Well, I would say competition is the real answer. We have been driving competition in the country, because what we need is more competition.

I would say, if you allow me, that we also need structural measures. I had the opportunity to talk to L'Union des producteurs agricoles in Quebec and others, and what they would tell you is that there are structural things. That's why you see there's not only the benefit, but we're also touching structural things such as greenhouses because we just need to produce more in Canada.

**Melissa Lantsman:** A number of times in 2023, you said things like “lower prices”. These are your words. You're going to “stabilize food prices in Canada”. You're going to give us “less consolidation, more competition, lower prices”. Those are all your words from when you were minister.

I want to know, which thing is lower today than it was in September 2023? Is it peppers? Is it lettuce? Is it beef? Is it coffee? Is it infant formula? Which thing? Just say one thing.

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** As you would know, food inflation is a challenge in pretty much all the G7 countries. I would—

**Melissa Lantsman:** [Inaudible—Editor]

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** No, I'm just providing background.

For example, currently, Canada sits lower than some of our peer countries: lower than the United States, lower than Germany, lower than the United Kingdom. There are a number of factors.

Let me just provide background to Canadians who are watching. Canada imports about 30% of our produce. When you get to winter, it's about 80% to 90%. That's why we have structural issues to deal with. We have currency issues. We have climate change issues. We have trade issues. That's why—

**Melissa Lantsman:** You can blame all the outside factors you want.

Minister, you brought this summit to Ottawa. You said that you would stabilize prices. You said that you would lower prices. Since your grocery summit, peppers have gone up 41%, lettuce 39%, coffee 33% and beef 27%. Which of these increases did your plan actually prevent?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** I'd say it's a work in progress. I benchmark with our G7 colleagues. I happen to sit at the G7 finance ministry, and I would say—

**Melissa Lantsman:** How is that progress? What does success look like in your department?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** —it's challenging everywhere, but the structural measures that we're presenting today are going to help produce more in Canada and increase food security. Immediate expansions, for example, for greenhouses and making sure we can support abattoirs and the food supply chain in Canada will help.

• (1840)

**Melissa Lantsman:** I'm going to interrupt you because I have no time and you're not really answering the questions with numbers.

If prices have risen by 43% after government intervention, what would failure have looked like? Is it 50%? Is it 60%? What are the benchmarks in your department that say lower prices need to be this much or stability needs to be this if everything is going up and we are the leader in the G7 on grocery inflation?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** Well, I would challenge you with the data on that. If you look from 2019, you will see that the data does not support your statement.

**Melissa Lantsman:** I'm looking from when you yourself said that you would stabilize prices.

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** I'm just telling you, because I happened to look at the G7 numbers, that we do benchmark with our G7 peers. If you look at Canada.... I'm happy to share the chart with you, but that's not what makes a difference for Canadians. What makes a difference for Canadians—

**Melissa Lantsman:** Wait a second: Grocery prices don't make a difference for Canadians?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** I would say that what makes a difference to Canadians is being humble in this place. Humility should be part of our discourse. Canadians are smart.

Canadians understand that a number of issues go around grocery inflation. It's not unique to Canada. They have the same thing in the United States.

What I'm saying is this: They know that, because you import, you have fluctuations in currency. They know about the issue of climate change. They know about the issue with respect to supply chains. They know that you have more competition—

**Melissa Lantsman:** With all due respect, Minister, you've been in government for 10 years.

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** Yes, but—

**Melissa Lantsman:** You yourself said in 2023 that you would stabilize prices, that you would lower prices, but every single price that I have named for you today on every single item has gone up and not down.

You're blaming outside factors. Right now, in Canada, our food inflation is twice that of the Americans.

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** I'm not blaming anything. I'm just telling you the facts. When you have people watching at home, they understand—

**Melissa Lantsman:** Well, it's convenient that you keep yourself and all of government policy, regulation and food packaging taxes outside of your facts. You're not allowed to have your own facts.

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** That's why I want to answer you. That's why I'm saying that Canadians understand food inflation as a global issue, but what they care more about is that we're taking structural measures to—

**Melissa Lantsman:** If it's a global—

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** Madam Chair, do you want me to answer? I'm happy to listen to the questions, but if Canadians want to have answers—

**Melissa Lantsman:** You have to answer the questions.

Why is Canada the worst, then?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** Well, I would challenge you on that, but that's not really what Canadians would focus on—

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Minister.

Thank you, Ms. Lantsman.

That concludes the time for this round.

We will now continue with Monsieur Leitão for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Carlos Leitão (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Minister, thank you for being here.

[*English*]

Just for the record, Madam Chair, right now, Canada's real food inflation is not the worst in the G7 and is not double that of the U.S. if you discount base effects. The numbers for December are heavily affected by base effects. If you discount them, food inflation in Canada right now is in the 3% to 4% range, not 6%. We have to adjust it for the base effects.

[*Translation*]

Minister, we created a support program for Canadians to partially offset the cumulative increase in food prices. Can you tell us how the program that was just announced, which we are debating today with the study of Bill C-19, is different from the one that was put in place a year ago regarding the changes to the GST?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** Thank you. That is a great question.

Thank you for setting the record straight. I think Canadians know how to sort things out, and I think your intervention helps to sort things out.

What is important is that there is a one-time support, but there is also structural assistance. For the one-time support, we are talking about overall benefits, for 2026-2027, of \$950 for a single person and \$1,890 for a couple with two children.

To answer my Conservative Party colleagues who voted in favour of this motion, I would point out that \$500 million from the strategic response fund will help Canadian companies increase production in Canada, because we want to talk about food security.

We also talked about immediate expensing for greenhouses. As I said, what we need to do is produce more at home so that we are less dependent and more resilient.

We are also talking about an additional fund for food banks to alleviate immediate pressures.

We have a national food security strategy to make food more affordable. My colleagues from Quebec will understand that. I consulted the president of the Union des producteurs agricoles. That is what I am saying to my Conservative colleagues: It is not just a one-off. Structural measures have been asked of us for slaughterhouses, the supply chain and food supply chains, which are quite long. These are measures to support the work that is being done by our farmers.

We also talked about standardizing the labelling of the unit price. You know that this is one of the measures we have in Quebec, but you will be surprised to learn that it does not exist across the country. So we want to work with the provinces to ensure that consumers are able to better compare prices when they go to the grocery store.

So, yes, there are ad hoc measures. I often say, and it was said in English, that it is like a one-time measure that will help people, with a bonus this year.

This is also a measure that will make it possible to bridge the gap for the transition. People at home understand that we have a plan and a vision to grow the Canadian economy by 2030, but people are telling us that, in the meantime, they need a helping hand. We know that, for Canadian families, the two biggest expenses are housing and groceries. That is why we said we had to take action to help people. We have done it before on housing. What we are doing in terms of food will help people at a critical time for many families.

I know that some of my colleagues may take the liberty of expressing some criticism, but I can tell you that these amounts will help many Canadian families. I am sure you have read the report published by Food Banks Canada. The report mentions that the funding we are willing to provide to help people will improve things for Canadian families.

• (1845)

**Carlos Leitão:** Thank you for talking about Food Banks Canada, Minister, because that is indeed the next topic I wanted to address.

As you announced, this measure was very well received by Food Banks Canada. In fact, I have the impression that it is something that this organization has been asking for over some time, since it is believed that the best way to combat the effects of food inflation was to make a payment directly to the people most affected by it. I would like you to confirm my impression.

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** As you know, the GST credit makes our tax system fairer. As you know, you are a great economist, Mr. Leitão. You were Minister of Finance in Quebec and you had a career in finance. People know your skills and your experience in the field. I think, as you said, it makes it possible to adjust the credit. That is the old GST credit, and it makes our tax system fairer.

This is a measure that has been applauded, obviously, by Food Banks Canada. Having spoken to various stakeholders in the field, I think that people understand what I am trying to tell our Conservative friends: There is a one-time increase, but there are also structural measures. Structural measures are what will help us in the long term to be more resilient in terms of food.

As I said, when you are in a northern country like Canada, which imports 30% of its fruits and vegetables, but where the rate is 80% to 90% in the winter, the answer to my colleagues is simple. Obviously, there is the exchange rate, but there is also the climate, the supply chains and the tariff measures imposed. All of that is documented. This is why food inflation is not unique to Canada.

What matters to people is that we take action now to help them. It will bridge the gap until economic growth starts benefiting Canadian households.

**Carlos Leitão:** Thank you, Minister.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Leitão.

Thank you, Minister.

I will now give the floor to Mr. Garon for six minutes.

**Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you for your availability, Minister. We are going to see each other a lot this week.

In 2022, the Bloc Québécois proposed a similar measure. We were in an inflation crisis. We asked for the GST credit to be increased. Our request did not include a one-time cheque, but we felt that, in a period of inflation, especially at a time where we were exceeding the target, it was a good idea. It took you a long time, but congratulations, in the end, you finally did it.

That said, there are two components to your measure. The first component is a permanent measure: The government is increasing the cheque by 25%. The second component is a one-time cheque.

Minister, you know me, I am not a cynical person, but your one-time cheques are starting to be quite familiar to us. There was a \$500 cheque for seniors on the eve of the 2021 election. There was a cheque for the carbon tax in the 2025 election.

Will your signs be ready on the day the cheque is paid?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** You say you are not cynical, but now I am doing my best not to have a big smile on my face.

**Jean-Denis Garon:** I am not putting words in your mouth, Minister. I will let you answer the question.

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** Okay.

First, I will explain exactly why we did that and what calculation we made.

If you look at what we call the excess food inflation that we have seen since COVID-19, you see that it amounts to about \$782. That is why we said we were going to make a one-time increase. That enables families to get that amount; it even exceeds that amount. It also helps structurally over the longer term. As I was saying, there is the idea of a one-time increase, but there is also the bridge until 2030. The amount you see is really the adjustment we calculated with—

• (1850)

**Jean-Denis Garon:** If I understand correctly, since you feel that there is a kind of temporary peak in inflation and that people are experiencing it very strongly, you write a one-time cheque.

Does that mean that, in a year from now, if you fail to reduce food inflation, you will issue another one-time cheque and we will have to pass another motion?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** No.

What we did and what we calculated, I want it to be clear for everyone, for the benefit of all my colleagues who are here. If you look at the excess food inflation since COVID-19, you see that it is about \$780. So we are filling that gap, but we are aware that there will still be food inflation.

**Jean-Denis Garon:** Inflation is recurring. Prices will not go down.

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** No, that is true, but—

**Jean-Denis Garon:** You write a one-time cheque.

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** —you see that there is a difference between food inflation and general inflation. Those are two curves. It varies by food. You will agree with me that what stands out is really cocoa, sugar, what we call confectionery, pork, chicken, beef. A 50% share of inflation is related to about four foods that are part of the basket of products we use to calculate, but that ultimately just represents 10% of purchases. As an economist, you understand all that. That is why we got that.

**Jean-Denis Garon:** I appreciate that. I am not the best in the world like Mr. Leitão, but I am an economist, after all.

I think there would have been a way, at the same cost, to increase this year's cheque by more than 25% and to do so in a more staggered way, so that it would be permanent and people would be guaranteed predictability. That is my opinion. Obviously, that is not what is in the bill.

There is another thing you could have done, Minister, that I think would have been really good for people. You know, the GST credit cheques come in every three months, but people are going to the grocery store every week. In 2022, when we asked for the GST credit to be enhanced, we said that it might be a good idea to write the cheque every month, so that the money gets to people more regularly. Mr. Leitão and I know economic theory, so we know that when people have money coming in, they go to the grocery store and spend it, so it is preferable to have some regularity in that. This measure would cost virtually nothing, apart from administrative costs.

Why do you not want to go in that direction?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** I think you answered the question by asking it: There are administrative costs to that.

We do it quarterly and it happens at the beginning of the month. There is a cost-benefit issue, as you know, in administering these benefits.

**Jean-Denis Garon:** Have you thought about that? Have you cost that out? It would really help people if they had a cheque a month.

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** I would say that, yes, we have looked at that. Obviously, if the cheques are sent out monthly, there is an administrative cost to that. To my knowledge, that is why the GST credit has always been done on a quarterly basis. We have tried to—

**Jean-Denis Garon:** For the guaranteed income supplement and old age security, you write tons of cheques a month, so why not do the same for this credit?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** As I told you, I think people know that we do it quarterly. Now we are enhancing it.

In addition, as you know, you are asking for sound management of taxpayer money. So I always look at that.

We also tried to do this fairly quickly, to get an increase quickly, because people were asking us for it, as evidenced by the House of Commons—

**Jean-Denis Garon:** I appreciate that. I have one minute left, so I am going to ask you one last question. However, I stand by the proposal and we would like to know how much it costs.

When you were the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, I was your critic. At the time, you told us that you were bringing together all the grocery store owners, among others, that we were going to have a grocery code of conduct and that we were going to see what happens, now that managing that issue had just started.

However, you were telling us something else. As you know, people call you the Energizer bunny, and we knew that the bunny was going to the United States and elsewhere to try to attract foreign grocery chains to Canada to bring back competition.

As of today, February 3, 2026, I would like you to give us a single name of a grocery chain that has come to set up shop here.

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** I will keep confidential the names of the people I spoke to, out of respect for the trade discussions we had.

I would say that one of the major concerns we heard was about the famous existing clauses in commercial leases that ultimately prevented other competitors from setting up—

**Jean-Denis Garon:** [*Inaudible—Editor*] in committee six months from now, and one has arrived.

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** Allow me to say that what constituted a barrier was the presence of these clauses in commercial leases. We made them illegal, because we found that, in terms of competition, it was the presence of these clauses in leases that stopped foreign companies from entering Canada. As you know, we amended the Competition Act precisely to make these leases illegal.

**Jean-Denis Garon:** We will be sitting on the edge of our seats in the next few months, Minister, and we will wait for the news.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Garon.

[*English*]

We will continue with Mr. Hallan for five minutes, please.

**Jasraj Hallan (Calgary East, CPC):** Thanks, Chair.

Minister, the Parliamentary Budget Officer costed this rebate at \$12.4 billion. Your government has already doubled Justin Trudeau's deficit, at \$80 billion. Where are you going to find another \$12.4 billion to cover the cost?

• (1855)

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** To go back to your first question about PBO, there are different assumptions. This is not unusual—

**Jasraj Hallan:** Whether it's \$11 billion or \$12 billion, where are you going to find that cost?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** They're just different assumptions in terms of the difference between their number and our number.

I would say that to be in government is to choose. We chose to support Canadians at a time of need. This is also part of our Canadian values. The fact that you voted in favour—

**Jasraj Hallan:** Minister, you also could have chosen to reduce the cost of groceries, but you didn't. The real issue is the cost of groceries. You're adding another \$12.4 billion of deficit for Canadians. There are only a few ways to cover that, as you know. You can raise taxes, put more debt on to Canadians or make government cuts. To cover this cost, which is it?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** I would say there are a lot of ways to grow the economy, and that's exactly what we're doing. That's why you saw that in budget 2025, we have generational

investments to grow our economy. That's the way we're going to make Canadians richer.

**Jasraj Hallan:** Minister, respectfully, we had 0% growth in GDP in November. All of last year, GDP per capita flatlined at 0%. The Bank of Canada is basically saying it's going to flatline next year for growth. I don't think you can say that the economy is going to be doing any better or help you guys out.

You are the guy who made a big claim in 2023 about lowering grocery prices. Can you please tell Canadians how much grocery prices will go down after this rebate?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** I just want to correct the record, Madam Chair. Canada will.... I mean, it's not me but the International Monetary Fund, which is a credible source, has said that Canada will have the second-fastest growth in the G7—

**Jasraj Hallan:** The Bank of Canada would disagree with you.

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** —so I think you should be rejoicing in that, because this is good news for Canada.

**Jasraj Hallan:** I don't think Canadians would be rejoicing—

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** Well, the IMF—

**Jasraj Hallan:** —who have the highest household debt in the entire G7.

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** —is a very credible source that would tell you—

**Jasraj Hallan:** Minister, we have to go back to the question: How much will groceries go down with this rebate? We just need to know the price.

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** I'm sure that when you voted in favour, you applauded the fact that there will not only be a boost but there's also a bridge to 2030 and structural measures to allow more resilient food production in Canada. That's why we will also have a national food strategy. I think this matters to Canadians for food security.

**Jasraj Hallan:** Actually, we have the highest grocery inflation in the entire G7. In 2023 you made this grand show that you were going to pull in all the grocery CEOs. You said that you were going to be the minister on a mission. You said that you were going to be the guy who gave it to them, and they were going to stabilize grocery prices. Since then, we now have the highest grocery inflation in the entire G7.

If you're not going to tell us how much prices will go down, can you at least tell us, minister on a mission, on what date grocery costs will go down for Canadians? Just tell us the date.

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** Madam Chair, I'm happy to produce that for the record of the committee, but importantly, there's also something called "Understanding the resurgence of food inflation in 2025" by the Bank of Canada. I think that might help my colleagues to understand the source of inflation. This is from the Bank of Canada—

**Jasraj Hallan:** Great. I read that report today, Minister.

In fact, that report says—

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** I'm happy to quote it for you.

**Jasraj Hallan:** —that two-thirds of food costs—the food costs we see today, the highest grocery inflation in the G7—were caused by domestic factors.

Domestic factors include inputs, like your industrial carbon tax, like your Liberal fuel standard, like your food packaging tax. Those things are directly in your and your government's hands, and yet you guys refused, and in fact voted against, our motion when we brought it forward to help lower the cost of food for Canadians.

We see 2.2 million Canadians going to a food bank in a single month—700,000 plus of those are children—and we have the most indebted households in the entire G7 because of your failed policies.

In 2023, you said you would bring down those costs. Why have they not gone down? Just answer: Why are our costs and our food inflation double the U.S.'s?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** I want to help my colleague again, because it's in the report.

For Canadians at home, it says, "The rise in food inflation in 2025 was mostly driven by pressures from import costs". That's the Bank of Canada. It's not even me who says that.

**Jasraj Hallan:** Excuse me: It also says two-thirds of the cost of food is from domestic factors.

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** It's helping you to understand the nature of the inflation. I'm trying to help.

**The Chair:** One person at a time, please. It's a bit of a challenge for the interpreters.

**Jasraj Hallan:** Minister, right beside your \$925 top-up is a \$1,000 increase in grocery costs because your government is spending.... There's already a loss for Canadians.

Your rebate is literally \$10 a week on a weekly \$300 grocery bill. How is that supposed to help Canadians? Should you not be lowering the cost of groceries?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** Maybe \$945 may not make a difference...but it's going to make a difference for millions of Canadians.

• (1900)

**The Chair:** Minister, we're going to have to end it there.

Thank you, Mr. Hallan.

We will continue with Mr. Sawatzky for five minutes.

**Jake Sawatzky (New Westminster—Burnaby—Maillardville, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Chair.

[Translation]

Minister, thank you for being here today.

I share your enthusiasm.

[English]

It's an opportunity to make things more affordable for Canadians at a time when, as you've mentioned, it's very much needed.

Of course, there are investments in major projects, which will stimulate the economy in the long term, but bridging the gap is really important for a lot of young people—and really, for people of all ages. Families, seniors.... Everyone is feeling the pinch right now. As you've mentioned, there are a lot of factors: global shifts, climate change, the economic impacts of COVID and all sorts of other things.

Can you elaborate on some of the things the Bank of Canada brought up? What are some of the causes of food inflation?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** That's a very good question.

You're right. I'm happy to talk to young Canadians watching at home tonight, because this measure is touching young Canadians, seniors and families across the country. That's why I was surprised that my Conservative colleagues are dismissive of our helping 12 million Canadians. I don't think folks in their ridings would be too happy to hear what they're saying tonight in committee, because their families and ridings are going to benefit.

If you look at the Food Banks Canada report, it will tell you that the amount we are proposing to offer Canadians—the boost and the bridge—is exactly what it is saying. The amount of money it quotes is very much in line with what we're offering.

That's why I think everyone here should have a humble approach to all of this. Canadians are watching at home. We have to be where the people are. For a lot of families, this is going to make a huge difference. You can take it from me. You can take it from Food Banks Canada. This amount will make a meaningful—I'm using the word—difference. To anyone in this room questioning whether it will be good for families, I say that humility is probably the tone we should adopt because, yes, if you're a single person in this country, the increase you're going to see this year will be meaningful. This is very significant. It's \$402 more in your pocket. If you have a family with two children, it's \$800. This is very significant for families.

However, you're right, sir. It's not just about that. It's about everything else we've done for Canadians. You have to couple that with the first thing we did, which was cutting taxes for 22 million Canadians. You have the Canada child benefit, which is going to six million Canadians. You have the national school food program, which is helping 400,000 kids in our country. You have the Canada disability benefit, which is touching 467,000 people. You have \$10-a-day child care, which is helping 900,000 families. You have the Canada workers benefit.

The list of measures we have taken to support workers, young people and families is long. They understand our vision, and I know the Conservatives understand it too. They won't say it publicly, but they understand that if you want to grow GDP per capita, you have to grow the economy. They understand generational investment. Actually, the IMF gets it. I was there in Washington when they said, "Oh, there are two countries in the world." They talked about Germany and Canada. They said that those are the only two countries in the world you should look at. Those are the two that have the fiscal capacity and the wisdom to invest in things that will make a difference: housing, infrastructure, productivity, innovation and defence. Those are the kinds of investments the IMF says will grow the economy in a smart way.

In the meantime, as we've heard from colleagues, Canadians are worried about the two things they see most directly: food and shelter. This is a reality every other day, every other week and at the end of the month. You have to be with people in their time of need. This is part of our Canadian values, and that's why people voted unanimously in the House. I'm surprised to hear some comments tonight from the opposition, because they were so glad to clamour that they put the motion forward and got unanimous consent. I'm sitting here tonight and they're saying, "This is not good enough." I don't know. I'm a bit confused, because Food Banks Canada thinks it's good. Twelve million Canadian families will be saying that it makes a difference for them.

In the spirit of non-partisanship, good policy and no politics, our colleagues in the opposition should be rejoicing that they've been with us on the journey and that they're going to be able to go back to their constituencies and say, "Yes, the government took up a good policy that's going to help you."

• (1905)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Mr. Sawatzky.

[*Translation*]

I now give the floor to Mr. Garon for two and a half minutes.

**Jean-Denis Garon:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to pick up on the last point, just paraphrasing you. When you were Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, you went to see foreign grocers, you told them that we had a competition problem and you asked them to come to Canada. So those people bought a plane ticket, came here, and then told you that they were only interested in shopping centres. They said they could not control their enthusiasm when thinking about opening grocery stores in shopping malls, and that they wanted nothing but stores in shopping malls. Then you introduced your bill, you solved the problem of leases in shopping malls, and you thought that foreign grocers would rush to open stores in Canada. Now you are telling us that, since all this takes time to set up, those grocers have not yet opened stores in Canada.

First of all, that does not make sense as an analysis. Could it be that we still have competition problems in the grocery sector and that we still have five major grocers, including Walmart and Costco?

If there are still competition problems, specifically, what are the next steps for constructive public policy in order to have competition in the retail sector?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** Thank you for going back to what I said. As I said at the time, competition is the best way to get better prices in the long term. What I told you—

**Jean-Denis Garon:** Tell me just one measure or just one thing that remains to be done. We do not have much time.

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** What I relayed to you was exactly the discussions I had with some of the foreign grocers. They told us, in some cases, that they had looked at the Canadian market, but that the way the leases were structured did not allow them to enter the market. Obviously, time has passed. Is that now—

**Jean-Denis Garon:** Time goes by here as well, Minister.

So there were not enough shopping malls for the Americans. I appreciate that.

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** I am talking about leases, not shopping malls.

**Jean-Denis Garon:** No, no, there were not enough shopping malls for the Americans.

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** It was the nature of the commercial leases that was the issue.

**Jean-Denis Garon:** I will continue quickly.

The GST credit will start being paid later this year. The one-time payment will be made in the next fiscal year. From a technical point of view, I understand that the bulk of the measure will be budgeted in the economic update for the next fiscal year. So it will appear in the next deficit, and it will not have an impact on the \$78 billion deficit that you announced in the fall. Did I understand correctly?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** Depending on how the payments are made, yes, as you said, it will fall into the next fiscal year. Having said that, we have to get royal assent first.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Mr. Garon.

Before I go to Ms. Ildout, I just want to remind everyone that one person has to speak at a time, or it is very difficult for the interpreters to interpret. Please speak one person at a time.

[English]

Mr. Kelly, you have five minutes, please.

**Pat Kelly (Calgary Crowfoot, CPC):** Minister, in September 2023, you said that you were going to bring price stability to groceries. That was two and a half years ago. The current situation with food affordability demonstrates the spectacular extent to which you have failed in that commitment. We support today's bill that we are discussing. We always support tax relief for Canadians. However, according to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, this puts a \$12.5-billion hole in your budget.

What does the bill do to your future budget projections, when you have just tabled a budget with a \$78.3-billion deficit?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** It's good that you support it, because I was not so sure, hearing what you were saying. You went on the news to say you would support the measure. I hope it's still the case, because Canadians are watching at home. It's important for you to be there for Canadians when they are.

When it comes to the budget, we presented a set of generational investments. This is a measure that was timely and needed to support Canadian families, but at the same time, that put structural measures in place to have more food resiliency in Canada. I think you should applaud that measure, because I know you care about food security in the country.

**Pat Kelly:** Yes, I do, Minister, but you didn't answer my question. Will this affect your budget projections, yes or no?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** When preparing a budget, which will come later this year, you obviously have to take a number of things into account. I say that this measure was very much needed for Canadians and to support the Canadian economy.

**Pat Kelly:** Minister, you make promises around budgets and deficits all the time, but you break them every time. Is this another one where your future deficit projections are jeopardized by this budget, or will there be reductions in public services, cuts or tax increases? Canadians need to know these things. If this is to pay for groceries, you're putting the nation's groceries on the nation's credit card. You need to explain how this will be paid for.

• (1910)

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** I think Canadians are confused now. I don't know if you're for or against it.

**Pat Kelly:** I'm for accountability.

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** I'm listening to you. If I were sitting in Saskatchewan tonight, listening to you, I might say, "Is the Conservative Party for the measure? They're voting for it, but I'm listening to them tonight, and they don't seem very much in favour." It's quite confusing. I'm thinking of all the families listening to you.

**Pat Kelly:** I don't want you to be confused, Minister, so let's be clear.

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** Canadians are listening to you tonight. People are watching at home, and they're saying, "Is he for or against food security?"

**Pat Kelly:** No, they're watching, and they're seeing a minister who won't answer a question. I just asked you if this is going to change your projections.

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** If the question is about something that you do or do not support, then your question is confusing to Canadians as to whether you support the measure. You're voting in favour, but now you're talking against it.

**Pat Kelly:** Minister, I've asked you at least three times now if—

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** You can ask me five times if you want.

**Pat Kelly:** Well, I'm going to ask you again and ask you if you will clearly answer the question. Does Bill C-19 affect the budget projections contained in the budget you just tabled, yes or no?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** Every measure that the government takes has an impact on the budget. I would say that when you govern, you choose. We chose to support Canadians, and I thought you did too. However, now Canadians are confused. Are you for Bill C-19 or not?

Tell Canadians; they're watching. They're watching your smile. Actually, they can see me now. I wish they could see you.

Are you for the measure—if you're voting in favour?

**Pat Kelly:** Minister, you are here to answer questions.

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** I am.

**Pat Kelly:** How will your government finance Bill C-19? That's the type of question we ask at committee. Ministers come, and we ask hard questions like this: How will you pay for a measure that you've proposed in the House of Commons?

How will you pay for this measure?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** Every measure that we take is taken into account in the budget, and there will be other measures, obviously, that we need to put forward to support Canadians.

The real thing tonight is that I'm not sure what Canadians should take from your questions, whether you're going to be for or against.

You know that every measure the government has put forward is obviously going to have an impact on the budget, but the reality is that this is the smart thing to do, at the right time, to support families.

Are you in favour of supporting families, yes or no?

**Pat Kelly:** We're here to ask the questions, Minister. You're the minister here to answer questions from committee. Let's finish this with another question.

You've spoken many times in this meeting about the need for elected officials to show some humility. You have a few seconds left; will you apologize to Canadians for your failure to bring price stability as you promised in 2023?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** Madam Chair, do I still have time to answer?

**The Chair:** You have two seconds....

Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Mr. Kelly.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Lavoie, you have the floor for five minutes.

**Steeve Lavoie (Beauport—Limoilou, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, thank you for being with us this evening.

I am going to bring the discussion back down to earth, as we say back home in the riding of Beauport—Limoilou, where I am proud to have been elected.

Early on in my career, I worked for a period of time in banks, mostly granting loans. Some clients had to hand me their keys because they were no longer able to pay back their loan. As a result, I experienced people's misery and the difficulty they had making ends meet, so this is something that affects me a great deal.

Over the holidays, I toured all the seniors' residences. I have a lot of them in my riding. I took the time to visit the families. Just last Friday, I was at Entraide Agapè, a centre that helps people and has more than 100 volunteers.

I was listening to people speak earlier and it made me smile to think that there were a lot of economists here. I was thinking about the people in my riding of Beauport—Limoilou. They are not economists, but I can tell you that they know how to count money.

Today, some people have written to me to say that what worries them is not whether they will receive a cheque every month or every three months, but whether they will actually receive the money, whether what is promised in Bill C-19 will actually get done.

So I have two questions for you.

The first question is the one I just asked you: Are the people really going to see any of that money?

Second, how will this benefit complement other financial measures that have been put in place, such as the Canada child benefit, the guaranteed income supplement, the national school food program and the Canadian dental care plan?

• (1915)

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** Thank you for bringing some empathy back into this discussion, Mr. Lavoie. I came here to testify tonight and I talked about humility, empathy and authenticity, so I would like to see that in everyone. There is nothing political about what we are doing tonight. I do not understand the line of questioning from the Conservatives. They voted in favour of it, then came to the committee with a view that they were against it. I think it is a bit confusing for people. I hear you. I come from Shawinigan. People back home who are watching this tonight are wondering how you can support something and then be so against it in the comments. You are right to bring it back to the floor. That is a good thing.

We talked a lot about the benefit, but we forgot to talk about all the structural measures. As I said, one-time measures are proposed to help people, but there are also structural measures to make food production more resilient. For example, I know that Mr. Garon will be pleased to hear that, in Quebec, the people I spoke with at the Union des producteurs agricoles gave us ideas, particularly on structural measures. Food security requires producing more at home and having more fluidity in the food production chain, for example. Obviously, we live in a northern country, so we import a lot of fruits and vegetables. We need to increase production in certain sectors, and that is why we focused on that.

Then we said that we had to help people by taking action on competition. I mentioned, for example, the price per unit, which is a Quebec measure. In Quebec, we take it for granted, but it is a measure that does not exist in a structured way in the other Canadian provinces. Consumer protection in Quebec is very advanced.

You are right. As I am trying to explain to our Conservative colleagues this evening, we cannot consider this in isolation, because we also have the Canada child benefit, the Canada school food program, the Canada workers benefit and the Canadian dental care plan, for example. This is a set of measures through which we are supporting Canadians at a time when they need it. I know that even our Conservative colleagues, although they will not tell the committee, understand that our investments are going to grow the Canadian economy. That is why we need a one-time measure and an increase in funding as well, which will allow us to bridge the gap until the Canadian economy gets better.

You are right that people are able to sort things out. I know they are watching television tonight and they are sorting it out. They know what politics is, and they can see when we are genuine and ready to answer questions. Those questions are fair, and we present the facts to people. This evening, I am pleased to be here with you, before the committee, and to see you shed light on this. We need to educate people on these policies. The fact that we voted unanimously on this is a good example of democracy. However, this evening, I think people are a bit confused about some of the positions taken and some of the questions asked.

**Steeve Lavoie:** I think I have 20 seconds left. What still needs to happen before people get the money?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** Well, we need to pass Bill C-19. It still has to go through some stages, and that's why I'm appealing to our opposition colleagues' common sense and asking them to support this measure. I think the Bloc Québécois should be firmly in favour, as should the Conservative Party, because this measure will help 12 million Canadians.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Lavoie.

[English]

We will continue with Ms. Cobena for five minutes.

**Sandra Cobena (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to start by giving the minister time to answer my colleague's question, which he did not answer.

The question was this: In 2023, you promised to bring grocery prices down, but they have since gone up 7.8%. Do you have the humility to apologize to Canadians for putting them through this hardship?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** I would say it's a work in progress. Tonight is a great step in what we're doing to help Canadian families. I'm glad you supported it. I'm sure your line of questioning will be about support.

**Sandra Cobena:** Minister, the question is actually quite straightforward. The question is very simple. You made a promise, but you broke it. It was under your watch that grocery prices went up 7.8%. Will you apologize to Canadians?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** I would say everyone in this room should show—

**Sandra Cobena:** Okay, so the answer is no.

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** —a bit of humility and authenticity.

**Sandra Cobena:** How much will this program cost?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** We have been able to table the exact cost of it. You have the PBO report. You also have our estimate, which is—

**Sandra Cobena:** I just want a number, please. How much will this cost?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** —north of \$11 billion.

**Sandra Cobena:** How much?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** It will cost \$11.3 billion.

**Sandra Cobena:** It will cost \$11.3 billion. We are operating under a deficit here. Will you be printing money or putting it on the line of credit?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** Will you support Canadian families or not?

**Sandra Cobena:** The question is this: Will you be printing money, or will it go on the line of credit?

• (1920)

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** The question is this: Will you support Canadian families? You voted in favour.

**Sandra Cobena:** Minister, when I speak to people in my riding, they are tired of politics. They want simple answers.

Whether it's \$11 billion or \$11.3 billion, will you be printing money or putting it on a line of credit?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** How are you going to explain to the people in your riding that you voted in favour...?

**Sandra Cobena:** It's a simple question. You're the finance minister. Finance is based on numbers.

Will you be printing money, or will it go on the line of credit?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** What will you say to your constituents when you voted in favour but you're not willing to support Canadians? I think people will be confused. You should help them. We can help you.

**Sandra Cobena:** Minister, please, just give me an answer.

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** That's what I'm saying. How are you going to explain that to your constituents?

**Sandra Cobena:** You must have thought this through. Do you know what you're going to do? Would you please just share that with Canadians?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** Exactly, that's what I'm saying.

**Sandra Cobena:** How are you going to finance this?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** I'm sure your constituents are confused. You voted in favour, and now you're saying you're not for the measures.

**Sandra Cobena:** Minister, will you be printing money or using the line of credit?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** Are you in favour of the measure or are you against?

**Sandra Cobena:** You are running a deficit. How much will the deficit be then?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** As I said, this measure supports Canadians. You voted in favour of it. You should stand by your vote and say, yes, we favour this because it's going to support Canadians in a time of need.

**Sandra Cobena:** Minister, will this be a capital investment or an operating expense? It's hard to tell with your broad definition now.

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** I would not say it's so broad. You should look at what the International Monetary Fund—

**Sandra Cobena:** Will it be an operating expense or a capital investment?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** Madam Chair, do you want me to answer? I'm happy to listen to the questions.

**Sandra Cobena:** Please answer. We're waiting for an answer.

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** That's what I was saying. I was referring to the International Monetary Fund—

**Sandra Cobena:** No, we're talking about Canada here.

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** I'm trying to help you. The International Monetary Fund said that other countries are looking at the definition Canada has adopted, and they praise the framework Canada has put forward.

**Sandra Cobena:** No, I'm not asking your opinion on the definition. I'm asking whether this program will be a capital investment or an operating expense. You must have thought this through.

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** It's going to be an operating expense.

**Sandra Cobena:** Excuse me?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** It's going to be an operating expense in the measure that supports Canadians.

**Sandra Cobena:** Thank you.

For a family—

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** Hold on, but let me finish because—

**Sandra Cobena:** No. I just need—

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** Don't you want the answer? I'm trying to answer your question.

**Sandra Cobena:** No, I just needed the clarification, Minister.

I have a question.

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** There are aspects of it that would support [*Inaudible—Editor*] investment as well in the structure—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. Minister and Ms. Cobena, I would ask both of you to pause for a second.

Ms. Cobena, please continue.

**Sandra Cobena:** Would a family with three children, with both parents earning minimum wage, qualify for this rebate?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** I would say the data I have is for a family of two children, which will receive \$1,899.

**Sandra Cobena:** No. The question was regarding a family earning minimum wage with three children.

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** We will provide you with the information. We have to look at the table to be accurate with Canadians.

**Sandra Cobena:** The answer is no. I looked at the table published by the Government of Canada. The answer is no. If they are making a minimum wage of \$17.50, with both parents working full

time and with three children, they don't qualify. They're seeing infant formula go up 13%.

The next question is, would a married couple earning less than \$61,000 and living paycheque to paycheque qualify for this rebate?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** We would be happy to look at the table and provide you an answer for that.

**Sandra Cobena:** Minister, you published the table.

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** Yes, that's what I'm saying. If you have the table in front of you, you should have the data to be able to answer that.

**Sandra Cobena:** The questions are based on the table.

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** I'm telling you what the benefit is going to be. If you're referring to the table you have, you can quote it. We'll be happy to respond to you.

**Sandra Cobena:** I have the table you published. The answer is no.

Would a single father with two children earning \$67,000 a year and facing grocery prices receive this support, yes or no?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** You seem to have the answers. I will let you speak for the record.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Cobena.

Minister, we'll pause it there. Thank you very much.

We're going to continue with Mr. Leitão for five minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

**Carlos Leitão:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Minister, thank you again.

Could you carry on with what you were saying? You were explaining something to our colleague, but you were being constantly interrupted. You were talking about why such a program is needed. Our Conservative friends seemed to be on board, but I agree with you that they now seem a little more reluctant.

Can you remind us why such a program is so important and so necessary?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** I hear you. I think people at home are wondering the same thing. I've always said that, in politics, you have to be authentic, humble and empathetic. On the authenticity front, people have questions. The Conservatives voted in favour of the measure, but now, during committee testimony, they seem to be against it. People are a bit surprised by that.

However, as you said, this is a very important measure. That's why we introduced it. People have asked us to help them right now. As I said, they understand that the economy will grow between now and 2030, but they need help right now. That's why we stepped up.

Mr. Leitão, as an economist, you know that we've introduced a series of measures to help Canadians. The first thing we did was lower taxes for 22 million Canadians. This measure will help 12 million Canadians who need help. Many people have applauded this type of measure because it will provide compensation to low-income families.

Our Conservative colleague mentioned some data points. What I presented was the published data for a couple with two children and for a single person. This measure will definitely improve things for several million Canadian families, but I want to emphasize what matters here. Mr. Leitão, you'll understand, because you've been a government member, too. Structural measures are what matter most, but people don't seem to be talking about them, and I don't understand why people aren't asking me questions about them. Making the food supply chain more resilient is a good thing. Ensuring that measures are in place to help Canadian families and the industry at a time like this is important.

Folks at home know what's what. They know that the price of chicken, beef, pork and lettuce has gone up. That's why we need to put measures in place to help people during these harder times. I still think that, at the end of the day, people know what's what. They know that we need to implement temporary measures and that we're also going to be able to implement structural measures to build greater resilience in the country's food supply chain.

● (1925)

**Carlos Leitão:** That's right, Minister. During discussions about food inflation here and in the House, people have often mentioned rapidly rising meat prices, for example. However, I'm sure everyone is aware of the fact that higher meat prices are essentially a supply issue. There's a meat shortage. Because of climate change and very precarious conditions in recent years, especially in western Canada, herds have shrunk dramatically. What can we do? If there are no cows, there are no cows. Essentially, certain circumstances and elements have a disproportionate impact on the total price.

You mentioned something earlier that I think is very important. When we look at all this, we see that food inflation is largely due to the prices of about four or five products.

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** You're absolutely right.

One thing the opposition will never talk about is prices that have gone down. Cellphone prices are down. The cost of child care has come down as well. The opposition will never talk about those things, because they're obviously not the things they want to bring attention to.

You're right that there are structural factors. You're right about beef. Again, Canada is not alone in this.

What matters today is that we are taking action. That's why I find our Conservative colleagues' questions kind of surprising. Instead of criticizing the measure they voted for, they should be telling

Canadians that these are good things and that they are supporting the government for once because they know that this measure will help Canadians.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Mr. Leitão.

We're going to wrap up this hour with two and a half minutes for Mr. Garon.

**Jean-Denis Garon:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, I'm sorry to have to be the one to tell you that people can't eat cellphones. We're talking about the price of groceries, but I'm glad if that helps.

I feel like we're not at the same committee meeting. You're telling us that no opposition members bothered to ask you about structural measures for the future. However, when it was my turn earlier, I asked you to give me just one more measure you would implement to improve competition in the grocery sector. That was pretty generous of me to ask for just one. You didn't have any ideas then, so try again.

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** It's always inspiring to listen to you.

The Competition Bureau is also looking at the food supply chain. Obviously, the number of players in the food production and distribution chain is what determines whether there's enough competition in Canada. That's what we asked the Competition Bureau to look at at the time, as you will recall. I asked the Competition Bureau to keep an even closer eye on that. As you know, the bureau's job is to examine competition issues. We're going to keep pushing on that. As an economist, you know as well as I do that—

● (1930)

**Jean-Denis Garon:** I appreciate that. I'll go to my last question.

Basically, you're taking action by asking the Competition Bureau to be vigilant. It just so happens that I asked them about that.

Some people don't file their tax returns. Even with auto-filing, some people fall through the cracks and have trouble getting benefits. As everyone knows, these are often the people who have the most difficulty with things like putting food on the table every day.

What other types of measures could the government put in place to at least try to help more people than it's currently helping?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** That's a very good question.

That's why this automatic benefit will affect 5.5 million Canadians over the next few years.

**Jean-Denis Garon:** They still have to fill out their tax return.

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** I said it's automatic, but I also think that you and the people here who are in favour of this measure can talk to people in your ridings about it. This is an important measure. You're right, I think the fact that it will happen automatically at the Canada Revenue Agency will help millions of people.

**Jean-Denis Garon:** Can you give us a quick update on the deficit as of March 31, 2026?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** I don't have an update for you today.

**Jean-Denis Garon:** Might we get one on Thursday?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne:** We'll see.

**Jean-Denis Garon:** I'll stay tuned.

Thank you, Minister.

**The Chair:** That concludes our hour with the minister.

Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Ms. Lavoie, for joining us today. We look forward to seeing you again on Thursday to discuss the budget for another two hours.

*[English]*

Before we conclude, colleagues, you would have received from the clerk a budget request regarding today's study for Bill C-19. Do we have approval for that?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Excellent. Thank you very much.

Do I have consent to conclude the meeting?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Excellent. I will see you on Thursday, bright and early and for a long time.

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