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Tuesday, May 26, 2020

Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



CONTENTS

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

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, May 26, 2020

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

• (1005)

[*English*]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

SUSPENSION OF CERTAIN STANDING ORDERS FOR CURRENT SITTING

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties, and if you seek it, I think you will find unanimous consent to adopt the following motion.

I move:

[*Translation*]

That, notwithstanding any standing order, special order or usual practice of the House, the application of Standing Orders 15 and 17 be suspended for the current sitting; and that the provisions of paragraphs (l) and (n) of the order adopted on Saturday, April 11, 2020, continue to apply to committees scheduled to meet by video-conference later this day.

[*English*]

Hon. Candice Bergen: Mr. Speaker, can I have clarification? My interpretation said Standing Orders 7 and 8, but I believe it should be Standing Orders 15 and 17. Could the House leader clarify?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Speaker, I thought I was speaking clearly when I said the numbers 15 and 17. If it was unclear, I apologize. It was indeed Standing Orders 15 and 17.

[*English*]

The Speaker: Does the hon. minister have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

PARLIAMENTARY BUDGET OFFICER

The Speaker: It is my duty to lay upon the table, pursuant to subsection 79.2(2) of the Parliament of Canada Act, a report from the Parliamentary Budget Officer, entitled “Reporting of Gains and Losses in the Government’s Financial Results”.

[*Translation*]

Pursuant to Standing Order 32(5), this report is deemed to have been permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Finance.

* * *

[*English*]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen’s Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8)(a), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government’s response to one petition. This return will be tabled in an electronic format.

While I am on my feet, I move:

That the House do now proceed to orders of the day.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: All those in favour of the will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Speaker: Call in the members.

(The House divided on the motion:)

*Government Orders**(Division No. 24)*

YEAS

Members

Alghabra	Amos
Anand	Bendayan
Bibeau	Blair
Dhillon	Drouin
Duclos	Garneau
Hardie	Hussen
Iacono	Lalonde
Lamoureux	Lebouthillier
McCrimmon	Miller
Ng	Rodriguez
Romanado	Scarpaleggia
Vandenbeld— 23	

NAYS

Members

Atwin	Barlow
Bergen	Bezan
Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)	Boulerice
Cumming	DeBellefeuille
Deltell	d'Entremont
Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)	Gray
Green	Harder
Larouche	McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)
Pauzé	Schmale
Sweet	Therrien
Vecchio	Wagantall
Waugh— 23	

PAIRED

Nil

• (1010)

And the result of the vote having been announced: Yeas: 23; Nays: 23

The Speaker: I declare the motion defeated.

[*Translation*]

The member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie on a point of order.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Speaker, you will have noticed that the voting was carried out in such a way that members opposed to the motion had to rise very quickly, which meant that the NDP caucus did not have time to stand up to have their vote recorded.

Our vote was not recorded at all, and I consider having our votes recorded to be part of our parliamentary privilege. For procedural reasons, there are far fewer of us in the House today. Things went a little faster than expected, and our vote was not taken into account.

The NDP caucus would therefore like its vote to be counted.

[*English*]

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately the NDP did not have its act together in knowing how to vote, but the rest of the House did. You have announced the result of the vote and I suggest that it stand.

Mr. Matthew Green: Mr. Speaker, in the confusion, when I stood was my vote recorded? If so, for which side was it recorded? You will find, if you look at the recording, that I did stand during this process.

• (1015)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Mr. Speaker, they had plenty of time to stand up. I do not know what happened.

Maybe they were on sick leave?

In any case, it hardly matters. They did not stand, so I think the decision should be easy to make.

[*English*]

The Speaker: The hon. member for Hamilton Centre voted nay, against the motion.

I want to remind hon. members that normally the procedure is that if a member votes one way and wants to change that vote, the member can rise on a point of order and ask that the House see it differently. However, the member needs the unanimous consent of the House for a vote to be changed.

Mr. Matthew Green: Mr. Speaker, given the confusion and the irregular nature of today's sitting, I would ask that my vote be changed.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

PROCEEDINGS OF THE HOUSE AND COMMITTEES

The House resumed from May 25 consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Foothills has 10 minutes left. Actually, I just want to clarify that there are 16 and a half minutes remaining. There is a discrepancy between what is on screen and the facts.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Foothills.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate your giving me that extra six and a half minutes, because I was mentally prepared for 16 and a half minutes, and I appreciate your clarifying that time.

I was listening to an online conference of Alltech, a large agriculture company, this week. One of the presenters said, “A crisis does not build character; a crisis reveals the character of you and your team.” I think that is very apropos right now, because Canadians are looking to us not only as parliamentarians, as elected officials, but certainly as their beacon of democracy, of what Canada stands for. They are looking to us for inspiration and to be leaders. In a time of crisis, we are the ones who should be at the forefront, taking the leadership role. I think that leadership role includes going to work.

I want to give those in the House who were not here yesterday a bit of a review.

Yesterday, my colleague from Ottawa West—Nepean said in her speech that the House does not matter and that being in Parliament should not matter. I think that is wrong. I know for us there is no greater honour than being elected by our constituents and representing them here in Parliament, in the House of Commons. I believe that this is the foundation of our democracy.

Somebody told me once that there have been fewer members of Parliament than there have been hockey players in the National Hockey League. I am sure most of us had our parents tell us we would never make it in professional hockey, but I do not know if they would have ever said we would never be members of Parliament. Here I am, and that is thanks to my constituents.

When I was elected by the constituents of Foothills, I believed it was my job to be here to represent them, to be their voice in the House of Commons, and to be in Parliament. I would hope that my colleagues from all parties would understand that being here is an integral part of the job of being a member of Parliament. If they do not want to be here, I think they have to look internally to what they want to accomplish in their career as elected politicians and elected officials. If being here in the House of Commons, in Parliament, is not something they see as an essential service or a priority, they should really be taking a hard look at whether this is something they want to do, because being here is a large part of that job. It should be an honour. It is something we should all take a great deal of pride in, no matter what party we represent, and certainly our constituents are expecting us to be here.

Last night, I went through some of my emails from my constituents. We have certainly had a number of them. I know we all have. My constituents in Foothills are asking me to come back to work, not just to be in a virtual committee meeting, but to have Parliament up and running. I would like to read some of the comments that I have from some of my constituents.

Missy in Twin Butte, Alberta wrote:

Keep the pressure up for our government to get back to work! Is it not an essential service? There needs to be some opposition feedback and some questions allowed to [the Prime Minister]. At the moment there are no checks and balances....scary!

Pat in High River wrote:

I would like to know what, if anything you are doing to get the liberals back into the house so you can all do what we are paying you to do.... Letting this virus hold you back is total crap, the people that work in grocery stores and other stores are working. [Why aren't you?] I don't see any reason why you and [parliamentarians] shouldn't be working as well. If the liberals won't go back [to] parliament [it should be] dissolved and an election called.

Government Orders

Karen wrote:

I'm extremely disappointed that the Federal government feels that Parliament is not an essential part of the running of Canada. The justification [for this] is a slap in the face to those [of us] who work every day.... [It is] time for Canadians to be allowed to get back to work.

Rick wrote:

Parliament needs to reconvene, even in a condensed version. I watched the sitting last week and there was some great issues/ideas put forward by the opposition. This inadequate [version of] government cannot continue on its own.

Ellen in High River wrote:

We MUST get parliament back in session !!!!! [That is an] understatement. There must be some way to make [the Prime Minister] recall parliament, short of a million people descending on Ottawa [and demanding so].

Those are just a few of my constituents' comments about where they feel the critical role of Parliament is.

Yesterday, we had the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development saying that we are in a virtual Parliament. We are not in a virtual Parliament; we are in a virtual committee meeting, a committee of the whole. That is very different from Parliament.

● (1020)

It is disingenuous and misleading by the government to say that we are in a virtual Parliament, because we are not having opposition day motions, we are not dealing with legislation outside of COVID-19, and we are not dealing with having the majority of committees up and running. There is no question that dealing with COVID-19 is a priority for all of us. I do not think any of us would disagree with that. However, to say that there are no other issues that are almost as important is simply not true.

The leader of the official opposition yesterday talked about energy projects that are languishing at the cabinet table, 85 billion dollars' worth of energy projects. One of those projects is the Riversdale coal mine in Crowsnest Pass, Alberta, in my riding. This is metallurgical coal, which shows the lack of knowledge of the Liberals, who are now chirping at me about shutting down the coal industry. This is a metallurgical coal mine that mines coal for steel, just in case members want to do some homework.

It is interesting that she is already yelling to shut down that industry, not understanding that thousands of people in that community rely on that industry. Having the Riversdale mine would be a game-changer for that community, a community that is not doing well. This is an opportunity for more than 1,000 jobs during construction and hundreds more during operation.

It is not just about the mine and the fact that it is waiting in limbo to be approved or not. It has gone through every process. It has one permit left to go and the approval of cabinet, but imagine what that does for that community. Imagine what that does for Blair's hardware store, Dawn's bed and breakfast and restaurant, Lisa's newspaper, or events operations, or other businesses in that community.

Government Orders

That community is waiting with bated breath on the decision for that mine but sees it languishing at the cabinet table or within government because of COVID-19. I hope the government can walk and chew gum at the same time, so that we can deal with COVID-19 but also have Parliament back to deal with other issues that are just as important.

When we come out of COVID-19, we are going to be in a deep financial hole. We have seen from the Parliamentary Budget Officer that the deficit right now is about \$252 billion. I would suspect that, with the extension of the CERB and the wage subsidy, it could double and we will see a trillion-dollar debt for Canada. To come out of that, we are going to be relying on a few industries to help carry or dig Canada out of that financial hole.

There are only a couple of industries with the landscape out there right now that Canadians can look to and government should be looking to, to ensure that they are on a strong footing. Examples are energy and agriculture. No matter what happens coming out of COVID, people are still going to heat their homes. They are still going to put fuel in their cars, buy groceries and feed their families. As part of that, there is very real discussion of having a global food shortage. Countries around the world are going to be looking to Canada to try to address that problem because of our farmers here. Would it not make sense to have those two industries as strong as possible coming out of COVID-19?

Those are two of the industries that the Liberal government is neglecting, when it should be looking at those two as pillars of our economy, pillars of our recovery. It does not make a lot of sense that they are not. If we have Parliament back, we can have those discussions here.

For example, in the energy sector, the Standing Committee on Natural Resources is not sitting. Why? It is one of the most important industries we have in this country, with more than \$60 billion in royalty revenue alone going to the federal government. That does not count the hundreds of billions of dollars of taxes that go to provincial, municipal and federal governments through income tax. That is an essential revenue source for this country coming out of COVID-19, but we cannot have those discussions, because we are just having what is essentially a committee meeting and we cannot talk about issues outside of that committee meeting.

• (1025)

There are projects like the Riversdale mine, which are essential to communities like Crowsnest Pass in my riding. That is just one project of dozens in constituencies and regions across this country. If I am hearing from my constituents about a project of that magnitude and the impact that it could be having on their economy, I am sure others among my colleagues are having the same conversations with their constituents.

As we go through this pandemic and we start looking forward to reopening our economy, in whatever manner that happens, as provinces will have a lot of say in how that happens and we want to ensure we do that as safely as possible, we can imagine where we would be as a country and an economy if we had a strong energy sector and a strong agriculture sector. We would be in a very different position, because we were coming into COVID-19 on very

weak financial footing as a result of out-of-control spending by the Liberal government.

I recall the election in 2015, when the current Prime Minister said that we were going to have deficits of \$10 billion for four years and in 2019 we would have a balanced budget. That obviously did not happen. We have now seen deficits as high as \$28 billion. That was even before the COVID-19 pandemic. We saw detrimental legislation like Bill C-69 and Bill C-48, which have devastated the energy sector. We have seen illegal blockades, carbon taxes and rail backlogs that have devastated the agriculture sector, not to mention more than \$5 billion in lost foreign markets as a result of political blunders by the Prime Minister.

Members can imagine where we would be if those two industries were doing well coming into COVID. It would put us in a decent position to come out of this pandemic, but unfortunately that is not where we are. That is unfortunate, because those people would be working. Certainly for us in Alberta, with close to 200,000 energy workers out of work well before COVID-19, that is certainly not getting any better as a result of what we are going through right now.

When I am speaking to my constituents, they understand the position this country is in with the pandemic. We all want to ensure that our families and our friends are safe, but they also want to be back to work. I find it difficult. My wife and I leave home now and again to get groceries, and on the weekend we went to a garden centre and bought some trees and flowers for the yard, and there are 15-year-old teenagers working there. They are helping serve their community in their way, and I find it tough that we cannot do the same thing and serve our community right here in the House of Commons.

What are my Liberal colleagues and those in the Bloc and the NDP trying to hide? Why do they not want to be here? What is holding them back? We are here all this week as 60 members of Parliament, but just in a committee meeting. Why can we not go that extra couple of steps and get ourselves back to normal? I think that is what Canadians are asking us to do. As I said at the beginning of my speech, we are supposed to be the leaders, so why are we languishing behind everybody else? Why are we asking Canadians of every walk of life to start going back to work, except we are the ones who are saying “but not us”? We are saying, “It is good enough for you, but it is not what we should be doing.” I think that is wrong. It sends a horrible message to Canadians. They are looking to us every single day, as their elected representatives. They chose us. They elected us to come here and be their voice, and for the Liberals, the NDP, the Bloc and the Greens to be muffling that voice is wrong.

Government Orders

I do not know how they can go back to their constituents, look them in the face and tell them they need to go to work in that grocery store, in that hospital, in that pharmacy and in that hardware store, but the members of Parliament are not going to go back to work. If that is truly their attitude, they need to look at their constituents and ask themselves why they ran in the first place to be a member of Parliament if they are not willing to be out in front, be that leader, be that inspiration to the rest of Canada, be the one who shows that everything is going to be okay. We are going to be here to make the tough decisions on behalf of our constituents.

• (1030)

What it really comes down to is holding the government to account. We cannot have an ongoing process of doing government by press conference. Our democracy is not about that.

I know my constituents are sick and tired of the Prime Minister coming out of the cottage every morning, making his announcements, going back in and then that is it. They want some accountability. In many cases, they agree with the programs that have been put forward, and they certainly appreciate the improvements that the official opposition has forced the government to do. However, they are looking to us to be leaders, not followers. They are looking to us to get back to work, and the government should follow that lead.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member is missing a very important point. We in the Liberal caucus can assure the member that we work whether we are in Ottawa or in our home constituency. At the end of the day, the role that a member of Parliament plays goes far beyond just representation inside the House of Commons. There is no doubt about it that this is an important aspect. It is absolutely a privilege. It is an honour to stand up and speak.

The motion we are debating today is going to allow, even during this pandemic, the opportunity to ensure that government is still being held accountable and that the institution continues to work. To try to give the impression that members of Parliament are not working is just wrong, at least from the perspective of the Liberal caucus. We work every day, whether it is inside or outside the House.

Does the member not realize that this work inside the House, in a hybrid fashion, will take place, even in the months of July and August, which will be a first?

• (1035)

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Speaker, I can speak from my perspective, however, I want to take this moment to thank my staff from the bottom of my heart. They have been absolutely incredible. My constituency office has never been busier. We are having some very emotional discussions with our constituents and business owners, who are struggling through this process. I am not saying that we are not working in our constituencies.

Again, the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader just said that Parliament would be moving on. No, it is not. It is not Parliament, and he knows that. It is a virtual committee meet-

ing, with many aspects of what is important to Parliament not happening.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I also want to thank the staff in our constituency and Ottawa offices. They have been working tirelessly for the last couple of months.

The Liberals keep saying that this is great, that we will be able to ask all these questions. We know we can do that, but rare is the day when we actually get an answer. Therefore, it will just be more asked questions with no answers.

It is important to articulate the differences between Parliament and committee. What the Liberals are proposing is shuttering Parliament for another month.

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is exactly right.

I know a large portion of Canadians are not following Parliament as a daily routine like we are. They may not see the intricacies and things that are a part of Parliament, like all the standing committees being operational, opposition day motions or the opportunity to fully debate issues.

For us and Canadians, it comes down to a matter of trust. When we have had this committee meeting, we have had the Liberals try to make an unprecedented power grab and put through a massive order in council, changing the criminal code. They have done these things with no public scrutiny and no debate, and it comes down to trust.

I am sorry, but right now my constituents and I do not trust this process.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first I would like to say, as other colleagues have, that I am at work and that the team I work with in Repentigny and I are very proud of the work we do for the people of our riding.

I will go back to my colleague's remarks about the energy sector. I do not know if he is reading during the current lockdown, but some meteorologists, ecologists and scientists, the International Energy Agency and Stephen Hammer of the World Bank have come forward to say that this has to be a green recovery. Recently, yesterday and today, 40 million health care professionals called for a green recovery.

Why is his party unable to consider green, renewable and environmentally friendly energy?

[*English*]

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Speaker, that question is extremely frustrating, and I think it goes to the lack of knowledge that my colleague has on the energy sector.

Government Orders

Between 75% and 85% of all green and renewable energy is done by traditional energy companies. If it were not for those companies, we would not have a renewable energy industry in Canada at all. Those are the companies that understand there will be a transition over time. They are the ones that are investing in that technology and innovation.

I would love to ask my colleague how she got here today. How is she communicating with her constituents? Does she really think that it is the end of the energy oil and gas sector? What would that future look like?

I would ask the member to start reading and get some real knowledge on what is at stake here.

• (1040)

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, to look at what real knowledge on what we are facing here, I would remind the House that there have been 6,180 deaths during this COVID crisis. There have been 81,765 cases. To suggest that this global pandemic, that this global tragedy is somehow of equal importance to the petro profits of the oil and gas sector is insulting to the families that have lost lives.

The suggestion to Canadians that we have not been working, I know that in my constituency we have been working harder during this critical crisis. What has the Conservative Party been doing over the course of this crisis?

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Speaker, it is an interesting that the member is talking about this pandemic and the tragedies. I do not think anyone here is arguing that fact. However, how does he think we are going to address that pandemic? Personal protective equipment, vaccines and antivirals all come from the petrochemical industry. Without it, I am not sure where he would be. How would he be communicating with his constituents and working very hard? Would that be through hand signals?

Let us be realistic here. Questions like this, unrealistic questions, should not be coming from a parliamentarian who is representing his constituents, attacking one region of the country over another. We should be working together, as a nation, every industry, to get ourselves out of this, not dividing ourselves.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, Canadians from all regions of the country deserve a great deal of credit for how they have responded over the last couple of months.

I much prefer using “physical” distancing over “social” distancing, because people can still communicate in various ways, but it is important that we maintain the physical distancing. We talk about washing hands and wearing masks. Canadians have really stepped up to the plate in so many ways to ensure that we minimize the negative impact of the coronavirus. We should all express our appreciation to Canadians in general for the way they have responded.

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

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Speaker, I could not agree more with my colleague. All of us have to take a moment to show our appreciation for Canadians across the country who have done everything they possibly can to deal with this pandemic.

When we were elected, I do not think anybody in this room could ever have anticipated that this was something we would have to deal with, not only in the House of Commons but certainly at home in our constituency offices. Again, I credit our staff who are doing the yeoman's work in trying to help our constituents navigate through this; our front-line workers, emergency and health care professionals and the kids at the grocery stores; all those constituents and Canadians who are doing all they can to ensure that the rest of us are safe and healthy, including our agriculture producers who are going to work every day to ensure we have food on our table and our grocery store shelves are well stocked.

My riding, in High River, had one of the largest outbreaks in the country because of the Cargill meat processing plant and some long-term care facilities.

I would like to take this moment to thank my constituents who work at Cargill Meat Solutions. They have worked so hard to protect themselves and their families, but still go to work to ensure that our agriculture and our processing industries are able to move forward. I thank them very much.

• (1045)

Hon. Omar Alghabra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister (Public Service Renewal) and to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to notify the House that I will be sharing my time with the member for Fredericton.

I would like to thank all our front-line workers who are serving Canadians and putting themselves at risk to ensure the rest of society is safe and able to access essential services. I also want to give a shout-out to our public service. Our public servants have been working around the clock providing support to Canadians when they need it during this pandemic.

It is important to highlight this starting point. We are going through a pandemic. Millions of Canadians have lost their jobs because public health advice has required people to stay at home to ensure that people are separated, so the virus does not spread even further and to minimize the loss of life. As a government, through the advice of science and public health advisers, we asked Canadians to stay at home. We asked Canadians to figure out how they could work differently. The same applies to Parliament.

One of the first things Parliament did, and it was a wise move, was ask the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to study how Parliament could react in response to the situation. I am lucky to sit at that committee. Members of the committee went on to do its business. We did it virtually, interviewing and hearing from experts at home and from other parliaments around the world. We came up with a report that set out a road map for Parliament to resume.

We advised that Parliament needed to create a new set of standing orders for exceptional circumstances and that those standing orders would only come into play when all recognized parties in the House of Commons agreed to it for a defined period. If we were to extend that defined period, we would still need the consent of all parties in the House. We know that in extraordinary circumstances, we need all of us to work together. These exceptional standing orders would enable Parliament to work under these exceptional circumstances. We would revise how opposition days would be held. We would revise how bills would be tabled, how we would debate those bills and how we would vote on them.

The House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs put together a road map for how Parliament could come back to work. However, for some reason, my colleagues in the Conservative Party were dead set against it. They disagreed. They tabled a dissenting report, and that is their prerogative. However, let me be very clear that the debate here is not whether Parliament is an essential service; we agree that it is. What we do not agree with is why the Conservatives are refusing to find alternative ways for Parliament to do its job.

Members of Parliament deserve equal access, so their privileges are protected. All members, regardless of where they live or what ridings they represent, must have equal access for their role as parliamentarians. That is why the committee asked Parliament to ensure we respected the privilege of every member. However, the official opposition is asking for us to have a reduced number of members here, which we understand, but how will other members of Parliament fulfill their duties? How will the privileges of other members be protected if the Conservatives are not willing to enable them or empower them to have the ability to participate?

I actually want to ask my colleague, the previous Conservative speaker, about this. While I appreciate his remarks, he said that we were languishing behind, and I agree. Parliaments around the world are finding ways to conduct their work in either a hybrid fashion or a virtual fashion, but they have empowered their members to do their work.

• (1050)

However, the Conservatives are standing in the way. They are saying no, that we have to do it exactly the same way and get “back to normal”. That is an exact quote from the previous speaker. We know we are not in normal circumstances. We know that Parliament, the government and public health officials have asked the rest of the country to figure out how to do their work differently to ensure that they are respecting public health advice. Why can Parliament not do that? We have asked millions of Canadians to do so.

Will the Conservative members look their constituents in the eye and tell them that yes, they have asked them to stay at home, but they are not able to figure out how to do their work differently, and they are requiring MPs to come to Parliament? When they say they are not asking all 338 MPs to be here, how will the MPs who are not here be able to represent their constituents? How will they be able to participate in the debate? How will they be able to vote?

When I asked the leader of the official opposition that yesterday, he said this is what we should be spending our time on. We did. We spent our time studying this and the committee made a proposal,

Government Orders

again with the Conservatives dissenting. They cannot have it both ways. They cannot say they want Parliament to work, but then when alternatives are proposed for how Parliament can work, they say no, they are not for that. How does that work?

I heard my colleague say this is not Parliament. I agree. That is right. When we go into committee of the whole, that is not a fully functioning Parliament. We are proposing that Parliament be fully functional, but when we present that proposal to the Conservatives they say no. What do they want?

One cannot be inconsistent and have a straight face. If they want a hybrid Parliament, they need to figure out what Standing Orders we need to change. How will MPs who are not here be able to debate? How will MPs who are not here be able to vote? They cannot say they do not want to talk about that, but Parliament must resume. It is inconsistent.

Other countries around the world have figured that out. Other legislators around the world have figured that out. Why can the Conservatives not figure that out? Why can the Conservatives not get with the times, recognize that we are in a pandemic and we have asked the entire country to find a way to work remotely, to work virtually and to respect public health advice? The Conservatives say the parties would select which MPs would be here, which MPs would not be here and which MPs would vote or not vote. That is a contravention of the privileges for members, who represent their constituents.

I agree with the Conservatives that Parliament is an essential service, and we all want to see Parliament fully functioning under these circumstances. The question is how we do so. We all agree that 338 MPs cannot be here physically. Good, we are making progress. We agree that it is essential and we agree that not all MPs need to be here, but how would the MPs who are not here, when we do have a fully functioning Parliament, participate and represent their constituents? I am hearing crickets. Conservatives are proposing no ideas on how to deal with that.

However, I have good news. The committee has made proposals. The committee is suggesting how Parliament and all MPs can represent their constituents while respecting public health advice, and while recognizing that we are in the midst of a pandemic that has, regrettably, taken away so many lives.

Government Orders

That is my challenge to my colleagues in the Conservative Party. Let us figure out how this Parliament can work under these circumstances, with all MPs' privileges and duties able to be fulfilled. Spare me all the rhetoric. We agree that Parliament is an essential service. Let us get our work done and make sure we represent our constituents. The opposition parties have a role to play and the government has a role to play. Canadians will benefit from a fully functioning Parliament that respects the advice of public health officials.

• (1055)

Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague's speech with great interest. He asked me to look my constituents in the eye and ask them whether they want Parliament to sit because of public health information. I am asking him what constituents he would like me to ask.

Would he like me to ask the individual at A&W who served me my burger the other day? How about the health care workers, police and firemen who are out there every day? How about the couple that runs the Home Hardware, where I was able to get a light switch the other day? How about the employees at Home Depot or Costco and all the other employees working in my constituency who expect me to adhere to my responsibilities, the oath that I made to Her Majesty the Queen, and represent them here in this House?

Those are the constituents I would ask. Who would he want me to ask who would actually say they do not want me here?

Hon. Omar Alhabra: Mr. Speaker, I regret there is selective hearing going on here. I am saying Parliament needs to go back to work, but we should ask those brave workers my colleague is talking about if they have adjusted how they do their work. Have they made changes to how they conduct their duty?

He is suggesting having only a small number of us here. What about the MPs who are not here? How will they fulfill their duties? How will they vote on behalf of their constituents? Does he not want to respect their privilege? Does he not want to respect his colleagues who are not able to be here, but who should still have a voice and still want to represent their constituents?

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I came down this week because we have so much unfinished business, and we need to make sure our Parliament is focusing on the crisis at hand. Within a week of the COVID shutdown, we had millions of people across Canada who could not pay their rent. That is a shocking statistic for a nation like ours.

Yesterday I did not hear any questions from the Conservatives about how people can no longer afford to pay their rent. I heard them go on about Margaret Thatcher, the Soviet Union, the red Chinese menace and the mystical hand of the market, but I did not hear them speak at all about having to send the army into long-term care facilities, where so many seniors have died. I have not seen them act in a manner that treats this pandemic with the seriousness it needs.

When we have had to do something extraordinary such as move to committee of the whole, and I would normally be very suspicious of changing the orders of Parliament, it is to allow us to focus, ask questions, and go back to our constituents and say that we

are taking this pandemic seriously in a way that will really drill down to get the answers Canadians deserve.

Hon. Omar Alhabra: Mr. Speaker, Parliament has an important role to play here. It goes without saying that this unprecedented time has surprised us all. As a government, as MPs, we are trying to grapple with this fast-moving situation, and no one has the monopoly on the right answers.

That is why the voices of MPs, their participation, the questions they ask on behalf of constituents and the issues they raise which their constituents are dealing with are incredibly important. They have been helpful so far. It is really important for Parliament to figure out how all MPs can functionally represent their constituents and stand proudly to express their voices.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in response to the NDP comment, I would love to hear the member say that I have not been working, because if he spoke to a single person in my riding, he would find that he is absolutely unaware of the work we have been doing.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

I never said that the member never showed up for work in her riding, so I think she should correct the record and stick to the facts at hand.

The Deputy Speaker: I think we are getting into matters of debate on that, so I will let the hon. member for Elgin—Middlesex—London finish her brief comment and we will get the response.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Mr. Speaker, in respect to the comments made about Thatcher and all of those different things, the member obviously did not hear the questions we had specific to the Canadian Armed Forces, which one of my sons happens to be a member of, and whose members are supporting long-term care homes.

Perhaps he needs to understand that we are all in this, and it is not that we are all in this together. We are all in this because all of our families matter and all of the constituents of Canada matter.

What matters to me is when I have letters coming to me from businesses that have had to close their doors and I write a letter to the Minister of Finance and he has not responded in two and a half months. It is concerning. Why is it not important to be able to have those opportunities to not only question but—

• (1100)

The Deputy Speaker: Our time is running out.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister.

Government Orders

Hon. Omar Alghabra: Mr. Speaker, let me first thank my hon. colleague for her service to our country and also thank her son for his service to our country. We are proud of the service of our men and women in the Canadian Armed Forces, especially in this difficult time.

I agree with her. I want every MP, opposition or government, to have the ability to ask questions and to participate in the debate. The question is how.

I want to close by saying I know the member is working very hard for her constituents, but is she meeting them personally? I doubt it. She is speaking to them on the phone and doing Zoom calls. If she is meeting with them, she is making sure physical distancing is respected. I am grateful she is respecting public health advice when she is fulfilling her duty with her constituents. We should be able to do the same as MPs here.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, GP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister for splitting his time with me today.

It is absolutely a pleasure, as it always is, to be here with all of you. I am delighted to see some members for the first time in months and I really did miss everyone. Once again, it was not easy getting here. I packed up my family and we drove here from New Brunswick. They are with me for the long haul. We will be here as long as we need to be to do the work of Parliament that is very critical and essential during this time.

I do think of all the MPs who are not here today, and it is not because they do not want to be here or that they are not working. As I look at this chamber, at the 30 or so of us spread out with several seats between us, I am reminded that each empty chair represents roughly 100,000 Canadians. Their voices will not be heard here today.

Certain members of this House believe that perhaps a responsible representation of MPs by party status is adequate for decision-making and questioning the government. However, let us not forget that our jobs are first and foremost to our constituents and not to our parties.

I am delighted to be here on behalf of the riding of Fredericton and raising the issues that are important to my constituents. Just like the member for Foothills said, this is also the thrill of my lifetime to be an elected member of this House and to stand here in this historic place, a symbol of our freedom and democracy. It is a place of honour and respect, yet there have been some disrespectful comments made, such as insinuations that our fellow members are not showing up to work because they cannot be here in person.

We have heard wartime anecdotes and quotes from Winston Churchill, among others, all suggesting that COVID-19 in the year 2020 is somehow the same as World War II or the influenza outbreak. Of course, we know this is not the case.

The word “unprecedented” has been used an unprecedented number of times to describe the situation that faces us. We are not seeing the forces of the world clashing under tyrannical regimes. We do not have bombs bursting overhead. We are facing an invisible enemy. It is an enemy that does not discriminate, that infects its

host at a rate we have never seen before and that has left our communities vulnerable.

We most certainly have an essential role to play as parliamentarians, but it looks different than it has at any other time in our history. The motion before us asks us to be creative, collaborative and accommodating to our members of Parliament. I believe it is meant to allow the fulsome participation of all elected members of this House from all ridings across this great country.

Few other MPs from Atlantic Canada are able to be here today. That is concerning to me. The issues facing my home region are urgent and unique. Right now, our region of Canada is facing challenges with the lobster season, quotas for fishers and processors unable to recruit enough workers. Temporary foreign workers were only allowed in New Brunswick as of last Friday, meaning a delayed season with major implications for the economy and the agricultural yields.

There are also calls for a public inquiry into the handling of the Portapique tragedy. There is the broader conversation it has started about support for mental health initiatives and our collective response to domestic violence, especially in rural areas.

Cities, towns and villages in Atlantic Canada are much smaller than the major urban centres of other provinces, meaning that some of the federal funding earmarked for New Brunswick, P.E.I. and even Nova Scotia cannot be implemented by the municipalities that need it most.

Let us not forget New Brunswick's unique role as a bilingual province and the challenges faced by Canada's minority francophone population to receive accurate, current information about the virus. We also see that New Brunswick is one of the most enviable jurisdictions in the world in terms of its total number of cases and zero deaths. Finally, it pays to be a New Brunswicker.

Canada should be watching closely as my home province continues to open up elements of its economy as a test case for which businesses will flourish post-COVID-19, and which will need continued support. These issues are regionally specific and deserve to be voiced. Most of the MPs representing those voices cannot be here due to restrictions on interprovincial travel, limited domestic flights and the requirement for pared-down numbers in Parliament.

I also note that it is not safe for other members of this House, those who are from isolated communities or those who will put their or their communities' health at a greater risk of COVID-19 by travelling to Ottawa. How can we ask those who cannot be here today to risk becoming vectors of transmission? At the same time, how can we hope to make decisions and represent Canada without a single voice from these vulnerable regions?

Government Orders

It remains my opinion that until we can have a full integration of virtual participation with in-person meetings of the chamber or special committee, we are doing a disservice to rural, northern, Atlantic and west coast Canadians. As we stand here today, we are not ensuring equal representation for Canada, which is one of our most fundamental principles. Having said that, I see the effort the government is making with this motion to integrate virtual participation with the in-person sittings.

• (1105)

I also recognize that the day-to-day sittings would be in the Special Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic rather than full sittings in the House of Commons, which would be more ideal.

With these elements considered, I will be supporting the motion because I believe it is in the best interests of democracy at this time.

When we have figured out how the whole virtual integration of MPs will work, we will need to see the House reconvene to table some pressing legislation, such as on medical assistance in dying. In February, the Minister of Justice asked the Supreme Court for a four-month extension to the ruling in order to avoid the creation of separate MAID frameworks in Quebec and the rest of Canada. We have already taken advantage of an extension. Difficult issues still need to be addressed and Canadians who wish to receive MAID depend on us to pass that legislation.

In March, the government introduced legislation to criminalize the cruel practice of conversion therapy. We need to commit to ban that practice without further delay. We also need to see the specifics of the firearms legislation meant to accompany the regulatory changes made on May 1. Canadians need to see the full details of this plan to end the suppositions on this issue that are polarizing Canadians.

Figuring out the integration of virtual MPs with those of us here in person will enable us to lead the way for Canada as the world of work shifts permanently through this period of history. Some Canadians will need to continue working from home for some time to come. Some will want to continue working from home. Some will need to work partially from their homes and partially from their offices. We are being creative. We will see less travel by plane. We will see less commuter traffic in general. Let us set the example for workplaces across the nation by enabling MPs to make the best decisions for their constituents and to engage fully in the debate and decision-making that occurs in the House.

My hope is that all Canadians will know how hard we are working for them every day. Whether in our living rooms with our kids hanging off us in front of a Zoom screen, or here on the floor of the House of Commons, our commitment and our efforts are unwavering.

My mind is constantly on those I know are still slipping through the cracks of our COVID relief initiatives: the not-for-profits, charities and church groups, which for one reason or another find themselves ineligible for the wage subsidy program despite the critical services they provide in our communities; the cleaners and cashiers who have been left out of the essential workers wage top-up in New Brunswick; the dentists who are concerned about their practices moving forward and are finding barriers to pursuing PPE; the inter-

national students who still do not qualify for the student benefits and who have nowhere to go and no support; the pregnant women who still do not have adequate answers about their parental leave benefits in the weeks to come, and so many others.

My colleagues and I work for them. I know that we can continue to do this work in a way that protects the health and safety of our home communities.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed listening to the hon. member's speech. I focused on her comment that we are in fact here to represent our constituents first and our party second. Of course, our system works along party lines, and that is normal and good.

However, I have heard a lot from the other side about how we could just solve this problem by having voting rotations. I understand the intuitive appeal of that, but when I heard the member's speech, I thought what if a member is not on a rotation voting on a bill that is particularly important to him or her, but not to their whip? While I am not casting aspersions on our wonderful whip, what if a member insists on being in the House because the member wants to take a stand on that particular issue because it is important to their constituents?

How would a rotation preserve our parliamentary privilege?

• (1110)

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Mr. Speaker, the member is right that it would not protect our parliamentary privilege. We have the right to be here and to voice our concern on every issue that is put before the House. Being from a small party, I am responsible for many files as critic, so I have broader interests and responsibilities than perhaps other members do, so I want to participate in everything that goes on.

I really feel that this shows our ability to collaborate. We are being creative. We are being accommodating. This needs to move forward and it is something we can be excited about. This is a very neat initiative. Canadians will be excited to see how this works, and other jurisdictions are already doing it, so it is time that we give it a shot and a good effort. Our attitudes need to shift a bit.

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Mr. Speaker, New Brunswick like Saskatchewan is well ahead of the curve. We have done very well in our provinces. I can see that Ontario and Quebec need to catch up to our two provinces.

I will say one thing to the member, who is new in the House, and it is that private members' bills will not go forward. We are going to miss almost a full year of private members' bills in the House of Commons. They are an important privilege of members, enabling them to bring their issues forward.

What is the member's view on private members' bills being shut down until the fall or maybe even longer than that?

Government Orders

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Mr. Speaker, the member is right. Yesterday when he was speaking about private members' bills, I found myself nodding my head quite a bit. They are a critical component of what we do here in the House, and it is an unfortunate aspect of this new motion that they would not be included. I was not lucky enough to win the lottery; my number is quite a bit further down the line. That is perhaps why I am more willing to support this, but it is not fair to my other colleagues who do have private members' bills they would like to put forward.

The member is right. This is not perfect. It is not the ideal situation, but we have to do what is best for the health of our communities and, unfortunately, private members' bills will not fit into what is being proposed here today.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech. She touched on the issue of domestic violence.

In some cases, in her province and in Quebec, is it that programs could help more women get out of violent situations in this time of crisis, but that the provinces and Quebec are sometimes in the best position to recognize their areas of jurisdiction?

[*English*]

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Mr. Speaker, as allies of women on the issue of domestic violence, we are certainly doing all that we can. It is difficult across jurisdictions. We need to be very regionally specific because there are lots of cultural things to take into consideration around this issue. That is one of the important things that we want to discuss here in the House, but also to allow all of our colleagues across Canada to join us through a virtual Parliament as well. I am open to any idea that allows the fulsome participation of all voices to address very serious issues like domestic violence in Canada.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed my colleague's speech today. She is very thoughtful and I always enjoy listening to her.

Here we are talking about return to work or a continuation of work and how things have to change. The member talked about her family and recognized that a lot of people are dealing with issues at home, where they have to balance home and work life. As we talk about that return to work, obviously the New Democrats are working on better ways. Paid sick leave is a huge part. I would also like the member to respond to how we move forward in a more supportive way on child care and a universal federally supported child care system.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Mr. Speaker, schools and day cares are closed. My children are with me. It has presented many challenges along the way. That has perhaps been the biggest barrier. It is the work-home life balance. As I said, in Zoom conferences my children often appear on the screen, but that has added an element of humanity to our work as well.

Absolutely, there have been increased costs associated with day cares reopening. We need consider its affordability for Canadians across this country. If we want our economy to get back to work, we need day cares to be there for people and to be affordable.

• (1115)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebec is a distinct society. Even staunch federalist Robert Bourassa said so and championed the cause with other Canadians.

Among other things, "distinct society" means that most of us speak French. It is the only official language of Quebec. Our culture is different. We are no better, we are no worse; we are different.

We are also different economically. Small and medium-sized businesses are the lifeblood of our province. The vitality of Quebec is built on the dynamism of Quebec business owners, who, by dint of their efforts and their toil, have been able to create businesses that were small to begin with, certainly, but that have become medium-sized, or even huge in some cases.

The pandemic is a threat to Quebec's industrial fabric, to that spirit of innovation and entrepreneurship. On the brink of bankruptcy because of the pandemic, some SMEs will disappear. Other places in Canada may say the same thing, and I acknowledge that. However, in Quebec, SMEs are even more important given the difference in our industrial fabric.

These businesses are threatened not only by bankruptcy, of course, but also by the risk that they may be bought by foreigners. If that happens, all the effort and creativity will slip out of the hands of Quebecers, and medium- and long-term decisions will be made in other countries. This threat may mean that businesses grappling with the temporary COVID-19 situation could suffer permanent harm. We must therefore be on our guard and make sure that this does not happen.

The Bloc Qu b cois's only objective is to look out for the interests of Quebecers. That is why, on April 20 and 29, during debates on motions adopted in the House, with a government that was open to our input, we submitted proposals to protect entrepreneurship from the pandemic, where we knew we were vulnerable.

On April 20, when we brought up the idea of collaborating on the Canada emergency wage subsidy project, we knew that some businesses were quite vulnerable, as they had to cover their fixed costs despite not getting revenue. This could be a fatal situation for them. That is why we had asked the government to add additional assistance to the April 20 agreement to help with fixed costs.

We had a \$73-billion wage subsidy proposal before us. We managed to convince the government to include in its motion a partial subsidy for businesses' fixed costs, an important measure that would prevent our future economic stars from going bankrupt. That is what we were proposing.

What did we get in return?

Government Orders

What we got was a program that offered almost no solutions for businesses. This program was too timid, too lightweight, and even inaccessible in some cases. Most businesses told us that this program was not good for them and they needed something else.

That is why we have been hounding the government and telling it to improve what was proposed in the motion. We reminded the government that it had made a commitment and that it had given us its word. We said that we needed to help businesses, because the situation is critical.

However, nothing has been done since then. It is radio silence. When the government tabled its motion 11 days ago, the Bloc immediately said that, to protect businesses, the support to help cover fixed costs had to be improved and increased.

Yesterday, the government House leader said that the government had taken a first step—a small step, if that. If that small step stops there, it is not enough, when in fact we were proposing continued assistance for these businesses. That is then a broken promise.

• (1120)

Mr. Speaker, I forgot to tell you that I will be sharing my time with the member for Saint-Jean. Sorry about that. I am sure you will forgive me. You are so incredibly nice. You are the person I should be negotiating with in the future.

The second important point is that some businesses want to hire people and some municipalities need to hire people. Economic recovery seems to be on its way. We can see better days ahead. In order for businesses to find employees and for people to want to get back to work, we need to help them. We need to encourage people to work. We need to tell them to start working again and to contribute to the production effort. The economy in Quebec and in the rest of Canada will be better off for it.

On April 29, the government created the CESB, and we commended it for that because it is true that some students will not be able to find a job and they will need financial security to be able to continue their studies. We applauded that measure. When we analyzed the government's proposal, we found it contained a flaw that meant that students might be less inclined to work.

Do I think they are lazy? No, it is not laziness. However, as structured and written, the program ensures that students earn the same whether they work two days or seven days a week. Even a trained monkey understands that, if its salary stays the same whether it works two days or seven, it should work two days. That is pretty clear, but it seems that the government has not understood, which is why we have asked the government to commit to encouraging students to work by ensuring that, in all circumstances, students' salaries would increase if they work more. Our support was conditional on that.

It is a fundamental rule of economics: the more you work, the more you earn. You do not have to put on a puppet show or draw a picture to understand this. The government told us that it was a good idea. The Deputy Prime Minister told the House that it was a good idea and that the government would work on it. Three weeks later, nothing; it has made no progress. It is worse than the fixed

costs, where the Liberals took a single step and called it a day. In the case of the CESB, they have taken no steps at all.

We have a government that is not respecting its commitments. That is why we decided to sit that one out when a new round of negotiations started. We cannot negotiate with a government that promises us things it does not do. We have had a part in this bad movie before, and we are no longer interested.

We even gave them a chance. We were really very nice about it. We told the government to keep the two promises they had made. We gave them eight days, but they made no effort. They were supposed to take more action on fixed costs to build on their very tentative first steps, and then do what they promised to do.

We waited, but in the end they said no and told us how things were going to work. That is why, today, we are saying how things are going to work for us in the Bloc. We cannot work or negotiate with people who have little regard for their word.

We have our word and we have very clear ideas. What is good for Quebec is good for the Bloc Québécois. What is good for the nation of Quebec is good for the people of Quebec. We have to help small and medium-sized businesses survive the pandemic, those budding businesses that will eventually grow into Bombardiers. They must be given a chance to survive, and that is what we have been doing from the start. We are working hard on this and we will not give up. Our platform is clear and simple: what is good for Quebec is good for us.

• (1125)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my friend makes reference to the connection between the need to support workers and the need to support businesses. Whether in the province of Quebec or my home province of Manitoba, small businesses are hurting, just as workers are hurting. That is one of the reasons the government has spent so much energy and many resources to make sure minimal damage is done to that aspect of our economy.

An example of that is the wage subsidy. By bringing forward a strong wage subsidy program, we are ensuring that both workers and employers will be protected. By ensuring that protection, we will be in a better position to grow our economy into the future. We are protecting jobs and at the same time protecting companies.

This is just one program of the many programs that are there, and it shows why it is so important that the Government of Canada works with provincial entities to make sure we minimize the negative impacts of the coronavirus. Does the member not see that as a good thing?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

Government Orders

Of course wage subsidies are important. Just look at the Liberals; they are certainly taking full advantage. It is clearly very important to them, but the problem is that the whole purpose of the program was kind of undermined when the government shamelessly helped itself to the Canada emergency wage subsidy. The Liberals are in no danger of going bankrupt. I am quite sure they will not go bankrupt this year.

Economics teaches about two kinds of costs businesses have to cover: fixed costs and variable costs. Variable costs are usually salaries, which are covered by the Canada emergency wage subsidy.

What we are proposing is even more important for Quebec because small businesses drive our economy. Yes, there are businesses in Manitoba, and that is fine. We are not saying this is bad for the rest of the country.

Getting back to fixed costs, of course businesses have to cover variable costs and payroll, but they also have fixed costs, which they have to cover even when they are not producing anything. That is the crucial point.

Just helping businesses cover their variable costs is not enough; we have to help them cover their fixed costs too. That is microeconomics 101, which I teach at CEGEP and university. We have to help businesses with their fixed costs. That is why we reached out to the government, but the government did not respond.

Is that because it forgot—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis has the floor.

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague from La Prairie a question.

Does the hon. member support the Conservative Party motion that is specifically designed to improve the Liberal programs?

The hon. member mentioned in his speech that the Liberal measures are too weak, too inaccessible, and poorly focused. Parliament can help the government, so that the measures help Quebecers and Canadians.

Does he support the Conservative Party motion that we return to Parliament in order to have better legislation to serve the people of this country during this pandemic?

Mr. Alain Therrien: Mr. Speaker, one thing is for sure: I do not support the fact that the Conservatives are also going to dip into the Canada emergency wage subsidy in order to try and wipe away their supposed financial problems, when they are as rich as Croesus. I might even say that Croesus was poor compared to the Conservatives. The two main, well-heeled parties have both hands in the Canada emergency wage subsidy. It is not a pretty picture.

Yes, Parliament should continue to sit normally. I agree with him. Yes, there are matters that remain pending. When we negotiated fixed costs around the government table, there were two absentees: the NDP and the Conservatives. Only the Bloc was pushing for improvements in the assistance that could be made available to

companies. When companies survive, the economic fabric is stronger and jobs are long-lasting and of good quality.

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my esteemed colleague from La Prairie for sharing his time with me. I appreciate it.

I am sometimes asked how I imagine us emerging from this crisis or what I hope we take from this crisis. I have thought about it and I think it is important that we all think about it a bit.

I want to draw a parallel between this situation and a situation I remember when I was 13 or 14 years old, in 1998.

● (1130)

My region lived through the ice storm, which left a mark on our collective psyche. At the time, we saw people coming together, similar to what we are seeing now. People were helping each other. I remember my father went around with his generator to empty basements for people who lived on our street and whose pumps were no longer working because they had no electricity. Although I was too young to notice it, older people remind us about how when the lights came back on, people stopped coming together in the same way. Sadly, I worry that the same thing will happen once a vaccine is discovered. Right now, there is a huge push to buy local.

I would like to think that we will continue to see people supporting each other so wonderfully, but the government and Parliament will have to do some things to ensure that we are left with something from this crisis. It would be an insult to those who are suffering now and to those who lose their lives to COVID-19 if we do not learn something from this pandemic and take this opportunity to make improvements.

There are things that can be done now in some cases, but they could also have been done in the past, which would have made it a little easier to get through this crisis. I will give you three specific examples. There is the matter of seniors, which the Bloc Québécois raised on numerous occasions. Even before the crisis, even before we became aware of the risk of facing such a pandemic one day, the Bloc Québécois raised the question. When old age security was introduced, it covered the equivalent of 20% of the average industrial wage. Given the trend toward disinvestment in the ensuing years, it now covers the equivalent of 13% of the average wage. Seniors' purchasing power has decreased significantly. We would like to be able to say that the \$300 benefit is a good thing, but it should not be a one-time thing. Yes, it will help a little during the crisis, but seniors' problems will not end with the pandemic.

Think about the cost of groceries in the fall, which could be extremely high, especially when it comes to fresh produce, in particular the fruits and vegetables grown by our own farmers. Something should have been done before the crisis, but we can still act now. We can increase seniors' purchasing power and make sure that they continue to contribute to our economy, that they continue to buy from our local producers and that they continue to be economically active in society. Unfortunately, these are things that we may not be able to do if Parliament is limited to four question periods a week.

Government Orders

Health transfer payments are another point that we repeatedly raised before the crisis. For several years now, there has been a massive decrease in federal health transfer payments to the provinces and to Quebec. In some cases, it could be argued that certain reforms introduced by the provinces were to blame. Even some of the people involved in these reforms acknowledge that the result was not perfect, that they could have done things differently and achieved a better outcome. Nevertheless, when you do not have the money, you are starting with a huge handicap. Federal disinvestment is the main cause of the current problems in the health care system. It was a problem before the crisis. It should have been dealt with before the crisis. What we are currently experiencing should at least make us admit that we do not want to see it happen again.

One thing that can be done right now is to ensure that companies that use tax havens do not get the wage subsidy. We did the math. The big banks save the equivalent of roughly \$2.5 billion a year in taxes. Meanwhile, it would cost between \$1.9 billion and \$2 billion to restore the health transfers. By making sure that the real wrongdoers, those who legally but immorally use tax havens, pay their fair share of taxes, the health transfers could be restored.

• (1135)

No one wants this to happen, but we need to be ready in case another crisis arises. We need to make sure that we learn something from the current crisis.

Another subject I have really enjoyed talking about during the crisis is everything related to farmers, but more specifically, the issue of temporary foreign workers, who are the backbone of our production. These individuals are absolutely essential to our food security and food sovereignty, and they ensure our access to local, fresh products.

The problem of closed work permits has been around for a long time. Agricultural producers are complaining about the lack of flexibility of closed work permits. I will give a few examples from before the crisis.

First, consider a farmer who only needs someone part-time, maybe one day a week. It is not worth bringing someone in from Guatemala to work one day a week. However, closed work permits do not allow farms to exchange or share the work done by employees with other farms.

Moreover, the workload is not distributed in the same way from one farm to the next. For example, there is slightly less work on dairy farms at the end of the winter because it is not the beginning or end of the harvest. Conversely, the end of winter is a very busy period for maple producers, since that is when they begin planting. These producers are also prevented from sharing employees' services to address the unequal workload. The problem existed before the crisis.

During the crisis, when there was a major shortage of temporary foreign workers, producers were unable to share workers at critical times. For example, apple producers needed to have their apple trees pruned at the beginning of the season. At the same time, and often on the neighbouring lot, maple producers, whose sugaring off season had been cancelled, had workers that they could not use and that they would have liked to share with the apple producers.

Another example is vegetable producers, who often have two harvests a year. As some workers harvest the vegetables, others behind them plant seeds for the second harvest. Most Canadian vegetable producers now have enough people for the first harvest, but not enough for the second planting. If all farms had agreed to make better use of the available workers, they could have had two harvests, which would have given them a better yield at the end of the year.

In the event of another crisis, it would be wise to consider new terms and conditions for closed permits. If farmers were allowed to share workers' services, and if a hail storm destroyed my harvest but not my neighbour's, my neighbour could save his harvest by using my workers. Closer to home, during the floods, the farm workers who had little to do at the time were unable to help lay sandbags to protect people's homes.

This problem has been around for a long time and we could solve it. We continue to make proposals and recommending solutions, such as allowing workers with closed permits to work elsewhere for a certain number of days.

However, we cannot discuss all of these issues right now, because two parties decided to restrict our exchanges. Still, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs was able to conduct a remarkable study on virtual parliament sessions.

I am disappointed that everyone recognizes that the COVID-19 pandemic is a huge problem, but then we tie our hands and prevent ourselves from finding solutions for now and for the future. In a sense, I think that not working right now to help people who are suffering and those who are dying from COVID-19 shows a basic lack of respect toward these people. It is unfortunate that the crisis is not bringing out the best in us.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member brought up a number of issues, some of which I agree with and others I might question. For example, I believe that the government has invested more in health care, historical amounts, and I do not see the cuts that she has seen. However, the reason I am posing a question to the member is to make a connection between her comments and how important the motion before us really is.

Government Orders

Surely to goodness, we recognize that just a few months ago no one could have anticipated this. If we look at all that has been accomplished, whether it is the programs or the government's working with the opposition, we have accomplished a great deal in a relatively short period of time. Democracy is important. The idea of a full virtual integration has been talked about for the last couple of months, and we have moved significantly on this. That is what the motion is really about: advancing us further into this full integration so that all members can be engaged in Parliament.

Would the member agree that because of the motion, she would have far more latitude and a greater ability to question the government on all of the issues she has raised? She will be able to do this not only in the months of May and June, but also for the first time, from what I understand, in July and August.

• (1140)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Mr. Speaker, I feel compelled to take this opportunity to talk about the issue of health transfers and remind the House that Quebec's minister of health and social services wrote to the Minister of Health to remind her that there was a problem when it comes to the transfers and that she was calling for those to be restored to 25%. This was in fact a common and unanimous request of all the provincial premiers at the Council of the Federation in December. I think there are others who share my point of view.

As far as the issue of Parliament is concerned, the motion before us allows us to question the government. That is good. I am not saying it is awful, but it is not enough. We do not have opposition days. We cannot introduce bills. We cannot debate motions. It is more of a question period than an answer period. Unfortunately, it is not enough to allow us to advance programs as much as we could. Indeed, things have been done. I do not deny that. However, the opportunity to do much more is being denied us today and that is what we take issue with.

[*English*]

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately my French is not yet good enough for me to ask my colleague a question in French, but hopefully it will be someday soon.

The member talked about her concerns with the agriculture sector. A constituent said to me the other day, which I thought was an interesting comment, that he wanted to have smart farming but cannot do that with dumb Internet.

As we have had to have these virtual meetings, I have seen that many of us in rural communities have not been able to participate to the extent that we would like. Again, that goes to the importance of having Parliament back in some format, whether it is hybrid or not.

I would like the member to comment on the impact that COVID has had on rural communities and the importance of having Parliament back in a traditional manner.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Mr. Speaker, I understand that the Internet is not always readily available everywhere. I grew up with-

out cable and with limited access to the Internet unfortunately. I do not believe it need be an argument to prevent us from working virtually. Returning to the House in person would also indirectly be a breach of parliamentary privilege for those who live far away, who might not have access to air travel or who may be older and fear for their health, which would be understandable. It seems to me that a good option would be a hybrid Parliament, which has been successfully tested in other countries and in parliaments in the Westminster tradition. I do not believe that it has to be all or nothing. We can find an even better way forward and that is what I am recommending.

[*English*]

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Outremont.

Over the past two and a half months, Canadians have faced a common threat to our health and our economy. Since COVID-19 emerged in Canada, our government has taken a coordinated approach that is consistent with our shared democratic values, whereby it puts people first and makes sure that no one is left behind. It is our responsibility to fight the spread of this pandemic and put our country on the path to recovery. We will do whatever it takes.

We are taking action to address the wide-ranging health, social and economic impacts of COVID-19. We are doing everything we can to help Canadians and businesses through this pandemic and give them the support they need. This includes taking strong, decisive action to stabilize our economy.

The Canada emergency wage subsidy is a key element of the COVID-19 economic response plan. For employers who have been significantly impacted by this pandemic, our government has put in place a program that will help them keep workers on the payroll and even rehire workers. This program is available for businesses, charities and non-profits alike. It is supporting Canadians at workplaces big and small in sectors across our economy.

The government established the Canada emergency wage subsidy to prevent further job losses and to encourage employers to rehire workers previously laid off because of COVID-19. It is there to make sure that families in every part of Canada know where the next paycheque is coming from. It is there to make sure that in this time of incredible uncertainty, they can benefit, knowing that they will have money for groceries, rent and prescriptions. This program also means that when businesses begin to pick up again, Canadian companies are ready with the right workers who know the businesses to prepare them to get operations up and running again.

Government Orders

The Canada emergency wage subsidy program provides a 70% wage subsidy, or up to \$847 per week per employee, for employers in businesses of all sizes and across all sectors who have suffered a drop in gross revenue of at least 15% in March 2020 and 30% in the following months. On May 15, the government announced that we would extend the Canada emergency wage subsidy by an additional 12 weeks, to August 29, 2020. Extending the program will give workers greater confidence that they will continue to get the support they need during these difficult times. It also gives business owners more runway to get back up to speed. We know that reopening needs to be a gradual and careful process.

At the same time, we introduced regulatory amendments aimed at improving the subsidy and extending it to reach more employers. These amendments will ensure that the subsidy meets its objective of supporting the employers hardest hit by COVID-19, while protecting the jobs Canadians depend on.

Regulations have extended eligibility for the Canada emergency wage subsidy to the following employers: partnerships that are up to 50% owned by non-eligible members; indigenous government-owned corporations that are carrying on business, as well as partnerships in which the partners are indigenous governments and eligible employers; registered Canadian amateur athletic associations; registered journalism organizations; and non-public colleges and schools, including institutions that offer specialized services, such as art schools, driving schools, language schools or even flight schools.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on Canadians everywhere. All sectors of the economy have felt its relentless and disruptive presence. Our government has been working hard to protect jobs across our economy. We have listened to the concerns raised by employers of all kinds, from small neighbourhood businesses to some of Canada's largest corporations that employ thousands of Canadians.

We know that extending the wage subsidy will help more workers. The wage subsidy has meant that, even though our economy has come to a standstill, businesses can afford to keep workers and, as a result, are ready and poised to spring back into action as soon as it is safe. This is protecting jobs now and making sure that there is no sluggish restart. It is making sure that Canada is ready to come roaring back, strong.

This program is complemented by the many actions our government has taken to date to support Canadians and their families. We have provided the Canada emergency response benefit to over seven million Canadians so that everyone who is unable to work because of COVID-19 has money for essentials.

• (1145)

We have provided support for students, including investing in over 116,000 jobs and opportunities this summer to help them access the workplace experience they need to pursue their dreams.

The Canadian emergency business account has provided interest-free loans to over 600 small employers.

All of these measures, including others, have contributed to one of the most comprehensive and ambitious economic support pack-

ages in the world. We know that by investing in Canadians, we will bounce back faster and better.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has had a dramatic impact on Canadians and around the world as a whole. It has crippled businesses around the entire planet. It has upended the global marketplace, dashing the hopes and dreams of workers and business owners. In these two and a half months, many business people in Canada and other countries have struggled as never before. Many have succumbed to the ravaging effects of COVID-19. However, through that time, our government has stood steady to take additional actions to stabilize the economy and mitigate the impacts of this pandemic.

Protecting the health of Canadians and ensuring their immediate needs remains the first priority of the government. We will continue to protect Canadian jobs and to support the Canadian economy as it navigates through the present and current crisis. When this crisis is over, we will be ready to work with Canadians to relaunch the economy and to continue to build a stronger Canada for tomorrow.

• (1150)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my hon. colleague. I am concerned about her comments on the economy roaring back. What we have learned with COVID is how quickly it has devastated our conceptions about the economy. The idea that we are going to simply switch the lights back on and everything is going to go back is not realistic. We certainly know there will be devastation in the restaurant sectors in the big urban centres. We saw how the oil sector collapsed before COVID. Now international investors have moved out all together.

There will need to be a long-term vision. Part of that is what we will do with the workers who are on CERB now? Many of them have no work to go back to. Is the government willing to play the role that will be needed to build and start the economy, carefully continuing its investments and ensuring that come August or October people are not simply cut-off from CERB if they have no work to go back to?

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Mr. Speaker, it is indeed our contention that we cannot just switch the light back on. It takes time. That is why our government has put in place various programs and measures to give Canadians the opportunity to settle in, to respond to their immediate needs, so when we are ready to relaunch the economy and build it back better, we will be ready.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

She spoke a great deal about the economy and the importance of helping our businesses get through the crisis. I would remind members that the Bloc Québécois made a proposal concerning fixed costs, which could be extended to tourism businesses.

Government Orders

I am from Shefford. In my riding, in the Eastern Townships, tourism is an important industry. At this time, the current program and assistance programs are not designed for tourism businesses, which require greater flexibility with respect to fixed costs to help them get through the crisis. They were among the first to be affected and will probably be among the last to be able to start up again.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question. Tourism has indeed suffered during this pandemic and will continue to suffer even more.

I just want to tell the member that our minister responsible for tourism has spoken with industry stakeholders many times. She has implemented measures to help them, using the three Rs, in order to lighten the burdens of these businesses.

We in Quebec are also suffering as a result of losses in tourism, but our minister is always looking at how to improve the measures to help this unique industry.

• (1155)

[*English*]

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there was a lot in the member's speech around the economy. What has been proposed by the government is to not have all committees sit. When we look at a lot of the committees that really would be very important at this time, for example, international trade, transport, infrastructure and communities, why are we not going down the road of having all committees sit so we can have these important discussions?

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Mr. Speaker, this is a notion that should be negotiated between our respective House leaders. The work we are doing here and the work we are all collectively and individually doing within our constituencies, such as answering questions, looking into various programs and looking at the territory we represent to see what the needs of our constituents are, is beneficial. When we then come the House, we can propose measures that would alleviate most of the problems being expressed by our constituents.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise in the House on the subject of the debate before us with respect to how to structure meetings of Parliament going forward in the midst of this pandemic.

I am sure I do not need to remind the members of the House of the extraordinary times in which we are living. As we deliberate on how we will continue to meet, we must be mindful of the example we are setting for Canadians and the message we are communicating.

Before I begin the substance of my remarks today, I would like to extend my deepest appreciation for the excellent work undertaken by the Clerk of the House and the entire administration to give us options on how we can continue to meet and conduct business during COVID-19.

[*Translation*]

I do not need to remind the House that these are extraordinary times. Before I get into the substance of my remarks, I would first

like to sincerely thank the security personnel, employees of the House Administration and all House staff. They are joining the hundreds of thousands of Canadians who continue to work in our essential industries. Whether they work in our long-term care facilities, our corner stores, our pharmacies or our hospital, the dedication of these workers is allowing our society to continue to function.

[*English*]

Turning now to the debate on the next steps for our sittings going forward, I find myself a bit puzzled by the arguments coming from my colleagues across the aisle. Allow me to once again clarify for Canadians that members of Parliament are meeting, that ministers are being held to account and are answering questions. In fact, over 300 questions were asked by members and answered by the government in a period of just three days. By comparison, in normal times, when the House sits for five days, members are able to ask, on average, approximately 190 questions.

Over the course of the debate yesterday on the motion before us, I have come to understand that the accountability that has existed, and that would certainly continue to exist under the proposal before the House, is not the problem for the Conservative. Rather, they are arguing that members of Parliament need to be sitting in their seats, under all the normal rules, in order to feel they are working.

I am a relatively new member of Parliament, elected just over a year ago, so perhaps I see things rather differently than my colleagues. For me, there is nothing more important than the work I do in my riding, serving my constituents.

I, and I am sure many others in the chamber, have been working 24/7, literally seven days a week, from the very early morning until the very early morning the following day. Whether I am speaking to seniors in long-term care homes who are concerned about their health and safety, or people who would like to understand how to access the emergency benefit of \$2,000 a month, which over eight million Canadians have applied for and received, or mothers who call me for help in order to bring their children home from overseas while on an exchange or students who are reaching out to their members of Parliament for the very first time in order to discuss the measures we have put in place to support them and the jobs that might be available to them this summer, this is important work.

How important is it that charitable and not-for-profit organizations serving our vulnerable communities, literally putting food on the tables of families that need it, receive government funding? It is critical, and we are there to support them.

Government Orders

• (1200)

[*Translation*]

Our local organizations are working hard. I am thinking of the MultiCaf community cafeteria in Côte-des-Neiges, Le Chaînon, a shelter that helps vulnerable women, the Mile End Community Mission, which provides food for residents of the eastern part of my riding, Sun Youth, which does an enormous amount of work in delivering food throughout Montreal, as well as many others. I am working hard to support the charitable organizations in Outremont, Côte-des-Neiges and Mile End.

Extraordinary things are happening. There are even new organizations that are being created in response to the current crisis. An MP's job is to support them. The Fondation Aide Outremont COVID-19 is doing an extraordinary job of helping our older and more vulnerable residents. This wonderful team of community volunteers has already delivered groceries and prescriptions to many hundreds of people.

[*English*]

As Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Small Business, over the course of the last 10 weeks, I have spoken to thousands of entrepreneurs in my riding and across the country. They needed to speak to someone in government. They needed to have their questions answered and I needed to hear them out.

The work that we have been doing with the private sector and business owners is what has fuelled the adjustments and modifications to our support programs. The feedback that I have been getting so far from all of these calls, from all of these virtual meetings is, "Wow, thank you. Thank you for focusing on us. Thank you for being there. Thank you for working for us." This is what government is for.

The work we do in service of Canadians in our communities is absolutely necessary. It is insulting to me and it is insulting to Canadians to suggest that we are not working if our bums are not in these seats. It was important for me to clarify that and put it on the record.

I will now get into the details of what we are proposing. What we are proposing would allow us to continue this important work in our ridings. What we are proposing would allow us to meet in this chamber, while respecting physical distancing and other health and safety guidelines, while allowing every member from every part of the country to take part in these proceedings virtually and, importantly, allowing us to continue to be accountable to opposition members and continuing to answer their questions.

[*Translation*]

I will get a bit more into the details of the proposed hybrid model approach. For members who are physically present in the House, there will be no changes, and the experience will be identical to a normal sitting. The members will be able to hear colleagues who are participating virtually by using the earpiece and will be able to see them on two screens installed on either side of the Speaker's chair.

Members participating virtually will be able to access the House debates through a very user-friendly online video conferencing

platform that is integrated into the existing House of Commons infrastructure and systems. When members participate by video conference, they will be able to watch the proceedings of the House when other members are speaking. They will also have access to a video of their other colleagues who are participating virtually. All members will have access to simultaneous interpretation at all times, and all members, including those participating by video conference, will be free to address the House during debate or raise a point of order.

Once the hybrid model of House sittings was established, the House administration carried out a simulation of a debate, and the results were excellent. Consequently, the Speaker of the House wrote to the House leaders to inform them that the hybrid model could be used.

[*English*]

In developing a hybrid model of sittings, the House administration was able to review different approaches that other legislatures in Canada and around the world had adopted to take into account the challenges posed by this pandemic, while ensuring urgent parliamentary business was attended to. More specifically, the administration consulted 30 parliaments and collaborated closely with several legislatures that had similar requirements. This included testing solutions and sharing operational strategies, experiences and results daily.

In addition to working with other legislatures, the administration also conducted extensive independent market research and worked with industry leaders and international national security partners. In working with these partners, the administration set a goal of ensuring that the broadcast production of a sitting would be seamless and that the public coverage would continue to be of excellent quality. This is the proposal we are putting forward.

• (1205)

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member across the way talked about the compartmentalization of her job, and that somehow her constituency work was more important than the work being done here on Parliament Hill in the House of Commons. I would like to suggest that both are important. To disregard this place, or to give this place a space of less importance, is actually to misunderstand the fundamental role of Parliament.

There are 338 of us in the House and we were all elected by our constituents to be their voice here. When we cease to show up for work here, then they cease to get their voice to Canada's Parliament. This is a problem. When their voices do not make it here, when we fail to show up in this place and engage in important discussions and engage in necessary debate, it means that for those Canadians who put their trust in us to represent them, we actually squelch their voice.

To say that the member across from us is somehow doing more important work for her constituency and therefore this place should cease to meet is absolutely wrong, and it is a fundamental misunderstanding of what this place stands for.

Government Orders

I would like to present to the member opposite that we go into our constituencies in order to listen to our constituents, in order to understand their stories and their experiences, so that they might inform the debate that takes place here and the decisions that come forward from this place. If we do not take the time to do that then we are, in fact, misrepresenting them, and that is a shame. However, if we also do not take the time to bring their voices here, that is equally a shame.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Mr. Speaker, I would like to clarify that I was responding directly to a comment from the Conservatives to the effect that we are not working if we are not in this place. We are always working. Through the summer and through constituency weeks, we are always working.

I would also like to signal that I am here in this chamber representing my constituents in this place. This place is extremely important to me, and I will continue to sit in this place as long as we are able to do so safely and effectively. The proposal that the government is putting forward is to continue to sit in the House to represent our constituents in the House, but it is a proposal that does so safely and that provides an example to Canadians of how we can continue to conduct our work.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have been sitting here for a couple of days and it sure feels like Parliament to me.

Many times, I have heard mixed signals from the other side and I would ask the member to comment in order to clarify for the people at home. I heard from the other side that everyone must be here. That was the word I heard. However, then the member said no, no she did not mean all 338. I heard “here” two minutes ago. Did the member not hear “here”?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Mr. Speaker, what the government is proposing is that we continue to sit in limited numbers respecting social distancing and respecting all health and safety guidelines—

The Speaker: Order. I am going to disrupt the parliamentary secretary. There seems to be some chatter. Members should know that they can cross the floor and discuss things much quieter than shouting across the floor while someone else is trying to speak. I want to indicate that.

On a point of order, the hon. member for Elgin—Middlesex—London.

• (1210)

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Mr. Speaker, I fully respect what you are saying, but when a question is put forward that is absolutely misleading the House, indicating that we have said in the House that we want 338 members of Parliament, and we well know that not a single member of our party has said that, why—

The Speaker: I believe that is getting into debate. It was brought up and we will leave it at that, but we will go back to the hon. parliamentary secretary.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Mr. Speaker, my colleague's question raises perhaps the underlying question of how the members opposite expect us to vote if we are unable to vote virtually. Perhaps my colleague would care to comment on that, and also to comment on

what exactly the problem is with the proposal put forward by the government.

Is the only thing missing that they are unable to have opposition days? From what I am seeing, the accountability is there in our proposal, and an opportunity is there for questions to be posed to the government.

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to stand in this place, with my feet on the floor of the House of Commons, and to have the opportunity to use my voice as the member of Parliament for Lethbridge to speak on behalf of my constituents, and I would even go so far as to say to what I am hearing from Canadians as a whole. I am thankful to have that privilege.

I was elected to represent my constituents, in 2015 after my first election and then in 2019 after my second one. As a member of Parliament I have the ability, along with other members in this place, to participate in the legislative process employed within this country, which we call a parliamentary democracy.

It is a position I hold with the weightiness it deserves and it is a responsibility I do not take lightly. Additionally, as a member of the official opposition, it is my constitutional obligation to join my Conservative colleagues in holding the Liberal government to account with regard to the decisions that it makes and to ensure that Canadians are rightly represented.

These roles and duties have been all but stripped from me during the past several months. Yes, I agree, I have been able to participate in makeshift accountability periods that have been put together virtually, and I have used social media in order to amplify my concerns and those of my fellow Canadians, but I have not been able to stand on the Commons floor and publicly address the government, as is my right and duty to do.

As word of the pandemic and its possible effects spread, we very quickly entered into a phase of closure. That was on approximately March 13. Knowing the pandemic was worldwide and spreading like wildfire, we agreed to suspend Parliament for a period of time. As the weeks went by and social distancing measures came into place, our return to Parliament, and the recalling of the House, became less and less certain.

Despite our willingness to work collaboratively with the government to ensure each other's safety, it soon became apparent, to the detriment of Canadians, that the Prime Minister was using this pandemic in order to avoid an element of accountability. He was perfectly comfortable issuing media statements from his front doorstep, but on the whole he was unwilling to take questions from members of the opposition. It took days of negotiation for the party opposite to finally agree to one House sitting per week. Even then, the Prime Minister could be seen here for several moments, but not long after.

If we suggest that Parliament's role is optional, as we have heard time and time again from members opposite, then we are effectively telling Canadians that there is no difference between a democracy and an autocracy, and that is a shame.

Government Orders

If the people's voices across this country do not matter in the midst of a crisis, then do they matter in the time period when there is good?

Is this simply an optional activity, or are we doing important work in this place?

Can we shut the doors and see no difference in our country, or do those doors need to be opened in order for us to continue and move forward as a nation?

By refusing to have Parliament resume, the Prime Minister is sending a strong message to Canadians that he alone is the one who matters. I would propose that is absolutely wrong. Parliament is essential. Parliamentarians are essential workers. Especially during a time of crisis, Parliament has the responsibility of holding the government to account, and this accountability best takes place right here, in the House of Commons.

Make no mistake. What the government is proposing today is not a resumption of full Parliament. It would like Canadians to believe that is the case, but it is simply not true. What the government wants to do is actually assemble what is called a special committee, or a committee of the whole. It is stripped of some key powers and responsibilities. For example, the government would still refuse to allow for opposition day motions. It would not allow for the request of emergency debates. It would not allow for the debate of private members' bills. The order of publication of government documents, and the debate and vote on committee reports, would not be allowed, either.

If the Prime Minister is willing, however, to now do four days here in the House as a committee of the whole, then he is proving, or showing the Canadian public, that it can be done safely. We can assemble in this place and do so while respecting one another's safety.

• (1215)

If that is possible, then why not resume Parliament in its full function to allow us to debate the necessary issues of the day? Why not allow us as Parliamentarians to do the important work that our constituents sent us here to do?

What the government is doing at every turn is skirting accountability. As many of my constituents have conveyed to me again and again, if grocery store clerks, restaurant workers, hairdressers, farmers, nurses, doctors and front-line workers can work, if they can look after Canadians, then surely parliamentarians can meet again in this place in a regular and safe manner. They can do so in a way that brings Parliament back in full force.

I have received hundreds of phone calls, emails and messages from constituents urging us to start sitting together as a full Parliament. Indeed, they understand that there is important constituency work to do, but they also see the value in Canada's Parliament, and they want to know that parliamentarians are debating the issues of the day and making sure that their voices are heard here in our nation's capital.

Here are a few notes that I have received.

"If the Prime Minister is staying in house arrest, he should not be allowed to make decisions."

"Why is this even a thing?"

"Parliament needs to open up all powers required to run this country immediately."

"Parliament must sit now."

Parliament is an essential service and MPs are essential workers. When each of us put our name on a ballot, we should have done so with great sobriety and out of an underlying conviction that we exist to serve. We serve in the good times and we serve in the bad times. That is what it means to put our name on a ballot. These happen to be the bad times, but that does not mean that we run and hide. It does not mean that we stay within the safety of our own homes. It means that we, as 338 privileged individuals who have been sent here to be the voices of our constituents, come and we sit and we look after our country.

As Marc Bosc, former acting Clerk of the House, said:

The House of Commons needs to be functioning and to be seen to be functioning...[It] is an essential service to the country. Members of Parliament are... essential workers.

We need to be functioning and be seen to be functioning, which means we are here in this place. The place to engage in robust debate is in the House of Commons. It is not Facebook. It is not Twitter. It is not the mainstream media. It is here. That is what our parliamentary system is based on. That is the historical nature of this place. That is what the health and prosperity of our country so much relies on.

If members feel that their work is non-essential, then I would suggest that they fail to understand their roles and responsibilities, and they ought not put their names on ballots in the next election. This is not simply a place of process. It is a meeting ground where we use our minds and skills to convince our political opponents of our positions. It is where we give impassioned speeches and where we vocally express our dissatisfaction with a less-than-sufficient government response. If we allow it to, the back and forth of exchange can produce excellence. One side puts forward a thesis, the other side puts forward an antithesis, and then the synthesis of ideas takes place. That is what democracy is about. It is the exchange of ideas. When did we lose an appreciation for this?

Diefenbaker famously said that "Parliament is more than procedure. It is the custodian of the nation's freedom." The House of Commons is not some random place simply used to facilitate the goings-on of Parliament. It is a crucial part of upholding democracy with debate, scrutiny, opposition and questioning of the government on all matters that affect the Canadian public. To characterize it as anything less than essential is an utter degradation of our Constitution and the fundamental freedoms for which our ancestors fought. At the very heart of democracy is the preservation of personal liberties, and the guardian of those liberties is Parliament.

Again, there are 338 of us who have been given the grand privilege and the sobering responsibility of being in this place in order to represent Canadians. If we are not here doing that, then who is?

• (1220)

For the government to use this pandemic to avoid accountability and to have us meet only virtually, where dissent can literally be silenced by the click of a button, is unconscionable.

There was a man who worked at a sawmill, and he would faithfully go to work day in and day out, and at the end of the week on Friday, he would exit the compound. Going past the security guard, he would be pushing a wheelbarrow full of sawdust. The security guard would look at the wheelbarrow and ask him what he had in the wheelbarrow, and he would reply that it was just a bit of sawdust, and the security guard would say that it was okay and to go on through.

The next week, the same worker would come back to work on Monday and work faithfully on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. Friday would come around and this worker would fill his wheelbarrow again with some sawdust and go past the security guard, who would ask him what he had in his wheelbarrow. The employee would reply that it was just a bit of sawdust and continue on his way.

This happened for several weeks. Finally, the security guard pulled him over one Friday and asked him if he did not mind his asking what he used the sawdust for. The employee, not missing a beat, leaned in, and asked him in a whisper if he could keep a secret. The security guard said that he could, and the worker said that he was not taking the sawdust but stealing wheelbarrows.

How easy it is to be distracted from the real things going on before us. Indeed, the government must respond to the current pandemic and ensure the safety and security of Canadians. This is, in fact, the first responsibility of any government, but there is more taking place here than what meets the eye.

The Prime Minister will take the media's questions from the comfort of his home, but he is unwilling to take questions from the people of Canada, through their representatives right here in Parliament. The Prime Minister is willing to hand out money to individuals, businesses and not-for-profits, but he demands something in return.

The government wants the Canadian public to be informed, but only with the information the government carefully curates. In March, the Liberals indicated that they were looking at the possibility of implementing legislation that would crack down on what they were calling "misinformation", information that the government deemed unhelpful.

Further to this, the heritage minister recently confirmed that millions of dollars are being spent on censorship. No legislation was presented in this place on that, no debate took place here and no discussion was had. The Liberals have crowned themselves now as the czar of what is true and what is false, what is acceptable and what is unacceptable, what gets to stay and what has to go.

Since when is it the government's responsibility to arbitrate truth? This is not democracy, and these types of silly things are the

Government Orders

things that happen when this place ceases to meet and when the official opposition is unable to hold the government fully to account. This is a direct infringement of our freedom.

I recognize that no one likes misinformation, but since when is it okay for the government to determine what is wrong, what gets to stay and what has to go, what is in and what is out? It is a massive overreach of power. I find this particularly unsettling given the fact that the current government is actually responsible for spreading some of the most dangerous misinformation that has been put out there. Canadians will recall that it was the government that initially propagated the false notion that COVID-19 could not be spread by human-to-human contact. That was proven false. It was the health minister who declared that closing Canada's borders was not necessary to protect Canadians because COVID-19 would pass quickly. That was false. As well, it was the government that misled the Canadian public into believing that a mask over one's face was not necessary and would not be helpful. That was false too.

If these are not examples of misinformation, then I do not know what is. If the government is looking to crack down on unhelpful or misleading information on COVID-19, then it really need look no further than in the mirror, or at least that is where it should start. The reality is that the government does not have all the answers. We are in this together, learning and discovering. Information is evolving.

• (1225)

Free speech is part of a thriving society. Free speech is what helps us maintain our fundamentals as a nation. It is how we share ideas. It is how we engage in creativity. It is how we advance. It is how we innovate. It is how we move forward. When did we become afraid of robust discussion? When did we become unable to disagree without being disagreeable? When were these ideals eradicated from our Canadian values, from the social fabric that we call home?

Having convinced the security guard that he was simply taking sawdust, the man cleverly pushed his employer's wheelbarrow home knowing there was profit to be made. Things are not as they immediately seem. Things are not fully what they appear to be to the naked eye. As Canadians, knowingly or unknowingly, we are being asked to exchange our freedom for what the government is calling "security", but to what end.

When Parliament fails to meet and the government ceases to be held accountable, it is safe to say that democracy is in fact under siege. I am concerned that so many have been willing to short-circuit democracy when times are difficult. I have heard members talk about the added travel time it would take to get here, the extra safety precautions they would have to take, the strain it would put on them physically, and so on and so forth. Some members have expressed concern about social distancing. We appear to be doing that quite effectively today and could probably continue it.

Government Orders

We swore an oath to serve our country in good times and bad, in convenient times and inconvenient times. Since when did the members of the House start putting their name on a ballot out of convenience? There are plenty of other careers that people could have pursued if that was their ultimate goal. If life were meant to be convenient, if that is what people in the House are seeking, then this is not the place for them. Rather, this is a place of service. This is a place where 338 individuals from across this country come together and engage in robust and productive discussion for the sake of Canadians. This is a place where the exchange of ideas occurs and where legislative decisions are made. This is a place where the voices of Canadians are meant to be represented. When we fail to show up in this place because it happens to be inconvenient, that is a shame, and it is not a shame on Canadians, but on all of us in the House.

This place is essential and we are essential workers because Canadians are the ones who are being represented here and they deserve to have their member of Parliament in this place, speaking on their behalf, making decisions for the greater good of this country.

• (1230)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that was a fascinating 10 minutes of my life.

Just because we have so much revisionism going on the House, I would like to speak about the incredible work that was done when the economic crisis hit. When the government started talking about tinkering with EI and child tax benefits, we knew that it was not going to work and that they needed to create a whole new program, something the Conservatives were not supporting at all.

It was the civil servants who worked through the Easter weekend and at night to get the CERB out. We know that the Conservatives are attacking CERB relentlessly and talking about people sleeping in their hammocks and not going to work. However, there is the work of the CRA in Sudbury and the Service Canada offices in Timmins and Thunder Bay, as well the incredible work of Community Futures and FedNor across the north, stabilizing our region, and the fact that we have \$50 million of new money coming into the north at this time. We have extraordinary civil servants who stepped up, and it is really important that we recognize the work they did in getting this program off the ground, working under very difficult conditions to make sure that millions of Canadians did not lose their economic security and were not wiped out at a time of unprecedented crisis.

This is an important moment for us because we are back in the House and seeing all manner of revisionism. I want the historical record to show the work of our civil servants, who stood up at a time of unprecedented crisis, and how we were actually able to work in Parliament to change the CERB to make it workable.

I say this because in the United States, the Americans have a one-time payment of \$1,250 under Trump. In England, under a majority government, there has not been any money for the self-employed people. It will not come until June. That delay would wipe people out.

However, here in Canada, because we are in a minority Parliament and because New Democrats were willing to negotiate to get

something done, we got this thing through. Our civil servants did an extraordinary job, so I want to thank them.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Mr. Speaker, during my speech I talked about being able to disagree without being disagreeable. I talked about this place being an opportunity for 338 of us to come together and engage in productive dialogue, where we might be able to exchange ideas in a way that we might disagree, but could still honour one another.

I find it very disheartening that the member opposite felt the need to start his statement with a personal attack and follow up with some further slimy comments. He did that yesterday as well. I think it is really inappropriate. It shows a lack of maturity and a lack of leadership on his part. It is very sad.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to be as concise as I can on what we are actually debating today and why I would highly recommend that the member opposite support where we are today. The Prime Minister has been here and has been held to account for government decisions, whether here or in the virtual Parliament over the Internet.

From the Conservatives perspective, what we are really talking about is their wanting an opposition day and private members' business. Maybe those can come with time. We need to focus on how we can continue to move forward with a virtual Parliament, a hybrid system that will enable all members to participate.

I want to give a specific example. If we have an opposition day, at the end of the opposition day there needs to be a vote. However, because of physical distancing we cannot have 338 members sitting in the chamber. Even the Conservatives seem to agree with that particular point. We have to allow for some sort of a voting process, yet the Conservatives refuse to have a voting process. Whether we are talking about opposition days or private members' bills, therein lies the problem. That problem needs to be resolved. The House leadership teams need to come together and work through it.

Would the member not agree that today we are talking about having more questions than we have ever had? We are going to be sitting in the summer, which we have never done before. There is going to be a wide variety of issues to talk about at length, both virtually and in Parliament. In fact, the Prime Minister and Liberal caucus have made a commitment to the parliamentary process and serving their constituents.

• (1235)

Ms. Rachael Harder: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite used an important term. I believe he misspoke and might want to retract it. He used the term "virtual Parliament" when, in fact, that is actually not what the Liberal government is proposing. That is not the proposal. That is not the motion. He is actually misleading the House. I would give him the opportunity to retract that statement should he wish to do the right and honourable thing. He is not presenting a virtual Parliament. That is not what we are discussing here today.

If that were in fact what we are discussing, a hybrid, full Parliament resuming, we would be willing to discuss it. However, what is on the table is actually the meeting of what is called committee of the whole or a special committee. It strips us of some very important powers and opportunities as parliamentarians. Again, for the member opposite, who I know knows better because he is quite an intelligent gentleman, to mislead the House the way he is doing is absolutely atrocious and he should stand up and apologize to Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her speech.

It was fascinating to hear her talk about ideals, about what we should be doing, and about how the government should respond to the crisis.

Let's go down the list of the people who need help from the government during the crisis, who need programs like the CERB and the emergency wage subsidy. That list includes workers, seniors, students, community groups, very important food banks, sick people, fishers on Canada's east coast, the tourism sector, which is huge, single moms, people with disabilities, indigenous individuals, people working in grocery stores and hospitals, and artists. The cultural sector was the first to shut down and will be the last to open up again. Our society needs theatre and the performing arts.

The thing is, I do not see either the Liberal Party or the Conservative Party on the list of people who need government help, yet both of them availed themselves of the Canada emergency wage subsidy. We recently learned that the two leadership hopefuls and other members were against that.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague if she thinks the Conservative Party, which raised almost \$4 million in the first quarter, really needs the help that should be going to all those other people.

[*English*]

Ms. Rachael Harder: Mr. Speaker, the member is, of course, correct when he says that for workers, students, indigenous people, artists and seniors, there is basically a benefit for every single person.

During this unprecedented time in Canada's history, there are an incredible number of men and women who are without work. As a result, they would be unable to pay for their rent, mortgage, the food on their table, the fuel that goes into their vehicle and the clothes on their back without a handout, so the government stepped in and put a number of benefits in place. I can see some flaws in those benefits; nevertheless, I also see the intent to help Canadians.

In terms of that, within the Conservative Party of Canada, there are employees. There are men and women who work incredibly hard to put food on their table, put a roof over their head and look after their family. The party saw it fit to take advantage of the benefit that was made available, in order to pay those employees so that they could continue to take care of their families. I was not a part of making that decision, so I am unable to answer for the motivation. However, I can say that there are 60 families that are being well taken care of now.

Government Orders

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we were talking about a virtual committee, not virtual Parliament. That is the motion before us.

I have a rural riding. I have trouble accessing the Internet as it is. Usually, it is pretty choppy. I wonder if my colleague could talk about some of the flaws in this and how members will be able to participate virtually, because that is not necessarily possible for all 338.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Mr. Speaker, my colleague raises a good point, which is that not all of us live in urban centres. I face this challenge as well. Internet access can sometimes be somewhat dicey and not always predictable. Sometimes we get cut off and have to re-enter the Zoom call that is taking place, which hosts our virtual sessions.

There are certainly many glitches, Mr. Speaker, as you yourself are aware, as you have had to deal with them and done quite well.

All of us have had to make adjustments as there are many glitches within the system we have been given. That said, when we talk about a hybrid system that would be in part virtual and in part in the House, I think we can remedy some of those problems. The key is that it is not just a committee with limited power, but that it is a re-establishment of full Parliament.

● (1240)

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Pontiac.

It is a great pleasure to be in the House today to debate the important issue of the pandemic that this country is going through and the way in which our Parliament is responding to it, not only in terms of programs but also in terms of how we are organizing ourselves to function as a democratic voice, notwithstanding what I would call the greatest disruption in our country's history since World War II.

Before I start, I would like to take the opportunity to thank my staff. They have been indefatigable. I looked that up in the dictionary, not because I did not know what it meant but because I wanted a more precise definition. It means "persistently tireless" and that accurately describes my staff always, but especially over the last two months. I would like to name them individually: Maire Whitley, Joanna Markowicz, Alex Slusar, Ashley Sanchez, Lauren Roy, Philippe Guay, Paul Kaiser and Vicki Bas, who had to interrupt her hours here on the Hill but who will be an integral part of our efforts to get our offices up and running again.

They have done a wonderful job. They have helped constituents who called searching for answers. They have suggested improvements to programs, which I have then sent to other levels. I am happy to see that some of those improvements have been made as we have adapted the programs, not necessarily because of my intervention, of course, but because members of Parliament from all parties have been communicating with the government with their suggestions for how to make these programs broader, fairer and more effective at this time.

Government Orders

As I said before when I stood to ask a question, this does feel like Parliament to me. Even though it is committee of the whole, it feels very much like Parliament. I am saying generally, in the last few days, even on Wednesdays when I have been here, so on and so forth. Also, the virtual sessions of the committee of the whole feel very much like Parliament. Members of the opposition have a chance to ask pointed questions, and those questions, at least the good ones, are reported in the media. That is all part of the accountability process that we are engaging in, albeit by different means than usual.

I have noticed during the debates that take place in the COVID committee that pretty much every topic under the sun can be mentioned or related in some way to the topic of COVID. That is obviously because of the latitude and open-mindedness that you have shown, Mr. Speaker.

We have heard in the House about people who work in retail in our communities across the nation, and I would like to tip my hat to them as well. They are essential workers. They have a very important job to do. They help ensure that our supply chains are functioning. However, retail outlets are taking precautionary measures. They are taking a variety of measures. I will describe some of them in relation to my last trip to the supermarket.

People had to line up outside, six feet apart. There was a long lineup alongside the supermarket. When we got in, we had to wash our hands and sometimes even answer questions about whether anyone in our family was ill. I know everyone has had this experience, as everyone has been doing the same thing to make sure we have what we need during this pandemic. When we get into the supermarket, there are arrows telling us which direction to go in which aisle. Of course, everyone has to stay six feet apart. When we get to the cash register, an employee points people to the cash register they need to go to depending on how long the lineup is.

● (1245)

That is effectively what we have done in this Parliament. We have implemented social distancing measures. That is why today, in this sitting of Parliament, we are not 338 members.

We have adapted. Just like the retail stores have adapted, we have adapted, and we have been able to use technology to adapt. I did not really know what Zoom was before the pandemic, to be honest, but I have adapted and I think I am pretty good at holding Zoom meetings now. Parliament has adapted as well. Because we have technology, we have been able to keep Parliament functioning. We have been able to keep debate going, and we have been able to see the opposition ask questions. The only real difference between the Zoom meetings and what we normally have here in the House is that there is no heckling on Zoom, so we can actually concentrate on what the questioner is saying and concentrate more on the answer. It is important that Canadians know that we have adapted and that we continue to function and continue to debate, despite the fact that we have to practise social distancing measures in the House.

I have also heard from the other side that we are principally talking about COVID. That makes perfect sense. This is an unprecedented challenge. It is one of the greatest challenges of our time. I would expect Parliament to be focusing almost singularly on that

topic, with the leeway you provide us, Mr. Speaker, to bring in other issues. This is the challenge of our time. I know there have been comparisons to Parliament in England during World War II, but I would submit that its members spent most of their time talking about World War II. That is just the way it is. To suggest that we are going to function exactly the same way we did in February, with the same range of topics, is a bit disingenuous, because we are in the grip of a major pandemic that has turned our country and the world upside down. Yes, there are budgetary issues to discuss. The member from the Green Party brought up the issue of MAID. We have asked for one extension already. How are we going to deal with that? I am certain we will find a way to deal with the priority issues that also need to be discussed, along with COVID-19.

The advantage we have over the British Parliament is that we have communications technology. Another difference between the British Parliament and Canada is that one can get to the British Parliament from anywhere in England without taking a plane. That does not describe how transportation works in this country, with its huge land mass.

I would like to finish on the point the member for Lethbridge was making in her philosophical speech about the give-and-take of debate, synthesis and so forth. I would like to submit that the virtual Parliament, the hybrid Parliament that is coming out of this debate is very much in the spirit of synthesis. It is very much in the spirit of parties listening to each other to try to find a common, workable solution in a completely unprecedented situation.

● (1250)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have a two-part question for my colleague across the aisle. He talked about his staff at the beginning of his speech. Obviously, we all rely on our staff and consider them to be extremely important.

I want to ask him if he applied to the program to receive assistance for his office staff. Obviously, his answer will be no, because his office budget has not been cut. The office budget has not suffered as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. The funds made available to businesses are meant to save businesses that are struggling.

Here is the second part of my question. Hoping that his answer to the first part is “no”, how does he explain that his party has unscrupulously gone ahead and applied for public money that has been made available to help struggling businesses, when that same party refuses to fulfill its commitment to restore public funding for political parties?

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Speaker, my office has not applied for the wage subsidy because my office is not a political party. We set partisanship aside in my office, just as I imagine my colleague does in his.

Indeed, the philosophy behind all the programs the government has created is to help workers and families. There are programs targeted at businesses, non-profit organizations and so on, but the common goal is to help individuals and families get through the crisis. I do not want to turn this into a partisan issue.

[English]

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, earlier it was indicated that we would have 338 members of Parliament here. One of my greatest concerns and challenges over the last few weeks is trying to say that I am sorry that someone is misleading people. I have heard this once again from the member today.

It is not just about the topic of COVID-19. Of course, this is a pandemic and we are all going through this. At the same time, the agricultural sector, the sectors that are dealing with businesses and our international trade, all of these continue to be huge hurdles we need to cross, and we are attempting to cross them. However, there is no ability to share the stories of the farmers in my riding, which I will be able to do so today, because we have been so constrained on what we can talk about.

We talk about democracy, but I saw an order in council from the government on May 1 regarding the firearms ban. Yes, I have been busy with the COVID pandemic, but if members want to go to Elgin—Middlesex—London and listen to over 150 firearms owners who are furious about this, I welcome them to come.

If the government is saying that we are only talking about COVID-19, then why the heck did it put through a firearms ban on May 1?

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Speaker, if the motion passes, the hon. member will be able to ask a question on anything she wants.

With respect to the recent action on firearms, that was part of the government's platform. The measure enjoys the support of a majority of parties in the House and I would submit the support of a majority of Canadians. I would also remind the member that we have an order in council process, but all the regulations that are passed by order in council have to be routed and given authority by enabling legislation. That authority exists in enabling legislation that was passed in the House.

[Translation]

The Speaker: We have time for a brief question.

The hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie has 30 seconds to ask his question.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

I do not understand why the Conservatives insist on rejecting a solution that will work quite well. A hybrid Parliament will allow everyone to take part and ask the government questions, as we saw in Great Britain.

I would like my colleague's thoughts on the committee of the whole model. Personally, I very much like having this opportunity to spend five minutes talking to one or more ministers and having a

Government Orders

more in-depth discussion than we normally can in the traditional version where we get only 30 seconds to ask a question followed by only a minute for the answer.

• (1255)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Lac-Saint-Louis has 30 seconds to answer the question.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent question because in this short five-minute period for questions and answers, the person asking the question sets the pace of the exchange.

That way, if an hon. member wants to ask a seven-minute question, the minister has seven minutes to answer and the government is forced to follow the pace of the opposition. I think it is an exceptional formula. I very much enjoy following this virtual question period.

Maybe someday we will use the same set-up in the House of Commons. I do not know. It is not for me to decide, but my colleague raises a good point.

[English]

Mr. William Amos (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry (Science), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would highlight for the House the fact that I will not be delivering my full speech. I will simply be thanking my staff, because my team in our constituency office has done such great work and have been there for the constituents of Pontiac. It bears mentioning to the public.

[Translation]

I am so happy to be able to celebrate their work. We do not always see the people working behind the scenes answering phone calls and emails. They have worked hard during this pandemic, and I know that the same goes for all of my colleagues from all parties in the House of Commons.

[English]

I really want to give special thanks to my team members.

Erin Davis is our team lead and has been with us since 2015. She is doing an amazing job coordinating the whole team. Jessica Forgues works in our Campbell's Bay office, obviously now virtually since the office is closed. She is front line, receiving all those calls, Stéphanie Lacroix does our administration and financial management. Francis Beausoleil also works with Stéphanie in our Chelsea office. Then there is Anick Caron has recently joined our team and is doing great work in our Gracefield office.

[Translation]

I want to thank Anick for her work in Gracefield, in the Gatineau Valley, and I also want to thank Geneviève Lemaire, our communications assistant.

[English]

Geneviève just recently joined our team, taking over from Maja Staka, who also did great work with our team.

These are the unsung heroes of the COVID-19 period, from a politician's perspective.

Government Orders

[Translation]

When we represent our constituents, we need all of our assistants and our teams supporting us.

[English]

It is only with a team effort that we can serve the public, so I want to thank my Pontiac team. With that, I will conclude my speech.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will also take this opportunity to thank my team, starting with my chief of staff, Christian Rivard. He has worked non-stop during the pandemic and I can even share a story with you about that. We practically worked around the clock during the repatriation operations. I slept at the office and Christian did as well on other days. We set up a war room, even for all the assistance programs.

I would also like to mention Marie-France Beaudry, who helps me out with community organizations which, together with cultural organizations, had difficulty qualifying for assistance from the various programs. We had to be sensitive to this reality and guide these organizations.

There is also Valérie Lafond, who helps out on the administrative side, and Yves Dumulon, who has 20 years' experience providing services to constituents. As you know, the Canada summer jobs program is rather complex and expectations have been much greater this year. I also want to send best wishes to Philippe Guertin, another member of my team, who suffered a mishap during the COVID-19 crisis.

This is a question for the member from Pontiac. Earlier, he mentioned that his constituents were emailing him many questions. I know that Internet access is an issue that is particularly important to him. How is the Internet in his area? How can we make a real difference in terms of Internet coverage, which the COVID-19 crisis has confirmed is a problem?

Mr. William Amos: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my esteemed colleague on the other side of the House.

I also take this opportunity to thank Tyler LaSalle, one of my assistants, who took some time off to go and work in one of our seniors' residences in Ontario.

To go back to my colleague's question, the Internet is without doubt the main infrastructure concern and a matter of priority for the Pontiac. We have to admit that, all over rural Canada, high-speed Internet is a frustrating concern because there is no quick response.

However, since I was elected in 2015, we have been able to announce projects totalling more than \$20 million, projects subsidized by the federal and provincial governments. Sometimes, the projects were submitted by not-for-profit organizations and sometimes by major telecommunication companies.

Does that solve the problem? The answer is no, not at all. We must move forward and I believe that our government has a plan to move forward very positively, with the collaboration of the provinces and funding of \$750 million from the CRTC.

I believe that service improvement projects will be submitted in the Pontiac, because they are needed. We must also have patience, although all of my constituents want to have the Internet yesterday, not today or tomorrow.

• (1300)

[English]

Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for setting a good tone in regard to the gratitude we owe to our staff. I would like to thank Dan, Patricia, Liz, Simon and Jacob who, particularly in these times, not only answer constituent concerns but deal with an intensity that is unprecedented as well. I know the word “unprecedented” has been used a lot, but that is the case.

I would like to encourage all my colleagues to be very attentive to the mental health concerns of their staff. When they get people from businesses calling, people who have worked for 20 years building their business and are in tears, or other people who have been unable to get on a program because they missed it by some avenue, it is troubling.

Last, we are all posting on social media. I have noticed an intensity of the posts as well. I would ask my colleagues, in a concern for mental health, to understand that people who have mental health issues can be very easily pushed into an anxious situation where they will make bad choices. I caution members trying to make political points out of the intensity of the pandemic and to be mindful of those very severe points members may make and how they will be received by people who are struggling with mental health.

Mr. William Amos: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for those wise and generous comments. I think all Canadians can learn from those contributions.

Certainly, the greatest success our team has had in sharing messages with the public on social media has been around celebrating our front-line service providers and celebrating our nurses. If I want to get a lot of likes and shares on our Facebook page, we are positive about the people who are doing the hard work. Yesterday, it was celebrating the Canadian Armed Forces men and women who are working so hard in our long-term health care facilities in Quebec and Ontario, and the response is overwhelming.

Canadians right now want to feel uplifted. They want to feel supported, and they deserve to be supported. We are all under stress, we are all under duress. We all know someone who is having a tough time right now or probably a dozen people who are having a tough time.

Our front-line service providers are worthy of that kind of celebration. I appreciate that we are able to celebrate the member's staff as well. They are doing a great job. I know everyone's team is doing a great job here. We are all just human beings after all.

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Timmins—James Bay. Also, Mr. Speaker, I would ask that you give me a two-minute warning. I tend to speak at length.

We have heard many passionate and compelling arguments related to the crisis we are currently in with COVID. Members heard me earlier in the House reference the 6,180 COVID deaths. Each statistic is a story, a family devastated by loss from this global pandemic. When we get into statistics that large, 80,000 cases, I do not believe that we are in a place right now where we are understanding the gravity of this. I do not believe that we have taken the time as a country to mourn these losses.

Yesterday we heard tributes to an officer and pilot who died in a tragic accident. I extend that same empathy in tragedy for the loss of thousands of Canadians across the country. I do that because we are in a historic moment. We have the opportunity within the House to craft the future path of the country. I admit that we have heard lots of rhetoric inflamed on all sides by all parties. When we hear about the idea that the government is misleading, or that a party is misleading, I believe it is deeply misleading to suggest that we are not working in this present crisis, or that this notion of going back to work betrays the very spirit of the previous speaker's assertion of just how hard the staff are working, and the intensity of the emotions. In our government operations committee, we are working diligently every day across parties to ensure that we have the highest amount of accountability from the government to the public.

I am happy to report to the House that I have worked with friends, along the way, from the Bloc and from the Conservative Party to ensure that we are adequately preparing for the next wave, which we know is going to happen. We know that the government was charged with creating a stockpile that would have had adequate protective equipment in place in the millions. We know that, at the onset of this, we could have used better evidence-based practices to ensure that the number of 6,000 dead may have been less. We will not know in this current crisis, but we do know that we have to begin to plan now for future deaths and future tragedies.

Every statistic is a story. Every life lost is a heartbreak for Canadians across the country. These are just the reported numbers. These are the numbers that keep me up at night. These are the numbers that wake me up in the morning to get to work, whether virtually from Hamilton Centre or right here today.

We are in historic times. The honour and privilege that our constituents have instilled in us, to be here representing not their financial interests but their very lives, which are at stake, is the single most important thing I will do professionally in my entire life. For that, I will make no apologies. I will make no apologies for the work that we have done in the House as New Democrats to deliver for Canadians. If there are members present here today who feel like they are not at work or who feel like they have not been able to get things done, that is on their own accord.

As New Democrats, when we put the proposal to create a hybrid system that would allow every voice across this country to be represented, we did it from a small but mighty caucus of 24 members representing every corner of this country, from Nunavut to St.

Government Orders

John's to Windsor to Skeena—Bulkley Valley, way up in the north of B.C.

We understand the complexities. We understand the passion of the small business owners who are about to lose everything after working decades to be able to provide for their families. We understand the workers who are forced into meat-packing plants like Cargill, knowing the risks they are going to undertake to ensure that we have food security. We understand what it is like for the single parents who are at home trying to make the heartbreaking decision of whether they are going to put food on the table or pay rent. There have been compelling visions for the future of this country presented throughout this crisis.

● (1305)

Let us be clear that the rush to get back to work is not coming from the working class. It is coming from the capitalist class. We have heard a lot of opinions about what socialism looks like. We have heard very maligning comments about how we got to work today and how we like oil and gas. I would ask members how they like health care, public education and all the goods and services that we cherish as Canadians. These were brought from a social democratic state and separate us from other countries around the world.

We have an opportunity in the House to deliver for all Canadians. We have an opportunity to deliver for every person who happens to be in the country during this pandemic. We have not only an opportunity, but a moral imperative regardless of people's citizenship. If people are temporary foreign workers or undocumented persons who have made it to this soil seeking freedom and the liberty that our Conservative friends talk about, everyone deserves to have a chance at life through this pandemic, and we know that not everyone is experiencing the pandemic equally.

As New Democrats, we are committed to working through this no matter what. We would work in a hybrid system, in a proposal that would provide a voice across all of Canada, that would work through the summer, that would work as much and as long as necessary to deliver for Canadians on a path forward. We are committed to doing that.

There was a very clear statement made by the Leader of the Opposition, who said that the rest of us here would prefer to look at Canada as how it could be, but the Conservatives would prefer to look at how it is. That is very telling. In Hamilton Centre, where I am from, I see suffering.

Is the reality we want to go back to the deep economic inequality, the racial disparities happening here, or the second-class citizenry of indigenous peoples across this land by the very definition of the Indian Act? No. I will never apologize for wanting to see this country become what it could be, not what it was.

Government Orders

That is where we are today. We talk about something as simple as extending EI health care to 10 paid sick days, as simple as providing universal pharmacare for everyone or as simple as providing the right to housing that would allow for the creation of 500,000 housing units across this country. We say that because we see the suffering. If members do not see the suffering, they have a deep privilege. If they do not see the suffering, I invite them to come to my riding, which has the third lowest income in the country. I will show them what it means in this moment with 6,000 deaths. When this is done there are going to be many more.

We have a moral imperative to do everything within our power legislatively. Whether we call it Parliament or a committee of the whole, whether it is virtually or in person, we have to follow the best practices that are provided by science and by doctors to model to the rest of the country just how dire this situation is. When this is all done, maybe as the House we can put politics aside and begin to mourn the thousands of lives that will have been lost. That is what I am here for. That is who I am here for.

With that I will take my seat and relinquish my time to my dear friend from Timmins—James Bay.

• (1310)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments of my colleague across the way. I always put the residents of Winnipeg North and their concerns and issues at the top of my agenda. I appreciate the hundreds of millions of dollars that are being spent through this epidemic to support real people in our communities: young, not as young, businesses and so forth. It is critically important.

It is encouraging to see individuals from all political parties contributing to doing the tweaking that is necessary so that we can maximize the benefits and minimize the negative impact of the epidemic we are facing.

My question is related to the full virtual integration that we are hoping to achieve. Because of health-related concerns and advice from health experts, 338 members cannot meet inside the House and therefore are looking for that hybrid.

Could my colleague emphasize how important it is that we achieve that at some point?

Mr. Matthew Green: Mr. Speaker, to borrow a Liberal phrase, there is certainly a lot of work to do. Although we are proud of the work that has been done in our committees, we know that there are still systems in place that leave far too many people out. We need to have a laser-like focus over the next four to six months on those Canadians who are deeply suffering. Our virtual Parliament proposal is to be able to provide a hybrid system that is going to do that: keep us on track and focus our attention on what is most important.

Let us be very clear: What is most important in the House are the lives of the people living in this country. It is not the profits of petroleum companies or the other stuff that is going to be brought in to distract as a sideshow. We need laser-like focus on the lives lost in this pandemic. If it is virtual, online, or here in the House in this hybrid system, we fully support it.

• (1315)

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member gave a very impassioned speech. To use his own words, he mentioned that we need to do, legislatively, what we can. He also mentioned we could call it Parliament or call it virtual Parliament, whatever one wants.

In fact, what we are talking about today is neither of those. We are not talking about Parliament or virtual Parliament. What we are debating today is a committee, which is not Parliament or virtual Parliament. Under that role there is no legislation that we will be able to vote on.

What is the member's understanding of what we are voting on today, and how would he expect the legislation he might be interested in to come forth when we are actually not discussing Parliament?

Mr. Matthew Green: Mr. Speaker, I can appreciate the legalistic terms that will be used. I am talking about the spirit and intent of running government using all the aspects that we need to ensure that Canadians get what they want. I will note the heckling that is happening right now. There is a certain spirit from the Conservative caucus that we need to get back to work. I would assert that we have been working. We have accomplished so much as a small caucus. In fact, if there was an opposition to be had, it would be had right here by working for Canadians day in and day out.

I can certainly appreciate the reactionary response from the Conservative caucus. They would prefer to cherry pick the people they have come here. This group would adhere to free speech. I see I am out of time. I am sure I will be able to elaborate on my free speech in a future question.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I know that my colleague's party is always quick to stand up for the most vulnerable, much like the Bloc Québécois stands up for Quebeckers.

A 60-year-old paramedic in my riding has congenital heart disease and had to stop working because his job puts him in daily contact with the public, which could put his health at risk. As a result, he does not qualify for the CERB, even though it was recommended by his doctor. He is not eligible for any kind of government assistance. I find that a bit ironic, since the government provides these programs, but with criteria that are often too strict for some people and too inclusive for others.

What does my colleague think?

What can we do to improve this situation from here, whether it is in a virtual or hybrid Parliament, to propose solutions to the government?

Government Orders

[English]

Mr. Matthew Green: Mr. Speaker, the member's question is critically important. Like I said, to borrow the Liberal term, there is much work to be done.

Members will recall that the first iteration of the Liberals' support was the mismatch of EI, which was undefined and certainly did not provide for the most vulnerable. As New Democrats, we fought for the universal application of \$2,000 to be provided to every single person in this country. What did the Liberal government do? It provided means testing that filtered very vulnerable people out: people who might have made a little money or been sole proprietors of their businesses and not paid out in the dividends that were required by the government.

To make matters worse and add more confusion, we had senior members of the Liberal Party telling everyone to apply. Our assertion from day one has always been getting more help to more people more quickly, instead of designing programs that are obsessed with filtering people out.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a great honour, as always, to rise in the House to represent the people of Timmins—James Bay and be here at a moment when our world has fundamentally changed forever. What we need to come to terms with in the House is that we are in the midst of an unprecedented economic and health crisis, and the role of Parliament is to come together to find a way to establish a means of working to address the nature of it.

Before I spoke, we heard a report that the Canadian military, which has been in long-term care homes, has found blatant disregard for the lives of seniors, with abuse and negligence in the for-profit care system. Canadians are looking to this Parliament. They will look to us and ask what we will do to ensure that this never happens again. We will hear some say that this is under provincial jurisdiction, but the negligence happened under provincial jurisdiction and in numerous jurisdictions. These seniors deserved better, and we will have to look at how we envision health care in the 21st century.

COVID has exposed very clearly the myths of our society and the smugness. It has laid bare the inequities, and it has made us start to address this. Canada is now in the new century, and the old century and its old smug assertions are gone forever.

Yesterday, the Leader of the Opposition talked about the magical, mystical hidden hand of the market that creates everything we need. That is a really bizarre thing to say when this nation did not have PPE, when our closest neighbour, the United States, was stealing our medical supplies and when front-line medical workers had to crowdsource because our nation did not have the capacity to handle the pandemic.

People will look to this Parliament to ask what we are going to do to make sure that never happens again. We should never ever be in a situation where we have to send in the army to keep our seniors alive. We send in the army for earthquakes in Haiti. That is where we send the army. We send it to catastrophic floods and fires. We had to send in the army because we have been so negligent in

the health care of seniors, and the reports speak to the blatant disregard and abuse.

We have had to adjust how Parliament works as well, and I will say one thing for sure: In opposition, members never give up time. It is their one tool. Members never shorten debate or give up an opportunity to speak, because it is the one tool we have. In the face of this crisis, we recognized that we had to pull back from Parliament and think about how we were going to do this. The New Democrats said that as we are in a minority government, we will begin to negotiate. That is what we do in a minority government.

The first negotiation was based on the fact that suddenly millions of Canadians could not pay their rent. So much for this myth of the middle class and those wanting to join it. What we see are millions of people in the gig economy and millions of contract workers who were not going to have the ability to pay their rent. Then we started to push the government.

In the original talk, the government said it was going to tinker with EI and that it had a little more money for the Canada child benefit. The New Democrats said the extent of this crisis was such that we have to do something extraordinarily different, something that would have been thought impossible in February: a \$2,000-a-month minimum to keep people afloat. We worked with the government on that. We never got any support from the Conservatives. They were all howling. They talked about the shirkers and people sleeping in their hammocks. We worked with the government but said the plan was too restrictive, and we asked about the self-employed. We had to change it, and each step of the way we had to negotiate. This is what we can do in a minority government.

People in the United States got a one-time payment of \$1,250. No wonder there is so much social unrest in the United States right now, a breakdown of social solidarity. If we had given a one-time payment of \$1,250 in March, it would have been an economic catastrophe for Canada. We recognized that we had the power of the federal government, a power that the provinces do not have. We have the Bank of Canada to backstop this. We knew we could give \$2,000 a month as a bare minimum, so we included the self-employed.

Under Boris Johnson, England went with a base income as well, but it does not include the self-employed until June. If we had done the same thing in Canada, millions would have been wiped out.

Government Orders

• (1320)

This is how we negotiated. We gave up our time, which we fight for to stop the government from shutting down debate and fight for at committee. We gave that up because there is a bigger principle at stake: the crisis that Canadians are facing.

We negotiated with the government about small businesses. The original plan the government had was for a 10% wage subsidy. We said that 10% was not going to do it and that it had to be 75%. We negotiated that. That is what we do in a minority. We have the capacity.

The government has now brought in a motion for the committee of the whole to meet four days a week. People back home have never heard me explain the ins and outs of how Parliament works because I do not tend to do that, but the idea that this is a fake Parliament or not a real Parliament is a complete misrepresentation and falsehood. We have been able to zero in with ministers, asking very specific questions to push much harder.

We asked how we would get to the end of June. We are not shutting Parliament down permanently.

How do we get to the end of June? We said there were two clear things for us.

We wanted some sessions in the summer because we do not know how COVID will change in the summer. We heard nothing from the Conservatives about wanting to show up for work in the summer. Parliament does not sit in the summer, but we got those meetings.

We also said we would support the government on this key issue if it considers workers who are going back to work. They get \$14 an hour and have no sick time. We never see the Conservatives stand up and talk about people making \$14 an hour, unless it is to thank someone who served them a burger in the morning after they went through the drive-through. It is great that an hon. member thanks a guy at the drive-through, as I heard earlier, but the Conservatives offer nothing about the fact that if workers get sick they cannot take time off.

The 10 days we negotiated with the government is extraordinary. It is also extraordinary because we realized, which my friends in the Bloc will lose their minds over, that we have to start talking at a federal level about how we can do this across Canada in a pandemic. We will have to negotiate a solution here.

We will now be speaking until the end of June about where we need to be, but coming out of this, we need to have a very clear vision. The economy is not simply going to turn itself back on and roar back into life.

We heard the Leader of the Opposition say that we have to get government out of the way because we want people to be able to make choices. Mr. 20th Century Man talks of making choices when millions cannot pay their rent. Let us get government out of the way. Let us just have the private sector do it all. Anyone who is dealing with industries has heard from industry after industry that they will not come back without some kind of vision and support.

We are talking about what the role of government will be. We have been here two days, and we have heard many things from the Conservatives. They went on about Margaret Thatcher. Remember her? She said there was no such thing as society. Guess what? COVID showed us that this is not very credible. Of course, they always mention Winston Churchill. They started off with Winston Churchill, then went to Margaret Thatcher and then to the Soviet Union, with the old “follow the Soviet Union” approach. The only thing they were missing was that we had to hold the line in the Mekong Delta so that the dominos did not fall.

What we are hearing are the tired old excuses of a 20th century vision that does not cut it. What COVID has shown us in 2020 is that those old myths are not going to cut it. We will need a new vision for public investment in health care. To end the precarious nature of work, we will need a public commitment with standards, not just to get government out of the way. We will also need a vision for building our economy.

We are willing, as the New Democrats, to give up some of our time in order to negotiate in a minority to put the people of Canada first. That is what we will continue to do. We will leave the Conservatives to howl at the moon or jump on the back benches. Maybe they will mention Castro next or someone else from their 20th century greatest hits. We will focus on what we need in the 21st century.

• (1325)

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague brought up something that I want to highlight. In my home province of Quebec, we have been devastated by COVID-19, especially in the CHSLDs. It is not normal that members of the Canadian Armed Forces are being deployed to our seniors residences. I want to thank my colleague across the way. Her son, like mine, is serving in a CHSLD. I thank all the members who are deployed on Operation Laser for what they are doing, including the 36 members who have now been diagnosed with COVID-19, catching it during this deployment.

We have seen something we have never seen before. We have seen the House come together, across party lines, during a pandemic. We have brought our voices together to make things better with the sole goal of helping Canadians get through this. I think that gives us hope. I know Canadians absolutely want us to work together for the good of the country.

Could the member elaborate a little more on how we can continue to work together to help Canadians in their time of need?

Government Orders

• (1330)

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I have been here many years. Nobody is ever going to accuse me of being non-partisan. I drop the gloves without thinking twice, because that is how Parliament has worked and it is the Parliament I have grown up in. However, we see something bigger than us, something bigger than we could possibly imagine. Timothy Morton calls it a hyperobject, something we cannot even completely comprehend. That is the power of this pandemic.

I hear the Conservatives talk about coming back here as if it is an inconvenience, but I do not see this as an inconvenience. My family worries when I come here and tell me I have to stay home for two weeks. What about my children? I see what people are doing back home. They are concerned. As my colleague from Hamilton said, it is not the working class who are itching to get back to work, because they know they are going to be on the front lines.

Canadians have taken an extraordinary step of social solidarity. I am so proud of Canada at this time. We need to show Canadians that when we meet to talk about these issues, we are focused on drilling down on the crisis that we are facing so that we will come out more resilient, stronger and more just. That is the task before us, and we will get there.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his presentation.

I have been sitting in the House on and off since October 21. I have noticed that we often agree with the NDP on the substance of things, such as support for the public, decent health care, and so on. However, there is a big disconnect between us. It looks like they did not read the contract they signed behind our backs in 1982. Health falls under the jurisdiction of Quebec and the provinces, period.

No, it is not normal for the army to have to come help in long-term care homes in Quebec. No, the current situation is not normal. How did we get to this point? In Parliament, they are trying to pin the blame on Quebec, but that is not where the blame lies. This is happening because of the fiscal imbalance and the many years of gross, appalling and scandalous underfunding of our health care system. The federal government taxes half, keeps the money and does what it wants with it. It has been rationing it out to the provinces and Quebec for many years. Mr. Chrétien even bragged about it in Europe. It is simple: they make cuts and the people complain to the provinces.

I will try to calm down, but it is hard to stay calm sometimes.

I will explain to the NDP what the solution is, and that will be the point of my question.

Does my colleague from Timmins—James Bay not think that the federal government should simply increase health transfers, as we have been calling for and as all the provinces and Quebec have been asking for in a reasonable, intelligent and rational way?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his good question.

For the NDP, it is clear that the federal government needs to fulfill its obligations and adequately fund the provincial systems. That is the NDP's vision.

It is also clear that the pandemic does not respect areas of jurisdiction; it is affecting everyone and Canada. The federal government of Canada certainly needs to talk to the provinces. However, we also have an obligation to take steps to ensure that the rights of seniors in long-term care facilities and in all seniors' homes across Canada are respected.

This crisis is a disaster for our country and the neglect has been extraordinary. We have an obligation to work together to come up with a solution. To do this, it is vital that we provide greater funding to the provinces.

• (1335)

[*English*]

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Battlefords—Lloydminster.

I am glad to be back in the House. I love being in the chamber. One of my friends in the media calls the day that he puts the newspaper together with the stories and the pictures “magic day”, and this is where magic happens for us as politicians, right here in the chamber. It is the only place, I think, where we can get the real feel of how Parliament is meant to work.

I appreciate that a number of colleagues are giving shout-outs to their staff, and I would like to do the same. My staff works so diligently and hard on behalf of our constituents who have been struggling during this outbreak. I want to give a big thanks to Dana, Lisa, Laura, Lindsay, Megan and Gianfranco. The service they provide to our constituents is bar none, and I am proud of each and every one of them. I know the incredible amount of effort and skill they apply to each case that has come to our attention through the mailbox, by email or by phone. Even though we are not yet allowing visitors in our office, we are working to put in place the proper safety protocol so that we can start meeting with our constituents again when a phone call is just not enough.

Meeting here and having these discussions is something that is fundamental to democracy. As Conservatives, we have been saying that Parliament needs to meet, as we are doing here today, and it needs to do so consistently. Now, we are not saying that we need all 338 members here. We can use a hybrid system, which we are going to try out going forward with the special committee of the whole on COVID-19. There are ways for us to do that, as well as to vote. We are looking for a compromise where we can have Parliament function and deal with the business of the day.

Our municipalities are meeting. Our town councils and municipal councils are meeting every month dealing with things on behalf of their ratepayers. Every provincial legislature is still meeting. They are acknowledging the need for social distancing while still doing the business of the day to ensure that they are on top of the COVID-19 crisis, and also dealing with all of the issues that government is charged with.

Government Orders

If we look around the world, the United States, the United Kingdom, the European Union, Australia and even China are meeting. I am sure that the Prime Minister, with his admiration for the “basic dictatorship” in China, is watching closely as the National People’s Congress of China is meeting shoulder-to-shoulder. If members watched them on the news, they are all wearing masks, but they are sitting shoulder-to-shoulder in their chamber. It is important that parliaments gather. We exchange ideas and have rigorous debate, which is not possible through Zoom with the technological problems, the inability to hear each other and the cutting in and out.

I am sure that the member for Timmins—James Bay will be glad that I am going to give a Winston Churchill quote, as follows:

It is difficult to explain this to those who do not know our ways. They cannot easily be made to understand why we consider that the intensity, passion, intimacy, informality and spontaneity of our Debates constitute the personality of the House of Commons and endow it at once with its focus and its strength.

That is the best way to describe why we need to be in here carrying out these debates, including the heckles. It is where we have an opportunity to have an exchange of ideas and to see the reactions and to be able to feed off each other’s emotions to some degree, as long as it does not escalate too much. It is the role of parliamentarians in the House of Commons to have these discussions. Although the government motion refers to having a 95-minute question time during the committee of the whole with five minutes of back and forth, it still does not replace what we do in here via conversations and discussions on the bills of the day, which is something that we are not dealing with at all while we are in this special parliamentary committee format. For instance, we are not dealing with a budget, and I will get to that later.

• (1340)

Professor Christian Leuprecht from Queen’s University has said:

Ultimately the underlying primary constitutional principle here is the principle of responsible government. It is about ministerial responsibility, first and foremost, during a crisis and an emergency...

Especially during a time of crisis, Parliament has a supreme duty to hold the executive to account. Canadians need continuous parliamentary audit of the executive and the bureaucracy’s judgment.

This is the role of the opposition and the backbench of the government in the House, that we ask the tough questions. Our Constitution, our Westminster parliamentary system, is built upon that ministerial accountability and that is not happening when we are working off Zoom.

There are concerns in my riding. When I am here I can have my 10-minute speech and I can have my time in question period and I can have time at committee to raise concerns from my constituents. I want to raise a few of those right now.

One of the small business owners in my riding owns a couple of businesses and said she had to shut down because of the types of businesses she operates and is having trouble paying her rent. Unfortunately, her landlord refuses to participate in the Canada emergency commercial rent assistance and so she is going to be forced to leave and he is going to have to chase after her for the lease payments that are left. It is going to end up in court and could actually affect her other businesses because she is financially strapped now.

If I get a chance through the special committee and the 95 minutes of questions and answers maybe I will get the chance to get these answers from the minister, but if we are here all day long, I have a greater opportunity to raise these issues directly with the minister.

On the agriculture side, farmers are really struggling. The Interlake area I represent has gone through drought after drought. Before that there was BSE and flooding along Lake Manitoba and Lake Winnipeg, so a lot of farmers have been hit hard. They are trying to get crops in the ground and cattle fed through the winter, having enough pasture. On top of that, as we already heard, and I thank my colleague from Battle River—Crowfoot for the great job he does as the shadow minister of agriculture, we are seeing meat prices go up because there is less beef being processed in our meat packing plants because the slaughter facilities are being impacted by COVID and workers cannot get to work and, ultimately, prices on the retail side are going up.

The opposite is happening because of oversupply in our feed lots and among our cattle calf operators. One of my constituents lost \$600 per head on the calves he held over the winter, as he always does. He sold them in the spring and received \$600 less than he did the year before. Most operators will not be able to sustain that. That is over a \$60,000 loss for that one single farmer.

There is also a commercial fishery in my riding, and it has raised many concerns. The Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation has quit buying pickerel from Lake Winnipeg and will not even try to market it because all the restaurants they sell to have shut down and there is an oversupply sitting in storage. Fishermen and their families have to go out onto the lakes and are not able to catch anything of value, like pickerel and whitefish, to sell.

One thing that is missing in all of this process is a budget from the government. We are spending money this year that could very well see us having a deficit equal to the budget we had last year of \$350 billion. We could have a \$350-billion deficit with the shrinking economy and the growing government spending in response to COVID-19. We still have not seen a budget from the government and accountability on how it is going to spend this money without crashing the economy, without putting us in such crippling debt that we may never be able to crawl out from underneath it.

It is our job as parliamentarians to look after the taxpayer, and that is not happening because of this special committee.

• (1345)

I can go on and on. Firearms owners in my riding are upset. These issues need to be discussed at committee, but we do not have every committee going. The public safety committee is not going. The national defence committee that I am vice-chair of is not operating. Without having those committees operating, we cannot deal with issues of the day in a timely manner to address the concerns of Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member is actually wrong in his assessment, and once this motion passes, it will enable the member to talk about whatever issue he so chooses to talk about and raise in the format of questions. We will still have members' statements and petitions as well.

Some things we will not have, such as opposition days. In order to have an opposition day, or a private member's hour, there are other aspects that need to be figured out, for example, how a member would actually vote. We cannot have 338 members inside the chamber all at once. Even the Conservatives seem to recognize that.

This is something that is evolving, much like many of the different programs. Three or four months ago, no one could have anticipated the types of changes that we have witnessed, such as providing the billions in support programs. Had we not done that, could you only imagine what the economy and our society would be looking like?

The government is moving forward, opposition members are contributing, life continues and we continue to look for ways we can improve our system.

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, I want to use this quote from December 2013. It reads:

We know why the Prime Minister prorogued the session back in September. It was because he did not want to have the House sitting. He avoided the day in and day out accountability in the House, because he was not happy with what was being reported in a sequence of events that portrayed corruption and fraud....

As a result, we lost weeks of debate earlier this fall because the Prime Minister did not want to come back. Why did he not want to come back? He had a very serious problem, and still does, and it is not going to go away.

Do members know who said that? It was the member for Winnipeg North.

He, of course, is failing to recognize that the issue of accountability, our ability as private members to bring forward our private members' bills, is not being enabled through this process. We are not dealing with any legislation. We are not dealing with opposition motions, as he already portrayed. That is part of accountability, and the Liberals are trying to duck out and do government through press conferences in front of the Rideau Cottage.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his intervention. I am pleased that he brought up the subject of agriculture, because that is what my question is about.

Government Orders

What does he think of the timid, even ridiculous, support that the federal government has offered the agricultural sector since the start of the pandemic?

Specifically, how does he feel about the minister frequently saying that farmers just need to take the money from AgriInvest? That is the same as telling a student that they will get a benefit as long as they empty out their bank account.

What is his view on that?

[English]

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, I am a farmer, and my son-in-law is just finishing putting soybeans in the ground right now. I can tell you that, knowing how AgriStability and the suite of business risk management programs work, they were never designed to deal with these types of crises.

Whether one is a beef farmer, a grain and oilseeds operator or a supply-managed dairy farmer, there are a lot of problems with the lack of response from the government. The government refuses, first, to recognize the issue and, second, to respond in a meaningful way to ensure that we are food secure and that our rural communities thrive. Without a healthy agricultural society, our rural communities hurt. The government refuses to put in place the proper cash injections to cover off the loss of market share on the international and domestic levels, and recognize the fact that we need to control supply.

Without the government, putting in place those steps and programs, like the set-aside on slaughter animals, we will not get to a point of viability to survive through the pandemic, for our agriculture producers.

• (1350)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, with regard to what we are dealing with, beef, we were starting to see some really good expansion by many of our farmers, but since then we have been hit very, very hard. We have people who might not be able to make it through this, because they were holding their cattle over the winter, figuring that prices were going to be good.

The member talks about the issue of supply, but it is also capacity. We are no further ahead than we were with BSE, with three plants covering 85%, and nobody expected COVID was going to hit Cargill as hard as it did, but it did.

I want to ask my hon. colleague about the importance of having some provincial or regional capacity to give to our farmers, because there is a need for beef at the stores. We need to get this thing through. The set-aside is simply not going to get people through as it is, but the larger structural problem of kill capacity remains a problem, and COVID has really exposed it.

Government Orders

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, when the member for Timmins—James Bay and I were first elected, we served on the agriculture committee together. The member is right. We do not have enough regional capacity across this country. Do we have surplus capacity on good days? Yes, we do. When everyone is operating at full steam, we have enough capacity within the country.

However, when we start seeing reductions in shifts, or shutdowns of plants in Alberta, Ontario and Quebec, we will ultimately see impacts in other areas of the country. The farther away those facilities are, the harder it is to get animals to market, and the bigger the discounts they will take.

We need to look at our overall food security and how processing, along with production, is part of that. We also need to maintain the ability to export our high-quality food products around the world.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege and an honour to rise in the House of Commons today to participate in this debate. The opportunity to debate, to stand and be counted in this chamber is a privilege, and it is the same privilege that those in the 42 Parliaments before us have had.

Now, in the 43rd Parliament, it is difficult to imagine that there are elected members of Parliament who are ready to pass on that privilege, but here we are today. In the midst of a pandemic, the government has put forward a motion that limits the role of Parliament. While this proposal is an improvement, of course, to the first one, it still falls far short of a full Parliament. It is shameful that some would devalue our democracy during a crisis.

Canadians have stepped up during this pandemic. They have followed the guidelines of our health authorities and have taken precautions. Our front-line health care workers have risked their health and safety to care for others. Essential workers have made adjustments to provide necessary services and goods to Canadians. All Canadians have faced disruptions and unforeseen challenges. The social, economic and health impacts of COVID-19 are widespread and, while the impact on each person may vary, not a single person is immune.

As Canadians across the country face these challenges head-on, they need to know that their government is also stepping up. They need to know that their government is committed to getting the best results for Canadians, and they need to know that their government is working to ensure that no one falls through the cracks. Right now, we are navigating the immediate fallout of this health crisis, but we still do not know what the long-term impacts will be.

The quality of governmental leadership will largely dictate the long-term impacts of this crisis. Good leadership is accountable, yet before us is essentially a permission slip from the Prime Minister asking to be less accountable. By limiting the role of Parliament, the Prime Minister is telling Canadians that he would like an audience and not an opposition. The government would like Parliament to govern without scrutiny, without debate and without opposition, but that is not how our democracy works.

Canada is a representative democracy. Three hundred and thirty-eight members of Parliament are elected across this country, each of us representing tens of thousands of constituents. Each of us is

sent to Parliament with a mandate from those who have elected us. Each of us has the responsibility to represent all electors in our ridings.

If there are members of Parliament who think that in a time of crisis their responsibility to their constituents is any less, I must question why they chose to put their names on the ballot. In times of crisis, our responsibility to our constituents is even greater. As a member of Her Majesty's loyal opposition, it is my duty to hold the government to account. It is my duty to seek answers for constituents, and it is my duty to stand up for their interests and make them known.

As a Saskatchewan member of Parliament, I will make note that western Canada is notably absent from the cabinet table, and the government benches altogether. Last fall, western Canada rejected the failed policies of this Liberal government. They rejected the Prime Minister's attacks on their livelihoods and their communities. In our democracy, that is their right.

The Prime Minister, however, does not have a licence to shut down their voices by governing without opposition parties. In fact, the principal economic drivers in my riding of Battlefords—Lloydminster have been largely left out of the government's response to COVID-19. They have been left out despite the national importance of both of these economic drivers.

First, the Prime Minister has failed to step up to support Canada's oil and gas sector, a sector that will be critical for a speedy economic recovery for western Canada and, frankly, for Canada as a whole. Aside from paying lip service to the industry, the Prime Minister has failed to follow through with meaningful support. As hours, days and months go by, there is an emptiness to his words. Given the Prime Minister's history of attacking the oil and gas sector and his admitted goal of phasing it out, it is difficult not to view this as anything but a death-by-delay tactic.

● (1355)

The other sector that has been left by the wayside in the government's COVID-19 response is agriculture. Hard-working farm families across this country are facing a crisis of their own. In the past year, they have already been confronted with hardship after hardship beyond their control, and COVID-19 is yet another devastating blow. Our farmers are faced with rising operational costs, a disrupted service industry, labour shortages and reduced capacity at processing plants. Our farmers and producers have already sounded the alarm.

To maintain a steady supply of affordable and healthy food, we have to ensure our vital first link in the food supply chain. We do know that the Canadian Federation of Agriculture had asked the government for an emergency fund, but instead of responding to the specific COVID-19 challenges that our farmers are facing, the Liberals reannounced already-budgeted funding. To make matters worse, while our farmers are trying to face the challenges brought on by COVID-19, the government hiked the carbon tax, reaching into their pockets for more money at a time when they could afford it the least.

The disregard for these two sectors of national importance underscores the absolute necessity for Parliament. The government must be accountable for its actions and also its inaction. It is essential that as individual members of Parliament we have the opportunity to raise the issues that are important to and affect our constituents. We are their voice in the democratic process.

We have seen repeatedly during the COVID-19 special committee meetings the government dodge and deflect questions asked by opposition members that it, frankly, does not want to answer. It has shut down questions it does not want asked and justifies it by stating they are outside the scope of the debate of this committee. I would argue that the impact of COVID-19 is so far-reaching that there is not much beyond its scope. This pattern of avoidance certainly does not invoke confidence that much will change without Parliament fully sitting.

It is not up to the government of the day to decide how it will be held accountable for its governing. When it comes to fiscal responsibility and accountability, the Prime Minister and the finance minister seem equally disinterested.

• (1400)

The Speaker: It is time for question period. The hon. member will have two minutes and 30 seconds left in her debate when we come back to this.

* * *

VOTE ON MOTION TO PROCEED TO ORDERS OF THE DAY

The Speaker: Before turning to statements by members, I wish to inform the House that an error occurred during the recorded vote on the motion of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons to proceed to orders of the day earlier today.

[*Translation*]

More specifically, the name of the hon. member for Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia was called when it was actually for the hon. member for Shefford. The name of the hon. member for Shefford was subsequently called, but that vote was counted twice. This error created a tie that resulted in my deciding vote being cast in the negative, in favour of continuing with the proceedings, that is, continuing with the routine proceedings then under way.

[*English*]

There was no tie vote. The motion should have been adopted by a vote of 24 yeas and 23 nays, and the House should have proceeded to orders of the day. I wish to apologize to the House. I have in-

structed the Clerks to correct the journals so that the official account reflects the House's real decision.

I thank members for their attention.

Hon. Mark Holland (Ajax, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order arising from the ruling you just gave.

During the vote, our intention was to be at 23. I thought I had counted 23. During the process of the vote, I was counting and I saw we were 24. I removed myself. I was not present afterward, so my vote should not have counted. Therefore, I would say the vote, as it stood, should have carried because I had exited the room. As soon as I saw that we were one number too high, I had exited the room.

I would ask for your indulgence, Mr. Speaker, and that of the House. We are trying to manage these situations a little dynamically. It was our commitment to be at 23. It was my error that we were at 24 and, when I saw that error, I removed myself from the House.

The Speaker: I want to thank the hon. member for his information. We will certainly take it under advisement and ensure that when the publications come out, we will have the appropriate numbers in there to reflect what happened.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

FRONT-LINE WORKERS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this time and opportunity to say a special thanks to those individuals who have had an impact on the lives of all Canadians.

We often thank our first responders, our health care workers, but there are so many other people, from the farmer who produces the food to the truck driver who delivers it to the supermarkets or food centres to the individuals who provide cashier services and stocking of the shelves, not to mention those services that are so critically important.

The other day I had the opportunity to speak to taxi and bus drivers. Imagine driving a bus or a taxi and not knowing who is coming in the doors or entering the car. Many people are contributing to ensure that we as a society are much better off in getting through this pandemic.

On behalf of the constituents of Winnipeg North, and I believe all members of Parliament from all sides of the House, I would like to express our appreciation and gratitude.

Statements by Members

• (1405)

SEX SELECTION

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for months Canadians have adapted to painful new realities. They are making sacrifices every day and expect their elected representatives to be their present voice in Ottawa. However, the government has stripped Parliament of its work and continues to deny Canadians that voice.

Preventing discussion on private members' bills means that my privilege and responsibility as a member of Parliament has been held captive. In February, I had the honour of tabling Bill C-233, the sex-selective abortion act. The bill would prohibit a medical practitioner from performing an abortion if the reason is the sex of the preborn child.

My constituents, and indeed 84% of Canadians, have been clear that sex-selective abortion is not permissible in Canada, yet we know it happens in our country because we have no law against it.

It is time for Canada and the Prime Minister to stand up for human rights and end inequality between the sexes from the earliest stages of life. It is time to restore Parliament and continue this vital conversation.

* * *

[Translation]

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at a time when our country is facing one of its greatest challenges, I am very encouraged every day to see how Canadians are pulling together to help one another and to bring kindness and hope to others.

[English]

Whether it is the medical staff alongside paramedics from the Queensway Carleton Hospital doing extra shifts in long-term care homes, young people bringing groceries to seniors, those who are sewing homemade masks, or local musicians doing free virtual concerts, we see the best in people during this time of crisis.

Even children understand this, like four-year-old Marcus who knew that his neighbours were a little gloomy. He also was not happy that all the rocks were grey. He decided to colour the rocks with bright colours and deliver them to his neighbour's doorstep. This is the kind of joy and community spirit that we need at this time.

[Translation]

During this pandemic, Canadians across the country are sharing their joy with others.

* * *

AIR TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last weekend, Air Canada announced that it was cancelling its flights to and from Abitibi-Témiscamingue until at least September 8. This is a blatant lack of respect. Our regional leaders are angry, especially when the economic recovery is urgent.

I remind the House that Air Canada, to which the government loaned \$780 million to help it get through the crisis, is claiming the status of a carrier that includes a regional component. We, too, want to get through this crisis. Knowing that the Rouyn-Noranda airport is the third busiest in Quebec, it is inconceivable that our region would get hit by these kinds of cuts. Air Canada must assume its obligations, shoulder its responsibilities and show consideration for the people of our region.

I thank the Minister of Transport for his empathy, but what can we do now with this most delicate, if not most frustrating, situation?

Now more than ever, it is time we considered concrete and sustainable support for small carriers serving the regions of Quebec and Canada. They want to offer us their services. They are sincerely reaching out so we can all find a lasting solution.

* * *

[English]

ASIAN COMMUNITY

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I had a unique story about the selfless people in Fleetwood—Port Kells who were helping our vulnerable neighbours stay safe from COVID-19. However, there is another virus present: the social virus of racism directed at our Asian community. News of verbal and physical attacks, although small in number, have amplified their level of worry and fear caused by the coronavirus itself.

I know that questions about China's actions or lack of them, its attack on democracy in Hong Kong and its increasingly belligerent and bellicose posturing in the world concern the Chinese community as much as anyone. However, people live in fear of speaking out if they have family still in China.

I know this because I reach out and talk to them as their MP and as their neighbour. Today, I invite all my other neighbours to do the same. Send the signal that in our community we all stand for that most Canadian value of working together for the common good. That is the very foundation for the way out of our current challenges and our way forward.

* * *

BOB PITZEL AND HUGO ALVARADO

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Mr. Speaker, two great artists have passed away recently in my home province of Saskatchewan, Bob Pitzel of Humboldt in March and Hugo Alvarado of Saskatoon just a couple of days ago.

Statements by Members

Bob Pitzel was a masterful watercolour artist who spent many hours in his studio just south of Humboldt. Bob loved painting rural Saskatchewan scenes. His worked often displayed the old farm homes, the fences and trucks. He also enjoyed painting trains and won many awards for his work. Bob is lovingly remembered by his spouse Maureen Doetzel.

Hugo Alvarado came to Saskatoon from Chile, with a mere \$5 in his pocket. What a gift to our city. Hugo was heavily involved in Artists Against Hunger, raising funds for those in need. His paintings featured landscapes, cityscapes and still life. A former Saskatoon citizen of the year, Hugo always encouraged others to paint and express their feelings.

We will miss these artists as both Bob and Hugo gave back so much to our arts society.

* * *

• (1410)

[*Translation*]

FARMERS IN ALFRED-PELLAN

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, more than ever, people in my riding of Alfred-Pellan and across Canada appreciate the excellent work our farmers are doing to feed our community. From vegetable farms to plant farms, to dairy farms, to livestock farms, the people of Laval have access to fresh products right in their backyard.

[*English*]

This summer make it a point to encourage the families behind our milk and cheese, our meat and fruits, our vegetables and produce. Make sure the kids know that tomatoes and strawberries do not come from shelves. They should visit the farms and buy local.

[*Translation*]

Now that the season has begun, visit one of our farms and buy local, instead of lining up at the grocery store. This is one way to thank our hard-working farmers and stimulate the economy.

Let us do our part and support the businesses in Alfred-Pellan that are reinventing themselves. We need each other. Let us stay close.

* * *

[*English*]

KANATA—CARLETON

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Kanata—Carleton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to stand in the House today to thank the people of Kanata—Carleton. Each day I am inspired by the way people in my riding have come together in the face of COVID-19.

I am so proud of everyone: volunteers, social services agencies, health care and essential workers, the farmers in West Carleton who are working to feed our families and the world-class high-tech companies in Kanata that are providing the very tools and networks we have come to rely on to do our jobs and to stay connected to our family and friends.

During times like this, more than ever, we appreciate how lucky we are to be Canadians. The contributions of individuals in my riding of Kanata—Carleton provide a great example of what Canadians are capable of. I am so proud the innovations developed in Kanata are being used right across the country as we navigate this crisis together.

* * *

SCLERODERMA AWARENESS MONTH

Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this coming Monday marks the beginning of Scleroderma Awareness Month in Canada.

Scleroderma is a progressive and chronic connective tissue disorder that can attack one's internal organs, literally shutting them down one by one. It can also cause weeping ulcers, skin deterioration and Raynaud's disease, among other symptoms. While these past few years have seen advancement in treatments that can ease pain and slow the progression of the disease, researchers have yet to find a cause for scleroderma and are still looking for a cure.

As many in the House know, I had to watch my mother suffer the awful effects scleroderma inflicts on individuals. In the end, scleroderma took her life. Unfortunately, my mother was just one of many women to be afflicted with scleroderma, as almost 80% of sufferers are women and most are diagnosed before the age of 50.

Due to COVID-19, Scleroderma Canada has moved its annual walk to a virtual format this year. I encourage everyone to participate and be very generous.

Research on new therapeutic measures have been promising, but we cannot rest until researchers find a cure for this horrid disease.

* * *

SCIENCE

Mr. William Amos (Pontiac, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, from day one, science has been at the centre of our government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We are relying on the scientific advice of Canada's chief public health officer, our chief scientific adviser and many others to inform our decision-making and our public health response.

[*Translation*]

In April, we announced \$1.1 billion to stimulate the science sector through Canada's plan to mobilize science to fight COVID-19.

This funding will support Canadian scientists in the international race to develop a vaccine and treatments, and it will increase our capacity to manufacture them once they are available.

*Statements by Members**[English]*

These massive investments in science are already paying off. Yesterday, the University of Saskatchewan's VIDO-InterVac, an early federal funding recipient, announced that its vaccine was successful in animal models, meaning that it will soon be moving to clinical trials in humans.

Canada is home to some of the best scientists in the world and Canadians trust them, so our government is committed to supporting them as they work around the clock to solve the COVID riddle.

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● (1415)

*[Translation]***LOUIS-SAINT-LAURENT**

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for over two months, the people of Louis-Saint-Laurent and all Canadians have shown determination and resilience in the face of the pandemic crisis.

Throughout my riding, I see and salute front-line health care workers: orderlies, nurses, doctors, those who put their own life at risk to save lives.

Throughout my riding, I see and salute essential service workers: those who work in grocery stores, pharmacies and corner stores. What is more, I am pleased to see an increasing number of young people aged 16, 18 or 20 working for these businesses with honour and dignity.

Throughout my riding, I see and salute charitable organizations, food banks, those that are helping the most vulnerable.

Finally, throughout my riding, I see and salute the people who, little by little, are getting back to their everyday lives while following the public health guidelines.

Needless to say, I very much look forward to Monday at 9 a.m. when the Coiffure au Masculin salon, located on Valcartier Boulevard in Loretteville, will reopen its doors. I cannot wait to go back there.

The COVID-19 crisis has changed and will forever change our way of life, but it will definitely not change the determination and spirit of resilience of the people of Louis-Saint-Laurent and of all Canadians.

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*[English]***HALIBURTON—KAWARTHA LAKES—BROCK**

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the stories of residents and businesses across my riding rising to the challenges of COVID-19 are inspiring.

The Rotary Club of Haliburton donated 300 food bags to those in need. Kawartha Lakes firefighters raised \$5,000 for the Kawartha Lakes Food Source. Whitney Plastics in Lindsay donated two boxes of face shields to the Kawartha Lakes Police Service. Gail Holness is raising money for the Haliburton Highlands Health Services through online yoga classes.

Philippa Skjaveland, owner of Kawartha Quilting and Sewing in Millbrook, is using her network to sew scrub caps for paramedics. Fleming College donated PPE to local health organizations and service providers. Local lake associations across the riding have donated thousands of dollars to food banks and local charities. Volunteers Mike Bassett of Cannington, Jonathan Koot of Beaverton, and Hunter Lovering of Sunderland are using 3D printers to make ear guards for front-line workers. Children and staff at Archie Stouffer Elementary School in Minden initiated the rainbow project to thank front-line workers.

The people in Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, like many communities right across Canada, are banding together in their response to these challenging times.

* * *

LEONARD RODRIQUES

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to honour all the health care workers who have lost their lives serving this country on the front lines of the COVID pandemic. According to journalist Nora Loreto, of the 6,000 Canadians who have died from COVID-19, over 5,000 are linked to residential care facilities, close to 86%. We know from the unions representing these workers that a significant portion of these workers are racialized.

I rise to honour Leonard Rodriques, a personal support worker and member of Unifor, whose family says his death was due to a lack of PPE at his workplace. He was buying masks from the dollar store because his workplace was not providing him with PPE. After he was denied the personal protection from his workplace, he was sent home. He tested positive, and when symptoms worsened he went to the hospital. A few hours later, he was discharged from the hospital, and he died two days later. The story of Mr. Rodriques cannot be forgotten. We must begin to collect race-based data related to COVID-19.

* * *

*[Translation]***CANADA EMERGENCY RESPONSE BENEFIT**

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebec has entered phase two of the pandemic, which is the reopening phase.

Sadly, for some industries, it will be a lengthy process. I am thinking in particular of tourism industry workers in eastern Quebec, who still do not know whether there will even be a summer. For those workers, getting back to normal will not happen overnight. To make matters worse, their 16 weeks of CERB payments are almost up.

The government has no choice. It must extend the CERB, because too many families and communities are depending on it, but not in the same format. The government promised the Bloc Québécois that it would amend the CERB and the CESB so that working would always pay better than not working. However, it broke its promise.

Quebeckers have guts. They want to work. They want to contribute to their region's well-being and be part of the recovery. When they finally get to go back to work, they certainly should not be penalized for their efforts. Quite the contrary.

That is why I want to remind the government that it must keep its promise. Before extending the CERB, the government must amend it so that it genuinely supports the economic recovery instead of slowing it down.

This is not just about respect for workers, it is also about the continued survival of our businesses and communities.

* * *

• (1420)

[English]

NOVA SCOTIA

Mr. Chris d'Entremont (West Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this week is the first time that I have returned to the House of Commons since March, and I am pleased to see that we are all healthy and slowly returning to a new normal.

For the past several weeks, the entire Canadian population has been going through a difficult time due to COVID-19. Unfortunately, many people have lost their lives.

In addition to the health crisis hitting the world, at home in Nova Scotia we have faced other terrible tragedies. On April 22, 22 innocent victims lost their lives in the worst slaughter that Canada has ever known. On April 30, we lost six soldiers attached to HMCS Fredericton during a crash of their helicopter off the coast of Greece. Two of them were Nova Scotians. On Sunday, May 17, we lost Captain Jennifer Casey in the Snowbird crash in B.C.

Since the current crisis prevents us from coming together, it is very difficult for all the families of the victims to overcome these tragic moments on their own. I want to thank all my colleagues, my constituents of West Nova and all Canadians for reaching out to friends and family in Nova Scotia with their messages of support during this difficult time.

My family, my staff and I want to offer our deepest condolences to all the families, loved ones and friends of those who have been lost. Our thoughts and prayers are with them. Nova Scotia will remain strong.

* * *

[Translation]

PARAMEDIC SERVICES

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while our doctors, nurses and personal support workers are playing an essential role in fighting COVID-19 and doing a

Oral Questions

fantastic job, today I want to highlight the work of our paramedic services.

[English]

This week is Paramedic Services Week, and our paramedics play an important role in fighting COVID-19. I know there are many examples across Canada of paramedics stepping up to help neighbours and their community.

[Translation]

In Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, when the residents of our long-term care homes had to be tested, our paramedic services answered the call. I want to thank them. These men and women always answer the call and save lives each and every day. We are fortunate to have unparalleled paramedic services in Canada. This week, I encourage Canadians to take two minutes to thank them, from a distance of two metres, of course.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

SENIORS

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are learning today that on May 14, members of the Canadian Armed Forces wrote a report detailing dreadful conditions at long-term care homes in Ontario. Soldiers have witnessed cockroaches, rotting food, seniors left in soiled diapers, and cries for help ignored for lengthy periods. I am sure all Canadians are horrified to hear these details. However, the Liberals only provided this report to the Province of Ontario on Sunday. In other words, the government sat on this report for almost two weeks.

Why did it take a leak to make these details public? Why was the Prime Minister not transparent with this horrific information?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have said many times in this House and over the course of this pandemic that we need to do a much better job of caring for our seniors in long-term care right across the country.

The report that came out is horrific. The Minister of National Defence received the report on Thursday evening. We notified the other ministers on Friday. He then passed the report to the Province of Ontario on the weekend. I read the full report on Monday, and today, on Tuesday, it is being made public. Canadians need to know what is going on, and we need to work together to fix it.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fact remains that the report was written on May 14, so it took almost two weeks for it to be made public.

*Oral Questions**[Translation]*

Our seniors deserve better than this. They deserve better than a government that waits almost two weeks before reading an absolutely appalling report on the situation in seniors' homes. We hear that the army is working on a second report, which will describe the situation in long-term care homes in Quebec.

Can the Prime Minister assure us that he will not wait two weeks before reading it?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what happened in Ontario's long-term care homes is totally unacceptable, and this report is extremely troubling. The Minister of National Defence received the report on Thursday and shared it with his counterparts and my office on Friday. We shared it with the Government of Ontario over the weekend, and today, on Tuesday, we are sharing it publicly.

We must take action to ensure that we take care of our seniors, who built this country. It is our duty as Canadians.

• (1425)

[English]

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): The Prime Minister has laid out that kind of timeline, Mr. Speaker.

I have a simple question. Who had the report from May 14 until last Thursday?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last Thursday, the chief of the defence staff passed it along to the Minister of National Defence. The Canadian Armed Forces had the report up until that moment.

* * *

ETHICS

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the media is also reporting today that the Minister of Digital Government has been promoting a fundraising campaign to sue Global News for its story that criticized the Chinese Communist Party. WeChat is a Chinese state-sanctioned social media platform that is monitored by the communist state security and, worse yet, the minister has admitted that her taxpayer-funded political aide is the one who manages her WeChat account and who allowed the fundraising campaign to be promoted. Clearly, this is inappropriate.

What action has the Prime Minister taken in light of these revelations?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a party and as a government, we value the important work that journalists do right across the country. Attacking the integrity of hard-working journalists is absolutely unacceptable. The individual who posted this link on this particular group is no longer a member of this group and is not affiliated with the electoral district association in question.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is so typical of the Liberals. When it comes to things like this, they only apologize when they get caught. When we put this in light of their whole approach to China, foreign affairs ex-

perts are saying that the government's approach is to speak softly and carry no stick.

Yesterday, I gave the Prime Minister four opportunities to condemn the attack on the freedom of the people of Hong Kong by the Government of China. He refused. We have seen a pattern of appeasement toward the PRC, but this is much worse. By helping an arm of the Chinese government suppress media critical of the PRC here in Canada, the Prime Minister is actually doing its dirty work.

Why are the Prime Minister's cabinet ministers helping the dictators in the PRC?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said, the individual in question was not associated with the electoral district association or the member of Parliament and minister in question.

We are, of course, deeply concerned about the proposals for introducing legislation related to national security in Hong Kong. With hundreds of thousands of Canadians living in Hong Kong, we have a vested interest in its stability and prosperity. We continue to support Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy and freedoms under the basic law and the "one country, two systems" framework, which would be undermined by this proposal. We will always support and promote freedom of speech, freedom of expression and freedom of the press around the world.

* * *

*[Translation]***EMPLOYMENT**

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I do not know how many empty, hollow responses the Prime Minister has for the media, Parliament and Quebec taxpayers, but he will see that the Bloc Québécois is going to keep an eye on him right up until the election because he has his hand in the public purse. At a press briefing this morning, he said that programs do not judge, but voters do. The program has no judgment. The Prime Minister should have some.

Will the Prime Minister have enough judgment to forgo the wage subsidy, which the Liberal Party does not deserve, and to return the money, where appropriate?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, people across the country who work for various organizations and companies are at risk of losing their jobs because of COVID-19. The help we have given workers is to ensure that they keep their jobs so the economy can recover. We moved swiftly so that we could help people across the country.

We continue to focus on the workers, and they are the ones we are helping with this worker subsidy.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this will come up again. Until the NDP said it had applied to the program, nobody had any idea that the Liberals and the Conservatives had not only applied for money but also received it. They kept things very quiet. The purpose of the program is to keep people employed. It is a program for businesses and workers, and jobs needed to be protected.

Is the Prime Minister now saying that, if not for the wage subsidy, he would have laid off everyone working for the Liberal Party?

• (1430)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, organizations and businesses across the country are having a hard time because of COVID-19. The wage subsidy program is available to non-profits, charities and businesses that have seen a drop in their income and that want to ensure continuity and support their workers.

To ensure transparency, a list of all companies and organizations receiving the wage subsidy will be made public. Our government always wants everything we do to be transparent.

* * *

[English]

SENIORS

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians were horrified to hear the details, as outlined by the military report, of the conditions that seniors were living in, in long-term care homes. Seniors need more than just our compassion. They desperately need action. Report after report has made it clear that private long-term care homes have been the site of the most deplorable conditions.

Will the Prime Minister agree today that it is time to remove profit from the care of seniors?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are all concerned about the situation that seniors face in long-term care centres across the country. As I said, the federal government stands ready to support the provinces in their area of responsibility and jurisdiction. We will not be telling the provinces what they need to do in their areas of jurisdiction, but we all know that there is a need for serious conversations within all orders of government and among all Canadians about how we ensure that we are taking better care of our vulnerable seniors, who have built this country and who we need to do far better by than we have been doing so far.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canada needs national leadership to rally around the idea that profits should not be made off of seniors and that seniors should not be neglected.

[Translation]

The conditions were equally appalling at the Herron long-term care home in Quebec. Thirty-one seniors died at that facility. That is unacceptable. The private long-term care homes have the worst conditions.

Oral Questions

Is the Prime Minister prepared to say today that it is time to put an end to for-profit senior care?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, everything that has to do with the administration of long-term care homes very appropriately and constitutionally falls under the jurisdiction of the Province of Quebec, and we will respect the work that the province must do.

Just as the federal government was there to offer the help of the armed forces, just as we are there to support this country's seniors and workers, so too will we be there to work respectfully with Quebec and the other provinces to reflect on how we can all better serve our seniors, who deserve much better than the services they have received in such situations.

[English]

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, military members serving in Operation Laser have sounded the alarm on the horrible abuse and neglect of our vulnerable seniors in long-term care homes. The military reported this abuse on May 14, but the minister of defence did nothing with that information until Friday. The Province of Ontario was left in the dark until Sunday because the public safety minister sat on it until then.

Our troops are in harm's way, witnessing blatant disregard for infection control, mistreatment of elderly residents and a level of care described as "horrible".

Why did the Minister of National Defence sit on these allegations for almost two weeks?

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me begin by acknowledging and offering my sincere gratitude for the excellent work of the Canadian Armed Forces who have answered the call to assist the Province of Ontario and the Province of Quebec.

Their report of the appalling conditions that they found in these long-term care facilities in Ontario truly is disturbing and demanded action. That is why, when this information was brought to my attention on Friday, I took immediate action to reach out to the appropriate authorities, including notifying the Province of Ontario and sharing those findings with them.

As the Prime Minister has already indicated, our government received this information on Thursday. It was conveyed to me on Friday, and we immediately reached out to the Province of Ontario and shared the entire report with them. We share the concern for those seniors.

• (1435)

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that does not answer the question. The question is that this information became available on May 14. The government refused to move on that intelligence and these allegations to go and protect the most vulnerable, our loved ones who are living in long-term care facilities.

Oral Questions

The question is quite simple: Why did the Liberals sit on their hands for two weeks and do nothing to protect our loved ones in long-term care homes?

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would just simply like to correct the misapprehension of the member opposite. As he has been told, this information came to the government last Thursday. It was conveyed to me the following day and we took action to notify the province.

The information that was gathered, important information by the Canadian Armed Forces, was shared with the government last Thursday, and we took immediate action to take the steps necessary to begin to remediate the appalling conditions they reported there.

* * *

[Translation]

FINANCE

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we all understand that a crisis creates deficits. We also understand that a deficit is a bill that we pass on to our children.

The President of the Treasury Board is front and centre in all of the government's financial decisions. He is the one who sees the money come in and go out. A month ago, the Parliamentary Budget Officer calculated Canada's deficit at \$252 billion.

Can the President of the Treasury Board give Canadians some idea where the deficit stands today, since he is front and centre in those decisions?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that this is a crisis and that it is very important to invest in Canadian families and businesses in Canada to make sure we have a plan to see us through this crisis. We will continue with our investment-oriented approach because that is how we will have an economy once the crisis is over.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is unacceptable. How is it that the Minister of Finance and the President of the Treasury Board are unable to determine how big Canada's deficit is today, when the Parliamentary Budget Officer knew? If the Parliamentary Budget Officer knows, then those in the government must know.

Why are they hiding the facts from Canadians?

Also, a week ago, the government said that it was going to provide emergency business account loan relief. A week later, there is still nothing. Why is that?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Those are two separate questions, Mr. Speaker.

We will take a look at what is happening in the economy once our situation stabilizes. Right now the economy is very fluid. Every day, we will be transparent about our investments.

As for our programs, we have looked at how we can improve them. The emergency loan is an example of how we are expanding our approach to ensure that more businesses have the opportunity to qualify.

[English]

COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a relative of one of my constituents is a student who is renting out a room in her home to a foreign student. The student recently informed her that he has found a way to collect the CERB and go back to his home country overseas, and that he would not be paying her rent any longer. He gets to leave Canada, he gets to collect the CERB and she gets shafted. We are hearing more and more stories like this.

Why are the Liberals turning a blind eye to individuals who seem to be purposely trying to scam the system?

[Translation]

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for raising that question.

Our plan has been very clear from the start. The plan is to quickly and efficiently get help to Canadians, especially students, who are really struggling to get through this crisis.

We need all Canadians and all students on board so we can start the economic recovery soon. We also know that there are mechanisms that the Canada Revenue Agency can use to ensure that aid is being distributed to Canadians with all due diligence. We are counting on its employees to do their job.

[English]

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, according to a memo obtained by the National Post, foreign nationals are not required to show any proof of status before getting CERB payments. Temporary foreign workers do not need to show a work permit and international students do not need to show enrolment or a student visa. There are virtually no safeguards in place.

Does the minister not realize that by failing to prevent fraud he is actually encouraging it?

[Translation]

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have two exceedingly clear messages.

Because of the very difficult situation that many Canadians are experiencing, the Canadian government made the obvious choice to make support available quickly and efficiently.

However, from the start, we made it clear to all Canadians that we would be doing our due diligence and that the Canada Revenue Agency would eventually be applying mechanisms to ensure not only that Canadians could get the help they need, but that it would be delivered with the necessary integrity.

• (1440)

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to reiterate that the emergency wage subsidy is for businesses and SMEs that are worried they will have to choose between going bankrupt or laying off their employees. It is not for multi-millionaire political parties.

On May 15, the finance minister announced that the emergency wage subsidy would be extended by three months until the end of August. My question is simple. Did he know at that time that his own party would benefit from the subsidy?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we decided that the emergency wage subsidy is very important for every industry and every situation across the country. Our approach is to protect employees. If a business experiences a drop in revenue of 30% or more, it will have access to the emergency wage subsidy. The purpose of the subsidy is to protect employees, and we think it is a good approach.

* * *

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the migrant workers who are taking care of seniors in our long-term care facilities have proven that they are extraordinary. That is why we are asking that the government exceptionally give their applications priority and fast-track them.

We moved a motion yesterday to ask the government to take action, but the Conservatives refused to support it. We are moving another today in the hopes that all parties will have as much heart as these people who are risking their lives to save the lives of those who built Quebec.

Will the government give their applications priority and fast-track them?

[*English*]

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are always very proud that Canada has been a welcoming society. We continue to open our doors to newcomers. Our immigration system continues to be based on compassion, efficiency and economic opportunity, while protecting the health and safety and security of Canadians.

I want to assure the member that all eligible asylum claimants will receive a full and fair hearing on the individual merits of their claim, and while waiting for their claim to be heard, asylum claimants are allowed to work, study and receive basic health care coverage.

We are grateful for the work that they are doing in helping to serve vulnerable Canadians, and we will listen carefully to the motions of the member opposite.

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HEALTH

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals refuse to tell us what happened to the national strategic stockpile before this crisis. On Friday, the chief medical

Oral Questions

officer was asked if she ever advised the Liberals that the emergency stockpile was underfunded, but the health minister prevented Dr. Tam from answering the question. She claimed it was cabinet confidence.

When will the Liberals come clean about their decision to reduce Canada's strategic stockpile?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank Dr. Tam and, in fact, the entire agency for being so transparent with Canadians all along. As the member opposite knows, we have been there talking to Canadians about the strengths and weaknesses of the National Emergency Strategic Stockpile. We have learned a lot over the last several months about how to create an effective network of stockpiling across the country, and I look forward to continuing to get regular updates from Dr. Tam at her daily press conferences.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we still really do not have an answer and, of course, she did muzzle the chief public health officer. In February, we know that the government shipped 16 tonnes of protective equipment, including face shields and masks, to China. We also know it closed warehouses and put a bunch of equipment into the dump. It is now in a global race to try to get as many face masks as possible, and we also know that many of the masks coming into this country from China are unsafe for our health care workers to use.

It is time for the health minister to apologize to the health care workers across the country who have had to scramble to get decent protective equipment.

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to thank the health care workers across the country for the enormous work that they are doing on behalf of all of us. As the member opposite knows, our government has been working hard to protect them, as well. I would like to thank the Minister of Public Services and Procurement and her team for putting together such a comprehensive procurement approach that makes sure we can fulfill all of the requests from provinces and territories to the National Emergency Strategic Stockpile. Of course, we are working with provinces and territories to ensure that we have the appropriate equipment going forward.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Prime Minister refused to condemn the odious attacks by China on the free people of Hong Kong. Worse yet, the Liberals voted against recommencing the Canada-China committee to address the threat to Hong Kong's democracy by the CCP. Liberals claim to be defenders of freedom, but they stand by while a communist regime drags lawmakers out of a legislative council, locks up those who fight for democracy and is hell-bent on exerting authoritarian rule over Hong Kongers.

Enough is enough. When will the Liberals stand up for human rights and democracy, and against the dictators in China?

Oral Questions

● (1445)

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are deeply concerned about proposals for introducing legislation related to national security in Hong Kong. With hundreds of thousands of Canadians living in Hong Kong, we have a vested interest in its stability and prosperity, the foundations of which are Hong Kong's relative autonomy and basic freedoms.

Canada continues to support Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy and its one country, two systems framework. We continue to encourage all parties to engage in peaceful and meaningful dialogue to address the legitimate concerns expressed by the Hong Kong population.

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the Liberals are so deeply concerned, why are they opposed to a group of Canadian parliamentarians looking into human rights in Hong Kong at the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations?

Freedom of expression is important, especially during a pandemic. In 2019, the Liberals boasted that they would defend freedom of expression. They are manoeuvring for a seat on the UN Security Council. Parliament can study this issue to defend freedom of expression.

Why are the Liberals not standing up to China to defend Canadians' rights and democracy?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I disagree completely with what my colleague said.

There are currently eight committees that meet on a regular basis. For example, the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food met five times and heard from 32 witnesses. In total, there have been 74 committee meetings and we heard from 580 witnesses. Furthermore, 23 ministers have appeared. This was all done during a pandemic, with all the difficulties it has caused. We managed it, we ensured that committees can sit.

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[English]

HEALTH

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Danielle lives in my riding and supports herself on just \$1,000 a month. Because of her health condition, she is especially vulnerable to COVID-19 and struggles to protect herself. She has to buy medicine out of pocket, pay for the delivery of goods and must avoid public transit, her only means of transportation. Danielle told us there are so many little things that have added up, she cannot afford her basic needs. Danielle does not need more empty promises. Danielle needs action from the government.

When will it finally deliver the support that people living with disabilities need?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have put in place measures that are supportive of vulnerable people, such as people in her riding. We know how difficult it is to go through this crisis. That is why we acted

quickly, efficiently and with rapid support through the increase in the GST tax credit, the Canada emergency response benefit and in seniors' benefits. We are going to do that because we need to keep looking after Canadians.

Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, thousands of laid-off Canadian workers are being denied supplementary unemployment benefits they had negotiated with their employers, and the government has failed to explain why.

Families need these benefits to pay their bills. These are not handouts. These are benefits negotiated by workers as an insurance policy when laid off, and paid for by the employer. Now the government is stopping workers from collecting this taxable insurance. Unions and employers are asking the government to fix the loophole that denies workers this much-needed income.

Why is the government denying workers their supplementary benefits, and when will it fix this problem?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once more, this is a very important opportunity to say how difficult the circumstances are that Canadians are going through. We are mindful of them, which is why we have acted quickly on the Canada emergency response benefit, CERB. With 8.2 million Canadians having received at least one payment of CERB, we know that this is helping many Canadians. However, we know that there is more to do, and we will continue to do more for Canadians.

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[Translation]

TRANSPORTATION

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every day thousands of truck drivers, many of whom live in my riding of Orléans, cross Canada to deliver essential products such as medications, food and personal protective equipment to our communities. They truly are a key component of our supply chain that keeps our cities and towns healthy. From the beginning of this unfortunate pandemic, our government has said that truck drivers should be considered essential workers across the country, so that they can do their jobs from coast to coast.

Could the Minister of Transport tell us what measures he has taken, along with his provincial counterparts, to ensure that our brave truck drivers can continue to do their very important work safely?

● (1450)

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for acknowledging the important and essential work our truck drivers do in delivering essential products. I want to thank them.

I have been working with my provincial counterparts all along, encouraging them to open more rest stops to meet the needs of these truck drivers, while still complying with public health requirements, of course. We are also working to make sure that these drivers can get the personal protective equipment they need. We will not hesitate to take other measures to ensure that our truck drivers feel safe. Once again, I thank our truck drivers.

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[English]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, grain farming in Ontario contributes 75,000 jobs and approximately \$18 billion in economic output. A recent survey done by the Grain Farmers of Ontario has indicated the following: 86% expect their net income to be reduced in 2020. Over half of the grain farmers are already seeing a reduction in sales, and another 24% are experiencing cancellations or delays of existing contracts. One-third are experiencing cash flow issues and another one-third expect cash flow issues in the near future. Fifty-five percent fear that they have an inability to cover the costs of production.

What is the government actually doing to help the farmers during this pandemic and for the future?

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, allow me to reiterate everything that we are doing for our producers. We care about them. We know how essential their work is and how important they are in ensuring Canada's food security.

We have risk management programs that offer on average \$1.6 billion. We recently announced additional funding of \$100,000 for beef and pork producers, \$77 million for processors, \$20 million for the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and \$50 million to help bring in temporary foreign workers.

We are going to do more. We know how important our farmers are to the Canadian economy.

[English]

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the agriculture minister is telling farmers that they cannot say the programs offered just are not good enough. She is also saying that she does not know where the gaps are or where the funds should go.

Well, here is a start. Exempt agriculture from the carbon tax. Regain the \$5 billion in lost markets that Liberal blunders have cost farmers. Improve the livestock insurance program. Instead, her advice to farmers is to drain their savings or go further into debt.

Can the minister tell me what other essential Canadian industries the Liberal government has told to drain whatever savings they may have before being offered any meaningful assistance?

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are many programs available for our farmers. We know that we must do more, and we are working with them to make sure we identify which groups have addi-

Oral Questions

tional needs. We are listening to them. Again, we heard our farmers when they told us that far too few of them had access to the Canada emergency business account. We broadened the criteria. That represents \$670 million in direct aid to our farmers.

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[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness has ruled that the firearms contained on the order in council banned list were unsuitable for sport or hunting, despite the government providing transport permits for over 30 years for the purpose of sport shooting with those firearms.

Why is the minister choosing to attack law-abiding gun owners instead of gun smugglers and criminals who have absolutely no intention of obeying his restrictions?

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, just to be very clear, what we have done is prohibited weapons that were not designed for hunting or for sport purposes but rather were designed for military use: for soldiers to use in combat. There is no place for those weapons in our civil society. They have been used, tragically, in many mass shootings in Canada and around the world. We promised Canadians that we were going to strengthen gun control, and we have taken an important first step. There is more work to do, and we will do that work.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know that the Prime Minister does not like energy workers. He will not support farmers and he is going after responsible firearms owners. The Prime Minister should be targeting the criminals who traffic in illegal guns, not hunters and athletes. The Prime Minister seems to only support Canadians when he thinks he can get their votes.

It is a simple question. Can the Prime Minister tell us why he is playing politics during this pandemic?

• (1455)

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is no greater responsibility of any government than to keep its citizens safe. What we have seen, tragically, even through this terrible pandemic, is that gun violence continues to plague many of our communities across the country. We have seen an increase, for example, in incidents of domestic violence.

Oral Questions

We have promised Canadians we will strengthen gun control, and that includes bringing forward new regulations with respect to storage, to prevent guns from being stolen; new laws and regulations with respect to the border, to prevent them from being smuggled; and new regulations to prevent their diversion into the hands of criminals. We will take the strong action that is necessary to keep Canadians safe.

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[Translation]

INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government has announced that it is going to give workers 10 days of sick leave.

Unfortunately, given that 95% of workers are not covered by the Canada Labour Code, we see that this issue will not be decided here.

I was pleased to hear the question from the leader of the NDP, and especially the reply from the Prime Minister, who said that he was not going to encroach on the areas of jurisdiction and responsibility of Quebec and the provinces. That is what we are talking about, Mr. Speaker.

My question is simple. Just before he made the announcement, did he come to an agreement with Quebec and the other provinces?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to answer my colleague's question.

The current crisis began as a health crisis that then developed into an economic crisis. Those two factors are extremely important, if we want to come through both the health crisis and the economic crisis.

Clearly, we are going to work very closely with all the provinces. All Canadians and all provinces agree that we have to do better to protect both our economy and the health of our workers.

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, they obviously had no agreement with the provinces and Quebec.

The government is just telling us that, if the provinces decide to give 10 days of leave, the feds are in agreement. That is not a measure, it is a wish.

Who is going to pay for this? The federal government? Quebec and the provinces? The employers struggling with COVID-19 and wondering whether they are going to go bankrupt? The tooth fairy?

How can the government announce a measure as a done deal, when it does not apply to 95% of the people and, above all, depends on other legislatures?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for raising the issue of cost. The cost of failing to protect workers' health in a crisis like this is exceptionally high.

Employers, workers, unions and governments know that in order to emerge from this crisis stronger and more united, we need to protect the health of workers, so that they can protect the health of

their families, as well as the health of their colleagues. We look forward to working with all the provinces and territories to that end.

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[English]

COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, more than one million tourism-related employees have been laid off. Summer festivals all over the country are being cancelled. Kids' camps are closed. For many restaurants, a recent study is telling us that the pandemic is going to devastate the industry.

In rural communities, mom and pop businesses are being told to close, yet big-box stores are allowed to open. Rural Canadians are told to work from home, yet Internet and cellular service is sketchy at best. Rural communities are going to be the hardest hit and, in many cases, the slowest to recover.

Will the Prime Minister finally start to put rural Canada and the tourism industry top of mind, especially when creating recovery programs?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the brief answer is yes. We have done that from the start. We know how difficult the crisis is across all of Canada, particularly across rural regions, with the tourism, the transportation, the industry around restaurants and the services.

The times are very difficult for all regions and particularly rural regions in Canada. That is why we have announced just recently an important regional fund, which, in addition to the wage subsidies, the emergency benefits, the emergency loans and all of that, will help rural Canada go through the crisis and emerge strong as we come out of it.

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, tourism is vital to the Okanagan economy and businesses have a very short window in order to make enough revenue to carry them through to the next season.

With COVID-19, events, festivals, conventions and travel for families have all been cancelled. Related companies are also affected, like cab drivers, event suppliers and bicycle rentals.

The Prime Minister stated on May 5 that the government was looking into tourism-specific supports. It has now been three weeks and still nothing. The Liberals are letting tourism operators down.

When will the government announce its plan for the tourism sector?

• (1500)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this gives me a chance to expand on my first answer and mention the \$962-million regional relief and recovery fund, which will support other measures that we have introduced, such as the wage subsidy, emergency loans and the Canada emergency response benefit for workers who have unfortunately lost their jobs. As we know, all this will help our extremely important regions and tourism industry weather this crisis and come out stronger on the other side.

[*English*]

Mr. James Cumming (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, businesses across the country are struggling, and the government has been saying that if the emergency business loan is not enough, entrepreneurs should apply for the business credit availability program that provides loan guarantees through Export Development Canada. While we heard at the finance committee how some of the programs were performing, there has been no feedback on these loans specifically, despite my repeated questioning.

I have a simple, straightforward question for the minister. How many business credit availability guarantees have been issued since March 13?

Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have put many supports out to help our struggling small businesses across the country, including the business credit availability program and additional lending supports for our businesses. I look forward to making that information available to my colleague and members of the House.

These supports really are going to help our small businesses weather through this difficult period with the operating capital that they need during this time.

* * *

[*Translation*]

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the arts and entertainment industry has been seriously hit by the pandemic. As we know, that sector employs a great number of Canadians, many of whom are freelancers like Liz MacRae, one of my constituents, who earns a living through contracts as a voice actor.

How is the government going to support workers in the arts and entertainment industry until we have a vaccine that will one day enable us to resume all these cultural activities that we love so much?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Lac-Saint-Louis for his question.

Now more than ever, we need our artists to keep us united, connected and strong through this very difficult time. As soon as the crisis began, our government took immediate, strong action to support them. For example, we made sure that artists who collect royalties are eligible for the Canada emergency response benefit. We

Oral Questions

also announced \$500 million in emergency support to meet the needs in the arts, heritage and sports sectors.

Our government has always been there and will continue to be there for our artists and our athletes in this difficult situation.

* * *

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, who said that there was no human-to-human transmission of COVID-19, that people did not need to wear masks and that we did not need to close our borders? The government. Was any of that true? Sadly, no, and now we are paying the price.

Now the Liberals want to make it an offence to spread misinformation. Are they going to throw themselves in jail?

What is going on with our democracy? Are the Liberals in charge of telling Canadians what they can and cannot read, what is true and what is false? Why is the government attacking freedom of expression right in the middle of a pandemic?

[*English*]

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am extremely proud of our officials and our government for adapting to science as it has evolved. As the member knows, COVID-19 has only been with humans for about four and a half months. We have learned a lot in that time. As new evidence has come forward, we have of course adjusted our advice to Canadians to best protect them.

In terms of disinformation, it is extremely dangerous that Canadians are being fed information that is false, that is misleading and that can increase risk to themselves and to their loved ones. We will make sure that Canadians have access to credible information about how to protect themselves and their families.

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is the government that said human-to-human contact did not transmit the disease. It said that the border did not need to be closed. It said that wearing a face mask would not help.

The minister opposite now is saying that the Liberals will make sure that misinformation is not spreading, “Don't worry, Canadians”. Really? These are the individuals who we are going to trust to make sure that false information does not land in the hands of Canadians. They are spending \$3.5 million to shut down voices across the country.

Since when is that okay?

Oral Questions

● (1505)

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to be part of a government that believes in investing in science, that believes in investing in research, that understands that science evolves and that a response needs to evolve with it.

We are part of a government that actually unmuzzled government scientists, that made sure we restored funding in the agencies that support our understanding, not only of this disease but many other diseases that threaten Canadians.

We will always stand up for credible information that can actually support Canadians to make wise choices about how to protect themselves and their families.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Chris d'Entremont (West Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we understand that the Nova Scotia massacre investigation is complex due to the number of lives lost and of course the crime scenes that it has. The only information the families and the public are getting are through the media from heavily redacted RCMP documents and it looks like they are hiding something, leading to the Premier of Nova Scotia saying that it was up to the Prime Minister and the government to call for an independent inquiry.

The gunman is dead. The families deserve answers. Will the minister of public safety ask his partners to break from the secrecy and provide information as it becomes available?

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the question of the member opposite is very important. I understand the people of Nova Scotia, and particularly the families that were impacted by this terrible crime, need answers. They deserve that information and we are working very closely with our law enforcement officials, but also with the Province of Nova Scotia. I am in regular contact with the attorney general in Nova Scotia.

We have been working together to make sure that we put in place a system whereby all of the people of Nova Scotia and Canada can get the answers to the important questions they have about this terrible crime. If there are lessons to have been learned, we will make sure that those lessons are applied, so a terrible tragedy like this cannot happen again.

* * *

SMALL BUSINESS

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that small businesses across the country are greatly impacted by this crisis. Our government has been supporting them by putting forward various measures like the wage subsidy, including CEBA and rent support. We also know that while they need financial assistance, they also need help to navigate the various measures available to them and many of them are turning to their financial advisers for information.

Could the Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade update the House on what the government is do-

ing to make sure businesses get the help and the information they need?

Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for her advocacy on behalf of small business and for the people of Longueuil—Charles-LeMoine.

The smallest and most vulnerable businesses may face the additional challenge of accessing financial planning advice to help them survive through this difficult period. It is why we launched the business resilience service. It is a free hotline, operated by the Charter Professional Accountants of Canada. It is going to operate seven days a week for the next four weeks. It is a service that is going to help Canadian business owners, including those who run charities and not-for-profits, with customized financial guidance, from navigating tax regulations, government supports and planning their path to recovery. It is a great help for small businesses.

* * *

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in my statement, I shared the very tragic story of Mr. Rodriques. Noted professor of law and medicine, Amir Attaran, publicly stated, “I am appalled that the Liberals, who talk a fine line against racism, won’t make it a legal requirement to collect data on racial minorities and COVID, when they are at greatest risk. “See no evil” is [the Prime Minister's] choice—and it’s racist.”

Will the government make it a legal requirement to collect race-based data related to COVID-19?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is an issue that is really important to us. This aggregated data will better inform our policy-making process. In fact, under the emergency response fund, we have required the intermediaries to provide this aggregated data up front to our government so we can respond more effectively to vulnerable communities, including racialized Canadians.

* * *

TOURISM INDUSTRY

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, GP): Mr. Speaker, Canada has incredible destinations, from spectacular mountain scenery to World Heritage sites, the highest tides in the world and vibrant cultural diversity. We can be proud of everything our beautiful country has to offer.

Tourism is indeed a vital part of the Canadian economy. Before the pandemic, it represented more than \$20 billion in revenue, millions of jobs and 3% of the GDP. However, now this sector and the people who make hospitality their career need our support more than ever.

Could the minister detail the plan to support the workers of this industry? Will they be able to count the hours they worked in the previous year when applying for employment insurance, as has been a concession for other seasonal workers?

• (1510)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for reminding us about the major challenges facing our workers, especially those in rural areas and the tourism sector.

That is why we acted fast to set up the Canada emergency response benefit, the emergency wage subsidy and emergency loans for small businesses, of which there are many in rural areas and the tourism sector.

That is also why we announced that other things are in the works, such as restoring employment insurance benefits for those who are not normally entitled to them.

We will keep working with all sectors and with the provinces and territories to make sure the tourism sector is ready to hit the ground running when the economy reopens.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Mr. Speaker, if you seek it, you will find the unanimous consent of the House for the following motion: That this House recognize the contribution of hundreds of essential workers, particularly in the health sector in Quebec and elsewhere in Canada, who are asylum seekers, and call on the government to work with the Government of Quebec and the rest of Canada to prioritize and expedite the processing of their and their families' applications in recognition of the work they did during the current health crisis.

The Speaker: Does the member have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: No.

[*English*]

Mr. Matthew Green: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. There have been consultations among the parties and I believe if you seek it, you would find unanimous consent for the following motion: That the House recognize the increase in recent weeks in hate crimes and racism related to COVID-19 across the country, particularly toward those of Asian descent, and call on the government to take the necessary measures to stand against all forms of systemic discrimination and racism, including but not limited to hosting a federal-provincial-territorial meeting to discuss the rise in hate crimes in Canada; coordinating collective efforts and identifying best practices to counter this trend; helping to create and properly fund dedicated police hate crime units in every police department in Canada; establishing national standards for identifying and recording all hate incidents and their dispensation in the justice sys-

tem; and working in collaboration with non-profits to facilitate the reporting of hate crimes.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I also rise on a point of order. During question period, I was questioning the Minister of Public Safety regarding the tragedy we are hearing about in our long-term care facilities that was witnessed by members of the Canadian Armed Forces who are serving in Operation Laser. The minister said he never received a notification of this until Friday of last week.

The Global News Ottawa bureau chief is now reporting that the report and a letter were sent directly to the Minister of Public Safety on May 14.

I wish that he would correct the record.

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to get up and correct the record.

The Global News report is wrong. In fact, when the Canadian Armed Forces sent that information to me on Friday, May 22, we immediately took action, and on the weekend as well notified the Province of Ontario.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

PROCEEDINGS OF THE HOUSE AND COMMITTEES

MOTION THAT DEBATE BE NOT FURTHER ADJOURNED

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in relation to the consideration of Government Business No. 7, I move:

That the debate be not further adjourned.

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 67.1, there will now be a 30-minute question period.

[*English*]

I invite hon. members who wish to ask questions to rise in their places so the chair has some idea of the number of members who wish to participate.

Questions and comments, the hon. opposition House leader.

S. O. 57

• (1515)

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very, very disappointed that we are seeing the government shut down debate on this important motion. When the government gave notice of it, I was anticipating it might try this manoeuvre earlier today and then I was very pleased when the government House leader did not move a motion to shut down debate.

What would possess him to do this right now I do not know, except for the fact that what I do know is that the government does not want Parliament to sit. The government wants a committee to sit so the Liberals can escape the accountability and rigour Parliament demands. We have seen the Prime Minister stand outside his cottage day after day over the last several months taking nice questions from the media and not having to answer questions, opposition day motions, questions on the Order Paper or deal with private members' legislation.

The work Parliament should be doing in this House the Prime Minister has been able to escape from day after day after day, and this motion continues to give him that escape hatch.

We know the government House leader is shutting down debate, but I will ask him this. He and the Prime Minister think that we can be here face to face, as the 40-some of us are here in this place today. If we can do that every day four days a week for the next several weeks, why can we not meet face to face in a Parliament setting with Parliament working and acting, and not just a feeble committee that is a fake parliament?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Speaker, this very important motion strikes the right balance between the important role Parliament has to play and also respecting the public health advice. Through this motion, we are adding time for the opposition to ask questions. The opposition will be able to ask questions on pretty much anything it wants. There will be MPs physically present and there will be MPs participating virtually, which means MPs from all over the country will be able to participate.

This is great for democracy, and that is why we introduced this motion. I am not sure which part opposition members do not like: the fact that everybody participates, that they get more questions, that there are S.O. 31s or that we meet this summer. I do not know which part they do not like.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the House Leader of the Official Opposition. We heard that this morning, but it did not come up. I held out hope.

Unfortunately, the motion before us summarily puts an end to the business of the House as we have known it for the past two days. The government says that we will continue to sit and that it will answer our questions. It does not take an Einstein or a Leonardo da Vinci to realize that sitting four times a week with 90 minutes of oral questions a day is not the same as five days of Parliament sitting from 10 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. Nobody is going to buy that.

We are in a pandemic. However, the lockdown is easing. The Quebec National Assembly and the legislatures of the other provinces have resumed sitting. Businesses in Quebec are open again, while businesses elsewhere have already been open for some

time. We are emerging from the lockdown. Things that were true and went without saying a month and a half ago are no longer relevant today. We are able to act intelligently, open up Parliament, vote on motions, study bills, and advance debate.

Why is the government running away like this when we are in a pandemic and the deficit is \$300 billion and climbing? The government is refusing to provide an economic update and going into hiding.

The leader is acting surprised. That is what the government is doing. I am an objective observer of the government, and it is doing everything that it can to avoid answering questions. I think that democracy is ailing in Canada right now. I do not understand, and I want to know why the government is running away like this.

• (1520)

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Speaker, my colleague says that we are hiding, yet there will be six hours of questions instead of four. To my mind, six is greater than four.

The opposition will be able to ask questions on any topic, not just the pandemic, even though it is the current priority of all Canadians. Pursuant to Standing Order 31, MPs from all regions will be able to participate in the proceedings through screens. Members from remote regions, whether in Quebec or elsewhere in Canada, will be able to take part in the debate at any point, which is a cornerstone of democracy.

If the Bloc Québécois was not happy with the motion, it could have come to the table and negotiated with us. The Bloc Québécois says it wants to make gains for Quebec, but gains are made around the table, not by sulking. Think of hockey: goals are scored on the ice. How many of Guy Lafleur's 560 goals were scored while he was on the bench?

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there are a number of issues that we need to start to move on.

I am very interested whenever I hear my political colleagues talk about their privileges. Privilege is about serving people. It is not about the fact that members are not getting enough air time.

We need to come back in committee of the whole and start addressing a number of the serious shortfalls, such as the serious shortfalls for seniors. What is the government going to do now? We can do the jack-in-the-box questions, jump up and down and point fingers, or we could actually drill down, because this is a bigger crisis that we face. There is the issue of health care and the lack of support for health care. These are issues we need to sit down and discuss.

I certainly want to know if the government is willing to continue working with us to actually drill down in the midst of this crisis to serve Canadians. That is the privilege that we have and that we bring to the House. It is to serve people in a time of unprecedented crisis.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Speaker, I want to tell my colleague that, although we may disagree from time to time, we will always be on the same page when it comes to working here for our seniors, for people with disabilities and for people who have lost their jobs. We will always collaborate, since that is the role of the government and the opposition alike.

No matter how good they are to begin with, government bills can always be improved. That is exactly what the opposition did. I want to give them credit for that today. The NDP, the Conservatives and the Bloc all made the bills better. We are working closely with them because the government does not have all the answers and is not always right. We sometimes make mistakes and do things imperfectly. Thanks to our collaboration with the opposition, we were able to improve these bills.

Yes, we will continue to work to help our seniors and people with disabilities, and to provide sick leave to workers.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for over a month now, the Conservatives have been calling for greater accountability from the government.

[*English*]

I would like to ask the government House leader to tell us the consequences of the motion, Government Business No. 7, which we have put forward, and of the content and certainly the duration of that question period.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Speaker, that is a great question.

In normal sittings, we have the equivalent of five question periods, which is five times 45 minutes. With this motion, we would come here four days a week physically. We would be here meeting and having fun, but our colleagues would also be able to participate from across the country. That is democracy. It is not just because someone who lives near Ottawa can ask a question, but anybody who has been elected should be able to ask a question. This is what we are doing.

I wonder why the opposition members have a problem if we are giving them more time than before to ask questions. I still do not know.

• (1525)

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the problem is not with the format, and Canadians are figuring this out. Perhaps that is the reason those members want to shut down debate. The problem is not the format. The problem is that we are dealing with a committee instead of Parliament itself sitting in this House, and Canadians have figured that out. They are not happy, because this is not what they were asking for and continue to ask the House for.

S. O. 57

There is no reason, if there are four days that we are here, and we travel back and forth, that we cannot sit as a proper Parliament during those four days. The member's explanation is not acceptable.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Speaker, my colleague says that Canadians are not happy. I would say Conservatives are not happy.

Overall, MPs should be happy with the fact that there is more time to ask questions, because it is fundamental. We want that. We want to have more time for the opposition to ask important questions.

I was in the opposition for many years. I know how important the role of the opposition is, and the members are playing that role very well. We are giving them more time for more questions. They will be sitting this summer, with more hours a week with colleagues and big screens, being able to ask questions from across the country. It is a fair and balanced approach.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Montarville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I heard the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons say a few moments ago how well parliamentarians on both sides of the House had managed to collaborate so far, to the benefit of Canadians and Quebeckers. I think we can all agree. However, what we are witnessing right now is downright embarrassing. I am not sure that Parliament is earning any dignity and credibility with what has been going on for the past two days.

It seems to me that it should have been easy to come to an agreement. The Conservatives want Parliament to keep working in a more regular fashion. The government wants a hybrid Parliament. What is stopping us from doing both? No, the government decided that it did not have enough ideas for introducing new bills.

How come the government no longer wants to make legislation? Usually a government is elected to make legislation. This government does not want to make legislation. This government just wants to be asked questions behind closed doors here and allow the Prime Minister to keep putting on his daily sideshow in front of his cottage in Ottawa. What we are seeing is not particularly impressive.

It is also not particularly impressive that, in order to get what it wanted, the government negotiated with the NDP behind closed doors about something that is not even a federal matter. They tinkered with a provincial matter, without even talking to the provinces, just so that the Liberals could do what they want with Parliament. That is frankly embarrassing.

I will leave it there. The leader was saying that the Bloc did not participate in the negotiations. As we have said, we have been collaborating from the beginning, but when someone gives their word around a table, we expect them to keep their word. As soon as one party fails to keep its word, there is not enough trust to sit back down at the table. What we have seen over the past two days shows that we were right not to trust the Liberal government and sit down at the table with them.

S. O. 57

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his comments.

Sometimes we have our differences and disagreements, but nobody goes and sulks in the corner if they do not agree. We sit at the table, engage in dialogue and talk it out.

The Bloc is again saying the reason it comes here is to make gains for Quebec. The way to make gains on any subject is to sit down at the table, not to stay away from the table and refuse to talk.

Once again, getting back to this motion, it strikes an important balance. There are many questions that remain unanswered. For instance, how will we vote on all the decisions a Parliament makes? How do we make sure that our colleagues who are not here can vote? They have a fundamental right to vote.

That is why, with this motion, we are asking the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to examine how this can be done, because it is one of the most important things a member does in the House. We need answers to this question and others, but in the meantime, we are increasing the number of hours for questions. In fact, questions on just about any subject are allowed. The members will decide what questions they want to ask.

We are going to come back here this summer. The members will get to make members' statements, speak on behalf of their ridings and so on. I think that is a good balance, because we are in a pandemic and there is a serious crisis under way. Public health officials are issuing directives, and we need to follow them.

• (1530)

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to hear what the government House leader has to say about two issues.

First, I find it disturbing that people living in poverty in Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, in Montreal and elsewhere, have to force themselves to go to work when they are ill because they have no access to sick leave. Socially, that is disturbing. The crisis has shown us all these vulnerabilities, all the people living in privation, all the humble workers who have no means.

Here, we are setting ourselves an objective to make progress. As a true defender of workers, as a true social democrat, I find that it moves things forward. I find that it is a worthwhile objective to set for ourselves and I am convinced that the workers in Quebec will be very pleased with it.

Second, as for the hybrid Parliament formula that we are going to have and that works well—as we have seen in London, in Great Britain—I would like to hear what the government House leader has to say about the fact that it is much more helpful for the opposition to have five minutes to have discussions with ministers and ask them questions rather than to be limited to 35 seconds. Personally, I feel that the quantity and the quality of the accountability will be greatly improved by this new measure.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

The fact that the opposition will have five-minute question periods where there is an exchange is obviously much more difficult

for the government. That is human nature. We will be a bit more destabilized.

In reality, the NDP made gains for the other opposition parties. It ensured that there will be more question periods where the government can be questioned about almost anything, any subject the opposition chooses. That is a measure that ensures the proper functioning of our democracy since it forces the government to stay on its toes and to fully respond to a number of questions. I think that is very good for our democracy. It is extremely positive. What is more, the fact that we will be meeting four times this summer is very positive. This type of questioning makes an enormous contribution to our democracy and we are happy to participate in it.

With regard to sick leave, my colleague is absolutely right. It does not make any sense for workers to have to choose between staying at home and hiding their illness and symptoms and going to work because they do not have enough money to put food on the table.

I want to come back to what the Bloc Québécois was saying. Obviously, this is being done in partnership with the provinces. Discussions have been initiated and will continue because we put people at the centre of everything we do. The opposition should do the same.

[*English*]

Mr. Chris d'Entremont (West Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I expected this closure to happen earlier this morning, but here we are today. My question has to do with convention and precedents of the House. It seems that once we do something it becomes a rule of the House, which means that in the future we can go forward and continue to do it.

When September rolls around, when things get back to whatever the normal is going to be, is this going to be continued because it has now become a convention? We all know, and have been told that from a political standpoint, there are no votes for us in Ottawa. We should stay in our constituencies and meet with our folks.

We should be able to come back here. Will this be continued in September?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Speaker, we all want this place filled with MPs. I would like to see 338 men and women in this place representing their ridings and the people they were elected by, but it is another reality. My colleague talked about a precedent. What precedent does a pandemic have? How did we know? This is a new order for everybody, for all of us. These are not normal circumstances.

Of course, we are working toward coming back to Parliament. That is what everyone wants, but we need to strike that fine balance between the capacity of the opposition to ask important, tough questions, as they should do and as they are doing, and also respecting the advice of Health Canada. It is fundamental. This is why the motion is good and it represents that balance.

• (1535)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we have heard other parliaments being cited as going virtual. The government is saying how wonderful it is because we can ask them questions, just like people outside. I completely agree with that.

On the other hand, other hybrid parliaments are not necessarily limited to question period. In fact, they have tested electronic voting. They are going much further.

Why should we limit ourselves to question period? Why should we not proceed with the legislative agenda? Why should we not have opposition days?

Why should we not go further and play the role of a real parliament, which we can do in a hybrid manner?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

We all agree that Parliament's role is important. That is why we asked the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to study the possibility of voting remotely, which is not currently possible. If remote voting were possible and if the Conservatives were interested, we would do it. My understanding is that the Conservatives do not want to do it. At some point, we may have to do it in order to carry out all our duties. We do not know how long the pandemic will last. We do not know what the future holds.

One thing is clear: The government will always act in accordance with the basic principles that define our country and will always debate issues and decisions. The opposition plays an important role that we respect, and we want it to carry on doing so.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, just now a member mentioned London's hybrid Parliament experiment. Actually, the idea was scrapped because it was not working well enough. Let's make sure this debate is based on facts.

The Conservatives have always said that there is no way we can bring all 338 members together in the House. Everyone knows that. During a press conference, the Prime Minister said things that were not true. He said that was what we were doing. Other members have made statements suggesting that is what we wanted to do. That is not true.

Parliament has been sitting for two days. We have had member statements and question period. The government needs to be held to account. Members of the House are debating motions. Parliament is doing its work. We are prepared to make certain revisions and adjustments, including with regard to parliamentary committees.

The tragedy involving Ms. Levesque took place in Quebec City a few months ago. A report was released on the weekend. As the member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles said so clearly in

S. O. 57

interviews with the media, the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security must do its job. Unfortunately, it cannot do so at this time.

Why is the government so determined to do things its way, according to its vision?

Despite the friendship, esteem and respect that I have for my colleague, I am asking him not to seek our sympathy by saying that having to answer five-minute questions is hard for the government. They must give real answers. What is the real answer to the question about the current deficit?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Speaker, I too have regard for my Conservative colleague. That said, these are vital questions and it is just as vital that the government answer them, which it is doing. We may not agree on the answers, but we will answer openly, sincerely and with transparency.

My colleague referred to the committee. I thank him for that as it allows me to say that despite all the difficulties caused by the pandemic—people are dying, people are losing their jobs, some people are ill—we have managed to accomplish several things here in the House. For example, eight committees have held meetings. In total, there have been 74 meetings. We heard from 580 witnesses and 23 ministers appeared before committees.

The motion would have us add the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans, and I am certain that my colleague is happy about that.

[*English*]

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since March 13 the House of Commons has met on multiple occasions with reduced numbers of MPs in order to respect the advice from public health officials. A quick look at the Hansard makes one realize that it is often the same MPs who take part in the House proceedings.

What is the government's suggestion to allow more MPs to take part in the parliamentary proceedings?

• (1540)

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Speaker, in a very objective way, that is an excellent question, because we want the participation of MPs from everywhere. In an ideal world, we would be 338 people here, men and women, representing their constituents. Because of the pandemic and the measures that have been put in place, and we respect those measures on both sides of the aisle, there is an option. It is this hybrid committee we can have here, with members on both sides, and MPs from everywhere across the country, so that MPs who are elected in Vancouver, Halifax, Côte-Nord or wherever can ask their questions on screen.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I was pleased to hear the words “Côte-Nord”, because it just so happens the Côte-Nord expects more from me.

S. O. 57

The government House leader talked about people who are sick, who have lost their jobs and who do not know what tomorrow will bring. What I am being told is that, as an MP, I should work less and stay away from Parliament. We are getting a math lesson, being told that six is more than two and more than four.

Recognizing that we normally spend 30-some odd hours discussing things here in Parliament, that is going to be replaced by committee meetings that do not always go so well, because we have less time to ask questions and we are constantly cut off. I think there is something the government would have us believe, but I would not call it a lesson in democracy.

We should do more for our constituents. We are considered essential workers. I consider it my duty to drive 10 or 12 hours to be here and participate in the committee meetings. It is my duty to stand up for my constituents.

I find it unacceptable that a minority government should decide to shut down the House. It is a denial of democracy, even if the government would have us believe that we are going to be able to ask more questions. I expect more from this government. I do not expect it to shut down the House. It is a minority government and it needs to remember that. The government needs to bring us together here so that we can ask it the right questions, and it must answer them. There are suggested questions, but they are not at all worthwhile and do not address the needs of our constituents. Our constituents want us to work. If we are asking them to make an effort, then we need to make an even greater one.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Speaker, I do not disagree with the importance of the work that is done by each member, in this case by my colleague and by all of the other members of the House.

This gives me an opportunity to point out something else, and that is the fundamental work that MPs do when they are in their own ridings. Some members told us that it was time to get back to work. I heard the opposition say that several times. However, we are working every day when we are in our ridings, when we lend a hand to community organizations, when we call seniors who live alone. All of the activities that members do are essential. I am sure that each member does just as good of a job of this, and I do not think that this type of work is done any better by a Liberal, a Conservative or a Bloc member.

Every member does this type of work. We must continue to recognize that, just as we just continue to recognize the work we do here.

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us do a quick run-through of our favourite moments of shutting down democracy. Do I say Stephen Harper, Stephen Harper, Stephen Harper? I will probably have to say that about 150 times, for every single time he shut it down. Then there were all the committees, where everything had to go in camera no matter what it was so there was no accountability. Then there was the crisis of 2008, the biggest economic crisis up to that point, when Stephen Harper came into the House and they all puffed up and were going to massively push through this austerity budget. The New Democrats said no. Then what did Stephen Harper do? He panicked

and shut Parliament down. Do members remember that? He had to shut Parliament down.

It is pretty rich, when we are here to talk about keeping Parliament accountable until the end of June, plus sessions this summer, and we will continue in the fall, to see the howling at the moon and the abuse of the privileges of the most privileged people in Canada, when, in fact, if we remember the Stephen Harper years, the doors were locked in the Parliament of the people because he was afraid to meet a minority government.

We have a minority government, and we have work to get done. I want to get to that work tomorrow so we can start to drill down and ask serious questions of ministers, where we have a good period of time to actually go through the issues, push, find out and insist on responses. Let us just get down to it.

● (1545)

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Speaker, I agree.

The Speaker: It is my duty to interrupt the proceedings at this time and put forthwith the question on the motion now before the House.

The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Speaker: Call in the members.

● (1555)

[*Translation*]

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

(*Division No. 25*)

YEAS

Members

Anand
Atwin
Bibeau
Drouin
Duvall
Garneau
Hajdu
Hussen
Lalonde
Lattanzio
Mathysen
Miller
Ng

Angus
Bendayan
Dhillon
Duclos
Freeland
Green
Hardie
Iacono
Lamoureux
Lebouthillier
McCrimmon
Morneau
Rodriguez

Government Orders

Romanado
Vandenbeld— 29

Scarpaleggia

NAYS

Members

Barlow
Bergeron
Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)
Deltell
Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)
Gill
Harder
McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)
Scheer
Sweet
Vecchio
Waugh— 23

Bergen
Bezan
Cumming
d'Entremont
Genuis
Gray
Lemire
Normandin
Schmale
Therrien
Wagantall

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

* * *

[English]

PROCEEDINGS OF THE HOUSE AND COMMITTEES

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: Resuming debate, the hon member for Battlefords—Lloydminster has two minutes and 30 seconds remaining for her discourse.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, what I was saying was that it is not up to the government of the day to decide how it will be held accountable for its governing. When it comes to fiscal responsibility and accountability, the Prime Minister and the finance minister seem equally disinterested. They have refused to deliver a budget or even a fiscal update, or proper accounting for that matter, for their COVID-19 relief measures, and today's motion still offers no timeline on a fiscal update.

As we consider this proposal, we have to acknowledge the shortfalls of virtual meetings. While meeting virtually is always preferred to not meeting at all, virtual meetings are not conducive to quality work. As a member of HUMA, I have experienced the shortfalls of technology first-hand. Our committee has been meeting virtually for the past month. Even a month in, the time spent on technological issues far outweighs the time spent on the meeting itself. These technological problems significantly hinder our effectiveness, and we have seen similar issues in the COVID-19 committee.

In-person meetings of the House would deliver better results for Canadians. There are those who would stand in this place and argue that in the name of health and safety this is not possible. To them, I would say that this very meeting shows that we can be in this chamber while maintaining public health guidelines. I would also like to point to examples of democracies around the world that have continued or resumed parliamentary activities. Just as the chamber should proceed with regular business, so should all of our standing and special committees. These committees should be getting back to their important work. It is in the long-term interest of Canadians.

A Parliament operating with its full authority can only better serve Canadians. This is not a partisan issue. This is a fundamental belief that Parliament is the bedrock of our democracy and that debate, oversight and transparency strengthen our democracy. Generations before us have shaped our democracy. They have safeguarded and improved it. It is our collective responsibility to do the same for the next generation. To do that, we must remain vigilant against intentional and unintentional efforts to erode or undermine our democracy. Safeguarding our democracy should be the priority of all of us.

We have to acknowledge that this motion would strip Parliament of some of its power. While governing in a minority setting may not be the Prime Minister's preference, it is what Canadians chose and he has the obligation to work with Parliament for the good of Canadians. Canadians expect more, and Canadians deserve more.

I would urge all members of this chamber to recognize Parliament as an essential service and to acknowledge that their responsibility to their constituents is crucial and their duty to uphold our democracy is paramount. A government without accountability fails our democracy and it fails Canadians. We must be focused on getting the best results for Canadians because they are counting on us. While we face a global health crisis, we cannot sacrifice the health of our democracy.

• (1600)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would contrast Stephen Harper and the current Prime Minister any time and anywhere when it comes to defending the parliamentary institution. It was Stephen Harper who prorogued Parliament, meaning that he actually shut down Parliament and did not work with any opposition parties.

We can contrast that to what we have today: an ongoing commitment by the current Prime Minister to ensure, by listening to health experts and respecting the importance of this institution, that we are where we are today.

In fact, at the end of the day, we are going to have more questions being asked and petitions from Canadians across the country. We have the opportunity for members' statements. This is something that is hopefully going to work toward more of a full virtual integration, where all MPs will be able to be engaged by using technology. Hopefully, the Conservatives will realize the importance of looking at how we can ensure some form of voting so parliamentarians, no matter where they are, are able to place their vote. Then maybe we could proceed a bit further on some of the other changes that are so critical.

Government Orders

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Mr. Speaker, I would actually argue that it is under this Prime Minister that we have seen attempts at unprecedented power grabs. We have seen attempts at silencing and taking away any ability that the opposition holds. It is not just in this Parliament; it was also in the previous Parliament. This is a trend with the current government.

If this is regarding virtual Parliament, sure, but not virtual committee. I would ask that the government stop misleading Canadians and call a committee a committee and Parliament Parliament. We are talking about a virtual committee, not a virtual Parliament.

• (1605)

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary used an important phrase. He said that we must respect the importance of this institution. I could not agree with the member more. We do need to respect the importance of this institution, and that means it needs to come back as a full Parliament, not as a special committee, which is what the Liberals are proposing.

Would my colleague care to comment on this further? Again, the parliamentary secretary said that we must respect the importance of this institution.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Mr. Speaker, I find it quite ironic that we debated closure on a motion. Here we are in Parliament, not at a committee, on a sitting day of the House of Commons, and we were debating closure because the government did not want us to debate any longer. I find it quite ironic that we were doing that for half an hour. We voted and the government was successful, with help from the New Democrats.

The government is not protecting democracy or our institution by moving closure to move forward with a virtual committee.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will use the same word my colleague used: “irony”. I find it especially ironic today to hear the Conservatives become the great defenders of institutions, parliamentary freedom, democracy and committees.

I was here for the nine years that former Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper was in power. I saw more than a hundred closure motions. The Conservatives prevented debate in the House, systematically put the committees in camera and prevented federal government scientists from speaking freely to the media.

Today we must have cool heads and think about what we can do to adapt to the circumstances of this pandemic we are in.

We will continue to sit four days a week until June 18, as we normally would more or less. In fact, sittings were added to the summer schedule and we will be able to sit and ask the government questions. That is progress because we usually do not sit in the summer.

[*English*]

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Mr. Speaker, honestly, I am at a loss for words, because it is ironic. The New Democrats just voted for closure on what we are debating. All day today and yesterday, the Conservatives have been debating the importance of Parliament,

and the importance that it has over a committee. I find his question quite ironic.

Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, private members' bills have been brought up repeatedly, and rightfully so. Fortunately, I am one of just over 300 members of Parliament who have had a private member's bill pass the House and the Senate and become law. That has helped victims of violent offenders immensely.

How does my colleague feel about the fact that with the rubric we just voted on, individual members will no longer have the ability to represent the constituents who elected them and bring about private members' bills to change the course of their lives for the better?

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Mr. Speaker, again irony comes to mind. I am surprised that any member not sitting in the front benches of the Liberal government would vote for closure or vote to have a committee. They are giving away their opportunity to have private members' business, to move bills forward and create new legislation.

It is so unfortunate that there are members in this place who were willing to vote away the opportunity for Parliament to sit and, in essence, give away their opportunity to bring forward private members' business.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have so many things to say that I do not know where to start.

I would like to come back to the idea that the functioning of Parliament will be improved as of tomorrow, that is to say from the moment we no longer do what we normally do as parliamentarians.

Like all members of the House, I was elected because voters wanted me to work for them. We know how difficult times are for people in our ridings right now. I am from a rural riding. I am thinking of people in the tourism industry, people in the fishing industry, indigenous communities and all the small and medium-sized businesses.

There are natural resources in my riding. My region is what is called a resource region. All these large companies work with small businesses that are really struggling right now. For instance, the paper, aluminum and forestry sectors are having a very hard time.

Two ideas came to mind at the same time. I have the impression, or rather the certainty, that someone is trying to make me swallow a big fat lie. I am being told that, starting tomorrow, I will be able to do more than if I were in Parliament. What is more, I am being told that this is exactly what people are asking for, yet that is not what people are asking us to do.

We have talked a lot about people who have lost their jobs, people who are sick and families who are struggling to make ends meet because they do not know which way to turn. People have to take care of their sick loved ones or their children, all while trying to work at the same time.

I know that my colleagues are doing a tremendous amount of work in their ridings. We are being told that they have found a solution for parliamentarians. We are being told that the work we do in the House is not useful, that we have to call our constituents and that we have to set aside our work as legislators and our work in committee.

We are being told that by doing less in the House, we will be doing more in our ridings. Personally, I believe that the ideals of dignity, respect and effort, as part of our duties as elected officials, should be reflected in the work of the House. I am quite open to the idea that this work should adapt to the current situation. However, no one can say that there is no longer a legislative agenda, that not all committees can sit, and that we cannot have all the space we can in committees because of the pandemic.

Instead, we should capitalize on the situation. More than ever, we need to find ways to do our job as lawmakers in the House and in committee, while working in our ridings and dealing with the pandemic.

I feel like we are on pause. Quebec and all the provinces have also been on pause. People are going back to work and getting on with their lives. However, the signal we are sending them is that we are not fast enough, that we are not working hard enough, and that we do not have the will to do the work that we usually do.

I think that today we have shown that we are able to work together safely, since we are observing social distancing. Later today I will be going to committee and doing my job. If we are able to do that, why would we not?

All my constituents, as well as Quebecers and Canadians, must be telling themselves the same thing: that we are asking more of them. They are being asked to go to work, to make sacrifices, and to put themselves a little more at risk. We, their representatives, should be flawless. I say flawless, but we certainly all have flaws. However, we should lead by example. Right now, the message we are sending is that we want to do less.

• (1610)

I can give an astonishing number of examples.

I come from a rural region. I am from eastern Quebec. I have been working with my colleagues from Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia and Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques for the past few weeks to jointly serve our constituents. Although video conferencing is available, we know that when we are back home in our ridings, we do not have a place for dialogue, a place to get answers and get things done. We need to be able to get things done with the House, with colleagues, like we usually do.

I spoke about small and medium-sized businesses, tourism, fisheries and forestry. Ridings as big as mine, which, at 350,000 square kilometres, is one of the largest in Quebec and Canada, are home to many isolated communities, communities of 200 to 300 people, indigenous communities that are struggling and very vulnerable right now. The House does not necessarily deal with issues of concern to these communities, since those issues seem to be less important from a purely demographic standpoint. However, these people are entitled to the same representation as everyone else. I want us to be

Government Orders

able to move forward, to present and talk about these realities in order to find solutions. We must remember that it took weeks before the fisheries sector got any assistance.

Coming to work in person in the House also allows us to speak to the Prime Minister and all of our colleagues, to get a specific topic out in the open and to find solutions.

We are seeing this now with tourism. I keep bringing it up, but I am thinking of all those people who rely on tourism and whom I see every day all over my riding. Some families that live off tourism are struggling to make ends meet and have no idea what is going to happen next week, next month, or even in September, when they may not have accumulated enough hours to qualify for employment insurance. I cannot imagine what kind of year these people might have. I keep hoping that something will happen for them. We need to work for these people. I want their voice to be heard, here as well as in committee.

I do not want us to have fewer opportunities to defend our people and propose solutions. That is Parliament's role.

We talked about the CERB earlier. It is an extremely important topic in Quebec as well. I have spoken to businesses that are in desperate need of workers, especially in the remote regions of Quebec. This benefit deters people from working. Our people need to work to survive. We are talking about families and individuals, but this benefit will also have an impact on the community and on our businesses if people do not go back to work.

Improvements need to be made, and I think that Parliament is still the best place to do that. The Liberals are not going to make us believe that we will be able to get more done better with less time, fewer committees, and fewer answers and discussions amongst ourselves and with our colleagues. I find that very hard, if not impossible, to believe.

Of course we need to keep working on these issues. I also raised the matter of indigenous peoples, which is a very important issue for me. The Innu and Naskapi make up 15% of the population of the riding of Manicouagan. We know that these populations are very young and still growing. I experienced this crisis, this pandemic, with them. I saw all the needs they had and still have, needs that still have not been met. Yes, millions of dollars have been provided, but these populations are fragile and vulnerable because of their isolation and their health issues. I would like to discuss their reality and their needs here in Parliament.

Yes, there is the regular business of the House and committees, and we need to make legislation. However, now there is also all the work that comes with the pandemic.

Government Orders

• (1615)

I always feel like we are lagging behind. We are lagging behind in terms of what happens next. There is nothing stopping us from thinking about the recovery, what is going to happen this fall or a second wave. We are not really talking about those things, but I believe it is our duty to anticipate them and to be ahead of the curve in terms of what is going to happen and what we can do to make sure that the impact is not as big as it was at the beginning of this crisis. We need to prepare. I say this for indigenous communities, for our businesses, for our workers and for all our communities. That is what they need. We have enough work to do, and we have the means to do it. We have more work than we would normally have. When I am told that we are going to meet once, twice or three times this summer, I do not feel that is enough. If I had to, I would come all summer long so that I could give even more to my constituents, so that I could defend them and find solutions.

For the sake of my constituents, I hope we can come up with something other than what we are seeing right now. We are being told to just go home and make calls, when there is so much to be done here. That is what the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons told us earlier. That is disappointing. In some respects, it is almost shameless given what we talked about yesterday when we learned that the two major political parties, the Liberal Party of Canada and the Conservative Party of Canada, had decided to apply for the wage subsidy.

At the beginning of the crisis, I noticed that indigenous people in my riding did not have masks. SMEs in my riding are telling me that they cannot make ends meet and are going to go bankrupt. I see fishers who know that they are going out on the water at their own expense and are going into debt. I see workers who have had to leave their jobs because they have sick children. The government is not improving these programs, these subsidies. It is not trying to adjust them based on real needs. Emphasis on the word “needs”. The Liberals have brushed all that aside, while at the same time taking money from the pot, claiming they need it. The richest party in Canada decided to avail itself of that subsidy even though it had absolutely no need for it. I think that is terribly shameless coming from any party.

The government is creating subsidies, and some of the wealthy are taking advantage. Then, in the same breath, it tells us that in order to work for our constituents, whose needs are so great, we should stay home and not work in the House, since we are able to.

Where there is a will, there is a way. We can do it, and the Bloc Québécois wants to do it. I want us to continue doing our work, in all moral conscience as elected representatives. We need to be aware that what we are doing is not for our party or ourselves, but for the people we serve. In my case, that is the people of the North Shore. I want to be on duty here as much as possible so we can find solutions fast.

We have been to the moon, so I think we can find a way to vote electronically pretty quickly. There is no earthly reason the work of the House should not proceed as productively as possible. I urge all members of the House to say they want us to get back to work, and serious work at that. That is what our people need. It is what they want, and we are here for them.

• (1620)

[*English*]

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I miss working with my colleague in that very short period of time on the fisheries committee, and hopefully we will get back to that committee.

The word “unprecedented” has come up a lot. This is a very interesting and unprecedented time, what has been described as a “she” session. This COVID-19 pandemic has had an inordinate impact on women and everybody in the precarious occupations, mainly. Given the kind of social and economic disruption this has caused, along with, of course, the sickness, I am concerned that I may have misunderstood what our friends across the way have been talking about today.

Are they talking about opening up Parliament to discuss a whole variety of things that Parliament would ordinarily deal with, or does my friend believe that dealing with the pandemic is and should remain the focus of the work done in the chamber and virtually?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Mr. Speaker, this is not a dilemma with just two choices.

I definitely think we can do both. We can sit. Of course, if there is an emergency, we can focus on the emergency. That should not prevent us from doing all the other work.

I believe I am capable and fit enough, and I will give all of my time to this. I would expect no less from all my colleagues, as I am sure all my constituents expect no less from this Parliament.

• (1625)

[*English*]

Mr. James Cumming (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member mentioned quite a bit in her speech the difficulty that businesses in her riding are experiencing, particularly getting workers back to work and the programs the Liberals have put in place that are making it difficult to get those people back to work. I would like her to elaborate on that a bit more.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for the question.

That is something that is very important to me. The people back home and elsewhere are brave and hard-working. They want to work and contribute to the effort in their way, by having their own job, but having a job penalizes them. Obviously people think of their families first, but we have to think about the greater community, and that is what the government should do.

What the Bloc Québécois is proposing is not to penalize the people who want to work, quite the contrary. We have to give them access to the benefit, but once they earn money, they should be able to get ahead and increase their income. I think that is a solution worth considering.

The government should do this quickly. Yes, there is a crisis, but as I mentioned earlier, there is also the recovery. This is no longer the beginning of the crisis. We are at a different stage. We have to adjust our measures and adapt to things as they come. We also have to think about the future.

I certainly agree with my colleague. We have to find incentives to get people to return to work and contribute to economic recovery.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his efforts and his passion for the Côte-Nord. It is very evident.

This is not an ideal situation. We are going through a crisis. There is a pandemic. I believe that everyone is trying to find ways to help people and to keep Parliament working.

We have made some progress with the new motion that we voted on. Until June 18, we will sit four days a week. We will have more time than usual to put questions to the government.

Typically, Parliament rises for the summer around Quebec's national holiday and we resume in late September.

However, we have ensured that Parliament will continue its activities, and we will meet at least once a month during the summer on a regular basis. This will ensure that by means of video conferences and a hybrid Parliament, we will be able to continue our discussions, put questions to the government and try to work on improving existing programs.

We will also be able to work on creating new programs. For example, there is one thing that is important to NDP, and I am sure it is to the Bloc as well. I am referring to compensation for artists whose exhibits, shows, tours and festivals were cancelled this summer. They have not yet received any assistance.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie for his work, which I greatly appreciate. I would like to tell him that.

However, I do not think that we are gaining anything. I find it unpleasant to hear almost the same words that the leader of the government was using earlier about making gains. Having less is not a gain. Less is still less. I am saying this as an arithmetic lesson for the leader of the government in the House: less is still less.

Now I am being told that there may be a day this summer when we will be able to talk about programs and that we can do so through committees. However, we could be doing that tomorrow. If we vote against the motion, we will be in the House again tomorrow. We could already start working on it.

Once again, I am having a hard time understanding certain things. Can someone help me understand how it is possible that, by doing less and having less, we will be able to do more?

Government Orders

Of course, this is an extreme analogy, but what would we do if we were at war? Would we stay home? Would we be asked to do more? Would we say no, we cannot do anything and we are being asked to do too much? Would we say that there is a crisis, that we are going through a crisis?

My impression is that there is a lack of will. I hope that it is not the case, that it is simply the wrong perception. I am ready to work. The Bloc Québécois is ready to work. I think that the Conservative Party is ready to work.

Why are we halting the sittings of the House rather than continuing them and working even harder, as all of our constituents have been asking us to do since the crisis began?

• (1630)

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the member for Manicouagan.

Can she give us a concrete example of a situation where the current format might prevent us from moving things forward and properly representing our constituents? I am thinking specifically of not being able to work in committee.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his question. He is very attuned to the concerns of the regions. We both come from rural regions and are well aware that Internet access is problematic, deficient, difficult and sometimes non-existent. This makes our jobs extremely difficult.

Even in the context of these committees, we are interrupted much of the time because people are not using their headsets or because the interpretation service is having difficulties. What this means is that, once again, we have less, not more. Every time we are interrupted, or we have to repeat ourselves or there are technical difficulties means more time wasted. Things simply come to a halt. How many times have some of my colleagues been deprived of their right to speak, their right to ask questions? We can never make up for lost time.

I find that very problematic. We are often stripped of our parliamentary privilege, and that has to stop. Obviously, it would be better if we could work together here in person, since no one would cut me off, except you, Mr. Speaker. We are perfectly capable of doing the work we were elected to do.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will try to keep this short.

Government Orders

If this motion passes, the member will be provided the opportunity to present all of the different issues she has raised, whether in question period, members' statements, petitions and so forth. There is a major flaw in the argument the Bloc and the Conservatives are putting forward. On the one hand, they say that health experts say that 338 people cannot be inside the chamber at one time, but the Conservatives are also saying they are not prepared to go to electronic voting. There is an impasse that has to be resolved for us to move forward. We have to allow for 338 members of Parliament to be able to vote when it comes to issues like opposition motion days and private members' bills. Would she not agree?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Mr. Speaker, that is a false dilemma. I said what I wanted to say. The government said what it wanted to say in its motion. We can talk about the different ways to make this happen, which is what the House is for.

As the saying goes, only a fool does not change his mind. We are able to change our minds, to come to an understanding and to find a way. This not about being the opposition or a particular party. It is about knowing what our constituents want and what is best for them. I think that is what we proposed earlier.

I am prepared to find ways other than having this minority government force the format that it wants but that does not sit well with Quebeckers or, I would imagine, with Canadians.

[*English*]

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be sharing my time today with the member for Saskatoon—Grasswood. Both of us are here from Saskatchewan. We made the trip. It worked well and it is very good to be back in the House.

I have a tendency to think in visuals. As I have been thinking through this today, I have been trying to think of how I could communicate in a way that Canadians would understand what is happening in the House today. I think part of the reason the Liberals moved closure is that they realized Canadians are figuring this out.

I ask members to imagine a mother who goes into her son's room, which had been well organized but now it is just chaos. She tells him that he needs to clean it up, that it is time to clean it up. In this case, the mother would be Canadians. They have been watching throughout this pandemic. The government is dealing with different dynamics, and we are working with the government, but it gets to a point when it is time to move on. It is time to clean this up.

The government we are facing today is that child with the room that has been cleaned up. He calls his mom back into the room and she says it is beautiful. There is nothing but beautiful space in the room. However, the books are not back where they are supposed to be. Where are they? The toys and clothes are not put back where they are supposed to be. Where is everything? It is all jammed into a closet where it is no longer seen.

We have a government that wants to run a committee going forward, even now, when this place is ready to reconvene as a proper Parliament. The Prime Minister and the government are trying to convince Canadians by telling us that we will have all these oppor-

tunities to ask questions and hear their answers, to present S.O. 31s and petitions, and that somehow things will be so much better.

I would argue that if anything, that says something even deeper. It says that the government has no desire to return to a position where it is being held accountable for the decisions it has been making. It has also stuffed things away into a closet that do not belong there.

During the first sitting of the Liberal government as a majority government, one of the first things Liberals tried to do was take away our parliamentary tools on the opposition side of the floor. Our House leader worked very hard on our behalf to make sure that did not happen. Now we have a circumstance where tools are being stripped away, and all we have is the opportunity to ask questions or present a statement. That is not our role as members of Parliament in the House. Our responsibilities are to represent our constituents, to bring accountability to the government and to further decisions that are in the best interests of Canadians when we feel they are not being met.

One example of what is not being met by a committee of the whole, which is not a true sitting of Parliament, is that there is no opportunity to present opposition motions. We know how important those are because the Conservative Party, along with the other opposition parties on this side of the House, won three opposition motions that put the government on notice.

One of them was the Canada-China committee that was struck because of all of the issues going on with China that are impacting Canada. We have two men who have been held there improperly for so long. I pray for these people regularly. I pray that they maintain their courage, that they stay healthy and that our government does what it needs to do to find a way to get them home.

There are issues around agriculture and what China has done to our exports. There are all kinds of issues on which the government has chosen to sit back on its heels, including dealing with China and this pandemic. There is no question that to a large degree the pandemic is what created the chaos in the room.

Canadians are saying that we are doing better, that we have done what we needed to do, but what about what the government did? Why did Liberals say that the virus could not be transmitted human to human? Why did they not immediately close down flights from China until we could figure this out? Why did they not play defensively instead of offensively? What was in their minds? Why did they say that we do not need to wear masks in the general public? Why are there not enough for our front-line workers? They threw it all away and did not have it replaced.

• (1635)

There are all kinds of dynamics here that need to be dealt with, and they need to be dealt with properly.

Government Orders

There was the China-Canada committee. Then there was the Parliamentary Budget Officer saying that he could not find where all of this infrastructure funding was. Where was it? We formed a committee with the support of all of the members on this side of the floor that forced this minority government to allow the search for where those funds are. Financial accountability is absolutely crucial for this government at the best of times, let alone when we find ourselves in a circumstance where money is being spent at such a huge rate. Yes, a lot of it needs to be done. I am not questioning that, but when we are spending to the point where we are printing money to the tune of \$5 billion a week, accountability needs to be there.

Then there is the issue of the Parole Board. When this government came into power, it fired everyone on the Parole Board and put its own people into place. The person in charge of that Parole Board wrote a report that said it was a crisis waiting to happen. Sure enough, an individual who was released on day parole and was told that for his sexual gratification he could hire someone to meet his sexual needs. Then, he turned around and killed that woman. There is no question that there are issues around that Parole Board, and we have the opportunity, because of agreement on this side of the floor, to force the government to deal with those questions.

There are no opposition motions. On legislation, why are those members not concerned about any legislation, which we have no opportunity to truly debate? Our committees are slowly coming back, but I can tell members that I know of veterans affairs issues going on that need to be brought to our committee. We called for an emergency opportunity to meet with the ombudsman. His report was so important that he has released it even though he is no longer the ombudsman.

Once again, we have a circumstance where someone has a responsibility to reveal issues with the government, and any government ends up having those circumstances. The Auditor General has challenged our party when it was in government, too. However, that person somehow disappears when there is something that needs to be said to this government.

Of course, there is the question of private members' bills. This is something that is very important to us as individual members of Parliament. It is the only time in the House when we get an opportunity to present something that is really important to our constituents, to Canada and to ourselves that is not led or directed by our leadership. It is a very special privilege, and significant things have been done through that. Again, this is something we are missing the opportunity to do.

It is not just that. It is also the efforts at a power grab when we met for the first time in good faith to deal with the COVID crisis, the introduction of the wage subsidy and whatnot. There is also the use of an order in council to determine a significant ban on firearms with absolutely no debate, no discussion and no consultation with, quite honestly, anyone other than who the government wanted to look at, because it was its own ideology that was driving it. It is not good, solid legislation for Canadians.

There are many more things I could say, but the point here is that Canadians are saying it is time for us to get back to work here. Yes, we are all working very hard, and I have to give a shout-out to my

staff. It is unbelievable the work they have been doing on behalf of our constituents. There have been times when they were in tears because of the circumstances that they were dealing with trying to help Canadians who need that help and are not finding it.

It is a real privilege to serve Canadians, to serve Yorkton—Melville and to serve alongside my staff. The reason I cannot support this motion is that Canadians are tired of a committee running this country. It is time for Parliament to get back to work.

• (1640)

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, one of the fundamental roles of parliamentarians in this place is to represent all of Canada. I am very lucky to live about 25 minutes away from here, which is why I have been able to come here three times in the past week. However, my colleagues in Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, New Brunswick, B.C. and northern Canada should also be here as much as possible. That is why we are debating this motion. We have to ensure fairness for all parliamentarians in this place.

One of the most important things we do here is vote. What would the member propose to make sure we are able to vote in this place and that all parliamentarians are able to exercise their fundamental right to vote on pieces of legislation?

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Mr. Speaker, of course this is an important issue, but I want to first deal with the concern about members of Parliament getting here. I am here. We have had people from across this entire nation here, because we are the only party that has people in absolutely every province and territory.

The thing that confuses me about the approach the government has taken to date is that it has only had the people who get here be here for one day. Now we are saying “here for four days”. That makes far more sense, because if I am going to come here, I am going to come here and invest in the time that is given me over those four days.

The purpose of this should be that we continue to become the Parliament that we should be, and that we are in this House to deal with all of the issues we need to deal with.

I am sorry. I get a kick out of the government when it asks us what we would do. The government can sit down with all of us and discuss it properly. There are ways that we can vote as the House. We can work it out. We have ideas. Let us talk about it.

• (1645)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

I would like her opinion on a question I have already asked. I would like to know what she thinks personally.

Government Orders

We have debated the idea of a hybrid Parliament to resume the overall role of Parliament. However, I sense a certain reluctance from the Conservatives, who would instead like us to be physically present in the House.

I would therefore like to know what is most important to my colleague. Is it the fact that the person answering her question is physically present in front of her or the fact that each member—who may, for example, have a health problem or is an age that puts him or her at risk by coming here, have young children at home or live very far away in an area that is currently poorly served by transportation systems—has access to his or her privileges as a parliamentarian through a hybrid Parliament?

What is most important?

[*English*]

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Mr. Speaker, quite honestly, if any of us have trouble with transportation, we also have trouble with the Internet. It probably goes hand in hand.

However, the reality is that before the COVID pandemic we were here. All of us were here. What was preventing us? We still had our families. I have 10 grandchildren. Three of them live with us right now because of loss of employment. We all have other responsibilities. We have all had travel that we had to do in the past to get here.

In time, there is no reason why we should not come to the point when we can eventually move back to a full sitting. I understand that we have to take it gradually and be responsible, but all kinds of workplaces are in the process of doing that very thing. My constituents, and Canadians in general, are saying it is time for us to see this Parliament doing its parliamentary role of holding the government to account and having proper interactions with each other.

As time progresses, I look forward to the day when everyone is back sitting in this House. It is called hope. In the meantime, I know that Quebec and Ontario are facing far greater challenges than we are back home in Saskatchewan in regard to the COVID pandemic. However, we can continue to do the things that we need to do within our communities, fight this disease and grow to where we have this House sitting the way it was meant to be sitting.

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my thoughts are with those who have lost loved ones in the last number of weeks. Many of them never had the opportunity to go to the hospital. I have spent the last eight or nine weeks, since returning home on March 13, phoning my constituents.

I remember one conversation I had at the beginning of April. I was phoning houses and, when I identified myself with my name as the member of Parliament for Saskatoon—Grasswood, one lady told me she had lost her husband in late March. “A week ago”, she said when I talked to her in early April.

She went on to say that she and her husband had been married for 62 years and she did not have the opportunity to say goodbye to him. He left the house and spent a number of days at RUH, Royal University Hospital, in Saskatoon. It was 62 years and she never had the chance to say goodbye to her loved one.

Those are the stories that we are dealing with in this country. We have had, unfortunately, eight deaths in our province of Saskatchewan. That is eight too many. Our provincial government has done a very good job, in my estimation, of dealing with this pandemic.

This time has been very difficult for many. Sometimes, in our conversations about social distancing and flattening the curve and all the words that we have used since we left here on March 13, it is easy to forget about these stories. These are not numbers. They are people. When I look at the catastrophe that I have seen in this country with thousands dying from this pandemic, I just shake my head. I look at Ontario and Quebec and today, the long-term care home report. Wow, we have a lot of work to do in this country. We have let down the people who have built this country. This is the time that all of us in the House need to do heavy reflection on how we can correct this.

That being said, I have to move on with the matter at hand. Of course, we are going to talk about the permanent return to Parliament, not a committee of the whole but the return to Parliament and what that will look like.

Virtual sittings have worked a bit. It is going to be interesting, because the Liberals in committees always want to bring people in. When we get back to real business in the committees, I am going to watch the Liberals. They want to champion virtual sittings, and they had better not be bringing people into committees on airplanes every week. We are going to watch that.

We were advocates on this side, long before this pandemic, for virtual sittings in committees. We see people coming in by the droves for every committee. They get airplanes, hotels and meals, sit in a committee for a seven- or eight-minute conversation, and then leave. We are going to watch the Liberals and the government when we get back in the fall, to see how much they love virtual sittings, because a lot of virtual sittings have not worked.

On this side of the House, we have talked about opposition days, or motions, or legislation or statements in the House, but I want to talk about the private members' bills. When we all gather around for the selection, every four years, of private members' bills, it is a big moment in the House of Commons. I know of some MPs who, in 14 or 15 years, have never had a private member's bill. This year, Conservatives, Liberals, Bloc members, New Democrats and Greens gathered around, and guess what? The Conservatives got six out of the first 10 spots, nine out of the first 15 and 12 out of the first 20. Is there a conspiracy? I just shared the numbers: six of 10. I am number seven. My bill would give tremendous hope for tourism in this country: Bill C-218.

• (1650)

I do not know if I will ever get a chance to present it again. It had first reading in March, like many others, but I am not sure the bill will get to second reading.

Government Orders

The member for Calgary Confederation got his bill passed in the House of Commons, in the 42nd Parliament, on organ donation. The member for Calgary Confederation lost his wife a number of years ago and she had prayed with him to bring this bill to Parliament. It passed in the 42nd Parliament. Guess what happened? He got picked number one overall. There was somebody looking over the member for Calgary Confederation.

I bring this up because we lost Hugo Alvarado, an artist in my city, this week. He phoned me in February with a plea that Parliament start private members' business. Recall that the member for Calgary Confederation had a bill on organ donations. Hugo, at 71, needed a double lung transplant. He drove to Edmonton and waited, and during that time he phoned me in February with a plea that the House of Commons start the process on private members' bills.

I talked to him 10 days ago. Hugo asked again what we were doing in Ottawa. There are hundreds of people who need transplants, who are dying. Ten days later, Hugo Alvarado died because he did not get his transplant.

This is the sort of thing we are talking about in the House of Commons. It is important. Committees of the whole are great: we bring down certain numbers of MPs. However, as a member of Parliament, one of the biggest factors is presenting a private member's bill, one's own idea, in the House of Commons.

I bring this up because six out of the first 10 happen to be Conservative bills, and we are hoping we can debate them in the House of Commons. There are some very good private members' bills from all parties that need to be moved to the Senate, but we cannot do that now. We are locked down.

This is what Canadians should know: The committee of the whole is not Parliament. We are missing one of the most important features of a member of Parliament, the private member's bill, because it comes from the heart and 337 others have a say as to whether a private member's bill is accepted or not.

I do not know what we are going to do over the summer. I do not know if we are even going to talk about private members' bills. It was not even going to be brought up until I brought it up in a conversation. It means everything to a member of Parliament to get a chance to present an idea for legislation in the House of Commons, whether it passes or not. Now, because of the committee of the whole that the Liberals and NDP agreed to, we will probably not get the chance in 2020. We are going to miss a whole year because it takes some time to get passed in the House of Commons and the Senate.

I have one other story, and then I am going to move on. We have all talked about fraudulent cases. I got an email from a woman informing me that her 92-year-old mother received three CERB cheques worth \$6,000. She is 92 years old and getting these cheques. I said, "Really?" She photocopied them and sent them to my office. This is why we need to come back to Parliament. Hundreds of thousands of dollars, maybe even millions, per month are being handed out by the government.

I just gave one example. This woman is getting \$6,000. She is 92 years old and has not worked in decades. Her daughter phoned me

and asked what she was to do with them. I told her not to cash them.

Is this not a story? This is a story in Saskatoon, and it will be a story in every city in this country. That is why Parliament needs to come back. There has to be opposition to keep the government accountable.

• (1655)

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his excellent speech touching on many issues that we have been raising as the official opposition. His last comment raised an issue that has happened to some of my constituents as well. Families making well over \$200,000 have all of a sudden gotten the child care benefit, which they never received before and which they feel they are not even eligible for.

They were actually quite upset, saying they did not want the money. They were asking for it to be taken back. It was on a direct deposit into their account. They asked for it to be removed and were told no: They had gotten it, and now it was theirs.

It just shows the issues that we are facing, not to say that they are fraudulent, but that mistakes are being made with handing out some significant dollars. I think it shows why the government needs to be held accountable, when some of these programs are going a bit awry.

I would just like my colleague to say how important it is, when it comes to fiscal responsibility and lack of a budget, that the government be held accountable with taxpayer dollars.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Foothills is exactly right. There are many people who needed the money right up front, and the government, to which I will give credit, did a pretty good job of getting the money out in the first couple of weeks. What has become apparent now is that they are not following up.

There are a number of files that they have already flagged. The government already knows they have been flagged, yet they keep sending the cheques out, so CRA made an announcement last week that it was going to do an audit on them next March. Now, some of the families that have spent this money may not have enough for CRA, and we all know when CRA knocks, we jump.

I think this is a big issue in the country right now. There is a \$252-billion deficit, and most of it has gone to the right people, but a lot of it has not, and the government is going to have to work hard in the coming months to get some of that money back into its coffers.

• (1700)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

Government Orders

I have a question that is bothering me about the position of the Conservative Party. They always say that they do not want the 338 members back here, but they want Parliament to work. At the same time, they do not want electronic voting.

How can we vote if we are not all here at the same time, and there is no electronic voting?

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is right, we do not need 338 members here.

Like I said before, my province of Saskatchewan, and Manitoba and New Brunswick, have done a pretty good job with COVID-19. However, if members go down east, they will see it. They will see Ontario and Quebec in a deadlock. There are things that we can work out. Whoever thought we would do these Zoom virtual meetings in the beginning? Some are working and some are not, because of Internet problems. These are things that we can come to the House and have a great debate on, but we cannot debate if it is a committee of the whole. We can if we are in here, like we should be.

Even Saskatchewan is going back June 15. They are going to be working. The NDP and the Sask Party have agreed to go back to the Saskatchewan legislature for 14 sitting days. We need to be here, and we need to be in Parliament, not in a committee of the whole.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have the same question as my colleague.

A return to the House with full parliamentary and legislative powers means that there will be question period and accountability. Democracy will require that all members, all 338 elected members, have a voice. We cannot have 338 members in the House. We cannot have only half the members of the House present without our other colleagues being present, as well.

I do not understand their proposal. If we want to come back to the House, we must have a process that permits all members to do so. How do my colleagues see their solution?

Members from Quebec and Ontario are not in a tough spot. I heard the message. We can travel. However, all 338 members cannot travel. There are still some health issues to consider.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Mr. Speaker, it is interesting because New Brunswick has MLAs in the gallery. Nobody has even suggested that here.

What sport is doing right now is going to Mosaic Stadium and Winnipeg. If the CFL comes back, one person's season ticket may be here but the next guy is over.

We can work together for this, but we cannot when it is a committee of the whole. My constituents in Saskatoon—Grasswood want us here, and this the first time I have returned since March 13. The member for Souris—Moose Mountain is coming next Sunday. He has not been here, so we are taking turns. It can be done and it has been done, at least on our side of the aisle.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Montarville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, a few moments ago, I rose in the House to express the fact that I was extremely concerned about what was going on.

My colleague from Abitibi—Témiscamingue, with whom I am sharing my time, will certainly have the opportunity to express his own views on the matter, but I had the opportunity to say how uneasy I felt about what we are seeing right now.

What I find deeply disturbing is that, while claiming that co-operation between the parties has yielded extremely positive results so far, the government insists on ending negotiations, on ending this co-operation that, in its own words, has been so fruitful up to now.

As proof of that, earlier, a Liberal member asked a Conservative member what they were proposing. That is all they have been doing for the past two days, proposing things. This has been a fruitless discussion, because the government has decided that, no matter what we might say here in the House, that is how it is going to be.

Why has the government decided that this is how things would go? It is because it negotiated an agreement with the NDP behind closed doors. The government prefers to reach agreements in secret rather than reaching a compromise here, in front of everyone, where Canadians and Quebecers can listen to us. I imagine that they have listened a little over the past few hours, and I imagine that they were a little disappointed to hear us having discussions without reaching any sort of compromise.

I do not believe that it would have been so difficult to find a compromise. I will explain. The government was really intent on having a hybrid Parliament based on the highly laudable principle that all 338 members of the House must be able to participate in its work. No matter their age, no matter where they live in Canada, they must be able to participate in this work.

I think we should applaud the government's desire to allow all parliamentarians to participate in the work of the House. The problem is that they decided to use the objective of having a virtual Parliament to change how the work is done. Not content with establishing a hybrid Parliament, they decided to mothball Parliament. That is what I find extremely troubling.

Government Orders

I believe my colleague from Manicouagan has very thoughtfully explained what we see as problematic. We are being told we will get more time to ask questions, which I am trying to reconcile with the fact that we will be getting 90 minutes a day for four days. When I compare that to five days of parliamentary work from 10 a.m. or 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., I simply cannot figure out how that works out to more time. I have never been good at math, but something tells me this works out to less time at the end of the day.

I am perplexed as to why there are parliamentarians in the House, whether Liberal or NDP, who think it is a good idea to muzzle parliamentarians during all this time when we could be not only asking questions but also passing legislation.

• (1705)

What is absolutely mind-boggling to see is that this government, which was elected with a very full agenda, now seems to no longer want to legislate. It is as though the Liberal Party has run out of ideas. Conversely, they may have decided that it is much too cumbersome to have to come before Parliament to pass legislation, when it is so easy, with the extraordinary powers they have given themselves, to just step outside the cottage and announce all sorts of measures that then become reality. Why go through this necessary evil of a Parliament when they can do everything directly from the Prime Minister's residence? All they have to do is step outside every morning at 11 a.m. to make a little announcement. Everything has been decided behind closed doors, without consulting the provinces, as we saw, for example, in the purpose behind this secret—now no longer a secret—agreement between the government and the New Democrats. They reached a deal saying that it would be a good idea to give workers sick leave.

Of course it is a good idea. It is an idea that we welcome and support. The problem is that this is not the right Parliament to do that. Once again, our Liberal and NDP friends have decided to trample on the jurisdictions of Quebec and the provinces. They are always interfering in the affairs of Quebec and the provinces. After reaching a backroom deal with the New Democrats and without consulting the provinces, the Prime Minister came out one morning at 11 a.m. and announced a sick leave program for workers. He said in the same breath that because he lacks the constitutional jurisdiction over that, he needed to reach an agreement with the provinces first. That is putting the cart before the horse. It seems to me that they should have first talked to the provinces, agreed on the terms and then made the announcement.

Instead, the government exploited this very important and crucial issue of sick leave for workers in order to mothball Parliament. The government took advantage of this very important issue to muzzle members. I do not understand why opposition members agreed to do away with their speaking time in the House. Sure, we can ask more questions. That is great, but we will not be passing legislation. Our main duty as parliamentarians is to legislate. We have a duty to oversee government activities, sure, but we also have a legislative function. Is there anyone here who remembers that one of our functions is to legislate? We are no longer doing that. We are operating through orders in council. Cabinet meets, decides what could work, and then it is implemented.

It is simply disappointing to see that the government would rather negotiate behind closed doors than out in the open where everyone can see what is going on. The government is saying that we have not yet agreed on how members will be allowed to vote. We need to send that to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs and have the committee think about how members could vote. It has been proven that necessity is the mother of invention. In the beginning, when we talked about a virtual Parliament, everyone was wondering how we would do it. When we spoke about a hybrid Parliament, everyone was wondering how we would do that. It did not take much to make those things happen. We made it work. I think that we could have just as easily come up with a mechanism that would allow members to vote. There was simply a lack of will to do so. The government preferred to muzzle Parliament. In my opinion, these are not exactly the glory days of Canada's parliamentary system.

• (1710)

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my esteemed colleague. I love listening to him speak. He does such a great job. He obviously has some experience under his belt.

I like the way he talked about an electronic vote. In his opinion, how could that have been implemented? There is certainly a lack of will from the government. If we already managed to do the impossible, which turned out to be not so impossible after all, we can certainly do more.

I would like to hear what the member has to say about that.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question, which I find most relevant.

Indeed, if we were able to deal with the technology to allow virtual sittings and a hybrid Parliament, we would also have been able to deal with the technology to vote electronically.

Therefore, it was not a technical problem that prevented us from reaching an agreement on how members vote. It is simply a false argument that we are being given today to explain the fact that we will be working in committee of the whole, rather than in a virtual or hybrid Parliament. That argument does not hold water. They just did not want to find a solution.

The best way not to find a solution is to send it to committee. The committee will consider the issue. No one asked the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to consider the issue of a virtual Parliament. No one asked the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to consider the issue of a hybrid Parliament. We racked our brains, hunkered down and found solutions.

There is a real rush to muzzle Parliament. Once again, I find this extremely disappointing.

• (1715)

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague's speech with interest. It is true; he is very eloquent.

Government Orders

I really appreciated two expressions. The first: necessity is the mother of virtue—sorry, of invention. Sometimes it could be virtue, depending on the person. If necessity is the mother of invention, I think it is good news for workers that we are aiming for a minimum of 10 paid sick days per year.

Then, we will ask the federal government, Quebec and the provinces to sit down together, take stock of these social and human necessities, and invent a solution.

That is our goal because we are humanists, we are progressives, and we want to help people who are struggling. We want to make sure that people have sick leave so they are not forced to go to work for fear of not being able to pay rent or buy groceries.

Why should everyone not have that right? Yes, let's get together and talk about it.

The second expression I really enjoyed was putting the cart before the horse. I agree with that as well. If we did not find a solution that would allow every member to be able to vote in a hybrid Parliament, then it makes sense to have a committee think about it and find a solution.

Maintaining a Parliament, whether it is hybrid or not, without remote or electronic voting, will not work. We need to consider this and not put the cart before the horse.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I will not spend too much time on the second part of the question. I believe I have answered that fully.

I think if we found solutions for the virtual Parliament and the hybrid Parliament, we could have also found solutions for electronic voting. There was no reason to defer that until later by referring it to a committee.

As far as the objectives are concerned, again, I completely agree: It is important to set objectives. I have to say that my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, like all my colleagues from the Liberal Party and the New Democratic Party, got the wrong Parliament. It is not up to this Parliament to set this type of objective.

I almost feel like saying to my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, and he will not like this, “Jean Chrétien, be gone!” Jean Chrétien once said that the best part of being at the federal level is that we are the ones who make the decisions but then it is provinces who have to enforce them. That is exactly the same reasoning underlying the intervention of my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie.

It is not for us to set these objectives. It is up to the provincial governments and the Government of Quebec to make these sorts of decisions. It is not up to the federal government to say what objectives the provinces must meet. It does not work like that. Actually, yes, it does work like that unfortunately.

It should not work like that in a real federation where there is a division of powers between the central government the government of the states that make up the federation.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to see you again live and in person.

Today, May 26, is a historic day for the people of Rouyn-Noranda because one year ago, we were the Memorial Cup champions. It is difficult to speak in the House without alluding to that. The good thing about this pandemic is that we will be able to say that we were the champions for two years. However, it is too bad for a great captain like Rafaël Harvey-Pinard, who will not have the chance to lift the cup two years in a row or on two different teams.

I am here to speak to the bill, of course, but also to analyze what we have experienced and what has happened in recent weeks, and to talk about our role as parliamentarians.

First of all, I must mention that the funding measures for businesses and organizations offered by the federal government have been as numerous as they have been disparate. Many businesses and organizations are still struggling to keep up, since the measures are changing every day. That said, it is a good thing that they were changed, because sometimes they were not at all adapted to the reality of businesses and organizations. This is an example of something we have not been able to debate and on which I did not have much opportunity to speak.

I also have the privilege of sitting on the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology. I want to acknowledge the chair of that committee. I have the privilege of sitting on this committee, which has resumed sitting and has the opportunity to work on sectors that are essential to the prosperity and survival of Canadians and Quebecers. We have been able to address a number of issues that are particularly important to us.

As we reflect on a virtual Parliament and remote attendance, I want to point out that the chair is doing an exceptional job. There were some technological problems, especially in the beginning. High-speed Internet is not available in all regions. If there is one thing this pandemic has shown us, it is that we urgently need to invest a lot of money to reduce wait times and to ensure that all Quebecers and Canadians have access to a good Internet connection. That is essential for carrying out our role as parliamentarians.

During this pandemic, people who have to telework are seeing their Internet and cellphone bills skyrocket. Their data is on a saturated network, and they are unable to get the same quality of service. That is not even counting those who have no Internet access whatsoever.

We have heard testimony on this subject from many citizens, professors and committed people from my riding and elsewhere in Canada. I hope we will study this issue. Many ministers have mentioned that, like the Bloc Québécois, they believe that high-speed Internet and the cell network are essential services.

During meetings of the industry committee, we had the opportunity to discuss several subjects, in particular assistance for farmers, which is clearly inadequate. We also discussed our concerns about data protection.

Government Orders

I would like to digress for a moment. If not for the fact that the committee I sit on resumed its work, I might not be so aware of this issue as a parliamentarian. Why does the House not ask itself the fundamental question of what will happen to our data? Google, Apple and other companies are considering data traceability, which worries me. There is an issue of professional ethics. If I were to contract COVID-19, would my medical records belong to me or to the government?

This is a fundamental ethical question that we are not talking about. Based on what we are hearing, the debate could start next week. However, we will not be able to do our jobs as parliamentarians because we do not have a place to do so.

When we are sick, who owns our data? Do they belong to the government, in order to protect society in the event of a pandemic? This is a fundamental question that could set an extraordinary precedent. This worries me a lot.

• (1720)

At the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology, we spoke about innovation. The idea of a green recovery, particularly in the supply chain, is one that is dear to my heart. Self-sufficiency, particularly food self-sufficiency, our sovereignty and the protection of our borders are important issues. We need a place to debate them. As I said, I am a privileged parliamentarian because I am part of an important committee. However, not everyone has the same power to defend their constituents. It is very frustrating to be an MP during this pandemic. We all experienced it when we had to defend inadequate programs, for example. We saw that the CERB was tax free in the beginning.

Businesses that offer essential services were calling us to say that their employees no longer wanted to work. That was fair, since they were worried about contracting COVID-19. That is understandable, but at the same time, these employees thought that they could make more money by staying home than by going to work. That was not so long ago. We understand that the programs were put together on the fly. It could not be helped. In two days, the benefit went from being tax free to taxable. As members, we act as intermediaries for our constituents. We need to answer for that. It is frustrating. We saw all kinds of flaws in the programs but were unable to express ourselves in the House and tell the government that some things were not working. I think it is important to mention that.

Take, for example, assistance for small businesses. For partnerships and business owners who pay themselves in dividends, it took a long time. They had to be supported and given a message of hope. I have always loved and hated the slogan “Everything will be all right” because it implies a somewhat naive view. At the same time, it is important to stay hopeful.

I will give some examples. For fixed costs, most economic measures are in the form of credit. This option does not help the recovery. Every business owner knows that it is risky for a small business to offset a loss of revenue with credit. It only increases debt and payments over the long term and hinders a successful recovery. The Bloc Québécois proposed that the government adopt a subsidy program that would cover a portion of the fixed costs of SMEs and organizations. Our objective was to prevent SMEs and organizations from making up for their lost revenue with credit when they

resume operations, as it would only increase their debt load and the burden of their monthly payments. I would have liked to be able to debate that here.

Creating a tax credit that is 50% refundable on fixed costs would have been a more appropriate and effective solution. When we talk about negotiations amongst smaller committees, including with the leader, there is give and take, and common sense does not always prevail. That is something I learned during this crisis.

The commercial rent assistance is not effective. Many SMEs and organizations do not qualify. According to the latest survey by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, 51% of property owners are not using the Canada emergency commercial rent assistance program because they have to assume 25% of the cost of the rent. Of course some property owners refuse to apply for the program. Once again, support for fixed costs would have been much more appropriate and more universally available to organizations and businesses.

In contrast, we have the regional relief and recovery fund, which was not debated in the House. That one is a good program because planning for recovery is more complex than getting a regular loan from a financial institution. The CFDCs' analyses of financial requests are key to an economic recovery that must succeed. That is the right approach. CFDCs are local. They are in touch with people and businesses. They have the right tools, and they can get money out the door fast, but they all say that the deadlines are too tight. Meeting with businesses, assessing their situation and making decisions by July 15 is a tall order. Where can I raise that issue?

Generally speaking, programs were announced hastily and rolled out much more slowly. People have to go all over the place to access the money, and deadlines are tight. None of this is conducive to a real and sustainable recovery.

I have lots of other concerns, such as programs not being a good fit for community and cultural organizations, many of which slipped through the cracks. The available funds do not always encourage organizations to innovate and adapt since project management makes our organizations more vulnerable than they already were because of their independent financing.

• (1725)

Many other issues required our attention. I am thinking of the situation of Air Canada, which I mentioned earlier, or that of Canada Post. Why does it cost less to ship a parcel from another country than to ship it from Canada? It is because of agreements. I do not understand it, but that is what is currently happening. That is not how we are going to help small businesses.

Government Orders

In conclusion, I would like to tip my hat to the people in my riding, who have shown a great deal of patience and have been able to readily adapt to all the economic and health measures put in place by governments. Our lives have been turned upside down by the crisis, both at work and at home. Many organizations are at risk. I would like to applaud the resiliency of my constituents.

• (1730)

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, if we have the opportunity to resume parliamentary work in committee, to legislate, what would my colleague like to look at? As my hon. colleague from Montarville said earlier, we are first and foremost legislators.

For several weeks and even months now, all we have been talking about is COVID-19. That is only natural because public health is a priority. However, we need to look at other issues. The crisis is becoming an excuse for everything. I am thinking about the environmental policies that have been delayed for various reasons, about a number of policies that were supposed to be put in place and about the many bills whose introduction has been delayed.

I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about that.

What bill would he like to work on?

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent question.

The most important issue right now obviously is health. That has already been made clear.

As an MP representing a region, I would like us to be able to ensure equity and the same dignity for all Canadians when it comes to accessing an essential service such as a cellular network and high-speed Internet. I think there are people in all 338 ridings in Canada who do not have access to these services.

As far as the programs are concerned, there is currently a long-term vision. The plan is to connect 95% of Canadians by 2030. However, I do not get the impression that there is a willingness to invest new money.

How can we deem a service essential and not want to invest new money into it? That makes no sense. Several ministers have acknowledged that it is an essential service. They need to be serious and table a budget bill, for example. We need assurance that the government is going to be accountable.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. I also want to congratulate his local hockey team, which won the championship for the second consecutive year. That is wonderful.

My colleague raised some important points. The government had to act fast. It made announcements quickly, but it was not able to keep its promises right away. It often changed the rules and the criteria along the way.

My team in Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie noted that people were very confused for a long time. The Liberal government unfortunately chose one approach and did not consider the universal programs that the NDP was proposing. We ended up with a patchwork solution.

As for the arts and culture, the \$500 million announced by the Minister of Canadian Heritage represents a 25% increase of all existing programs. I think that this situation calls for much more targeted measures. I spoke about that earlier, and I would like to hear what my colleague thinks.

For example, what is being done for people who take part in festivals all over the world? Festivals have been shut down, and no one can even fly anywhere. This includes festivals in Quebec. Every summer, there are tons of cultural activities in Montreal, and I am sure there are also some in my colleague's riding. What is being done for people who had planned on exhibiting their paintings or sculptures? Everything has been cancelled, and we have no idea when those activities will resume.

All those people who did not participate in programs in the past have been completely forgotten. I would like to hear what my colleague thinks the Liberal government could and should be doing.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie for his excellent question. Honestly, it is something I wonder about daily.

I regret not being able to welcome you to the food fair in Ville-Marie this year. We made plans to meet there when you were elected.

It is an example of a fantastic celebration. It is a food festival. It is a festival where people get together. Obviously there is a financial loss associated with not holding an event like that. The same thing is happening everywhere. How will we ensure the survival of these events in the long term? How will the tourism industry bounce back?

We have to consider that it takes people working year-round to put on an event in July, or any time. How will all that be supported when the event is not held and there is no revenue? It is going to take direct grants.

The tourism industry is currently looking into promoting inter-regional tourism. That is a very interesting model, but there is no answer for now, and the uncertainty felt by every Canadian, every business owner, is untenable.

• (1735)

[*English*]

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am so proud to stand here and represent the amazing people in Elgin—Middlesex—London.

Like many other members, I would like to start by talking about my incredible staff who have helped so many people through this pandemic. I send a special thanks to Cathy, Jill, Jena, Charli, Kim and Scott who have really kept my feet to the ground in ensuring the people of Elgin—Middlesex—London are served during this pandemic. I would like to send them my absolute thanks, and thanks on behalf of all 116,000 constituents as well.

Government Orders

Today we have talked a lot about the role of a parliamentarian. I know, like others, some of us have come with a background of what a constituency office looks like. In the last two months, I have been a constituency assistant. I went back to a role I did for 11 years. I was a receptionist, I was whatever they needed me to do.

As a member of Parliament, we have two very distinct roles. One role is to serve our constituents and do what they need. We attend important events or have meetings with our mayors and stakeholders and we ensure their voices are heard in Parliament. Part of that role at the constituency office is also being the liaison with departments such as the Canada Revenue Agency, immigration or Service Canada. We have many roles.

My greatest role is to be the voice of Elgin—Middlesex—London in Parliament. That is why it is very important that Parliament resumes. Following this vote tonight, we know we will be back in our ridings doing work, but once again, limited to the work we can do.

I would also like to thank my husband. This morning Mike was installing proper protocol in my office so we can serve our constituents, starting June 1. I thank my husband for putting up Plexiglas, which is very important. Serving our constituents has to be safe.

Through this pandemic, I have listened to people talk about social versus capitalist, all of those ideas, whether one is NDP, Conservative, Liberal or Green.

I want to read a post from earlier today. This is from a friend of mine, Cindy Watters-Carroll. She is not part of the 1%. She is a single mom with two grown boys. Her son A.J. is a tattoo artist, and I would like to thank him for doing my tattoo on mental health. He is a wonderful man.

Both Cindy and A.J. are in businesses that cannot reopen. This is what she sent me earlier, “I fear for small business owners, even with the slow return to our businesses, how do we survive the economic massacre that will follow for years? Yes the government is helping albeit not enough, but what happens after they allow small businesses to reopen at only half capacity? They will not help financially then, we small business owners will struggle as the economy and everyone else struggles. Canada is in debt and not just a little debt, so as we move forward over the next year(s) the help for small businesses will be gone. The cost off PPE and extreme cleaning procedures is very expensive and adds to our overhead, all while we take in even less income from working at half capacity and take in less income from those that now choose only to shop on line.”

These are the kinds of challenges we are beginning to see.

Back at the beginning of January, my husband and many of his colleagues started businesses. He started a massage therapy business. Out of his graduating class, many of those people rented spaces and started their businesses. For two months, many of these graduates were up and running businesses.

This group, until just a couple weeks ago, was not able to get any support from the government. They had worked for two months. Very few had reached that line of \$5,000, because they had been in

school for 22 months. I took it upon myself, on behalf of the graduating class, to write a letter, saying that this was a missing group. What is really important is that I do not know if they spoke to any other members of Parliament, but they spoke to me and I wanted to ensure their voices were heard. I sent that letter here along with many other letters from constituents in which they expressed their concerns.

That is what Parliament is here for. It is not just about answering the questions. It is about what do we do to find solutions. I do not think the government recognizes that there are 338 parliamentarians, all with incredible backgrounds and skills. Whether they were lawyers, doctors, real estate agents or anything else, we all have something to offer, not just the people sitting at the cabinet table.

● (1740)

Those are concerns I have as we talk about why it is great that we are getting more opportunities to ask more questions. However, I am not just about questions. I also think I am part of the solution, and that is something that I am really hoping the government will understand.

Prior to this pandemic, we spoke to agricultural producers. We know there were issues in the dairy sector, beef and pork specifically if producers are trying to ship their goods to China, and in my area, grains and oilseeds, which is very large. People could be beekeepers or working in many of the other sectors that are a part of the agricultural sector that is one of the backbones of Elgin—Middlesex—London. They had all of these concerns going into the pandemic. They had issues with their grain being stopped at blockades. All of these things were happening and the government did not do a lot about them. As we moved forward, the pandemic hit. Not only did producers have the first barrier of not being able to get their goods to market, they also had the other barrier of COVID-19. Now they have two strikes against them.

We talk about small businesses. I have heard many people talk about the decades of hard work by Canadians to feed their families and to provide jobs for their employees. Today, we have talked a lot about access to the programs for these businesses. I am sure that all 338 of us in the House of Commons heard about some of the eligibility requirements that just truly took so many of these small businesses out of the loop.

There are issues with personal bank accounts versus business bank accounts. I probably had at least 20 to 25 different business owners contact me specifically about that.

Government Orders

Of course, there is the payroll issue. When people are operating a small business, they may not pay themselves out of the payroll. I was a small business owner, and I can promise that making sure my employees were paid first was my priority, as it is for many small business owners. Not only is it embarrassing when they cannot give their employees a cheque to cash, but they know that the business is not going to survive and they hope there will be a job for the employees to come back to.

We can also look now at the commercial rent program put out just yesterday. There have been questions in the House about it. Many of us have been working on this file, recognizing that there is a huge gap. Tenants have been calling me asking me to please call their landlords and explain this program to them. There are many landlords who do not want to get involved with it. The fact is there is a 25% loss to landlords as well, so getting them to buy in can be difficult. We recognize there are changes being made to this program, specifically to the mortgages, but at the end of the day we know who is going to be hurt. It is going to be small business owners, all of the employees in that area and the communities that risk losing these incredible assets, whether it is a business that works in tourism or shops or art galleries. All of these places right now are at risk. These issues are once again a huge concern. This is not about capitalists versus small businesses, or about making certain types of income. All people, whether old or young, rich or poor, are being impacted in a different way.

I just want to give a couple of thoughts specifically on the CERB program. We recognized in the HUMA committee that the government did not do a gender-based analysis of this. I wonder, too, if the Liberals did that with the wage subsidy program or with the business assistance program for the operating costs.

Finally, I want to finish on a couple of things. Why is Parliament really important? Just a few minutes ago, I read that we are looking at Huawei. If there are not people in this place to hold the government to account, will the Liberals be allowing businesses like Huawei to set up? If we are off in our ridings working, how are we going to be sure that the Prime Minister is not making backroom deals with Huawei? Those are things that are really important and that Canadians are concerned about.

This is about our critical infrastructure that needs to be updated, and we know that. We know that because we are talking here today on why we cannot connect Parliament with the rest of Canada. I talked about the fact that I could not even have a staff meeting. I know that my friend from Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, whom I am sharing my time with, was dropped from our first call when we were doing this Parliament.

There is a lot of work to be done.

The COVID pandemic is occurring and we need to deal with it, but the world has not stopped. Human trafficking has not stopped. Businesses have not stopped. We have to realize that we have to work alongside this and take these proper precautions. I wish the government would change its mind and resume Parliament as necessary because there is a lot of work to be done, but, unfortunately, we will continue to be on hold.

• (1745)

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am really appreciative of the work by my colleague from Elgin—Middlesex—London. We share a boundary and work really well together. I hope that continues. It is very valuable to me that we can work across party lines for the benefit of people in London. I am glad she addressed the issue of human trafficking.

Although we disagree on how Parliament should go forward, we are doing that work together right now to ensure that we are holding the government to account and that programs and funding to address human trafficking do go forward. If the member could talk specifically about the impact that money would have on our London Abused Women's Centre, on the fact that we are on the 401 and there is a huge increase in human trafficking in our area, I would appreciate her thoughts on that.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Mr. Speaker, the London Abused Women's Centre is special in the hearts of anyone who has represented that area and all of the great work Megan Walker and her team have done.

Whether it is domestic abuse, sexual assault or human trafficking, we have seen those numbers rise during this pandemic. Unfortunately, the MAPI, the measures to address prostitution initiative, has been exhausted and the government has not implemented a program that would allow front-line workers to actually be able to work with sexually exploited people, whether they be young girls, young boys or women.

London lost the funding and luckily the community came together to support that program for one more month, but the government needs to step up. I believe the best thing we can do is to continue to voice that loss to the government benches, continue to voice the needs of the vulnerable young women and girls and to make sure there are people available to talk to them and to get them through this awful time and make sure they are not exploited by these creeps.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her excellent speech and comments about the need for Parliament to sit. I wonder if she could talk about some of the challenges her constituents are facing during this pandemic. Although there has been some support from the government, it seems that every time the Liberals roll out the support, there is a mistake they have to fix. Those things would have been dealt with had we been able to have Parliament sitting and to talk about some of the programs and deal with them as a Parliament. I am wondering if she would comment on that.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Mr. Speaker, I thank our incredible House leader. She has done a great job since she took on this incredible role, and on March 12 as everything changed, she made sure that we were all on the same page. I appreciate her incredible work.

Everybody has seen many challenges, but one of the biggest challenges is if people cannot get out to make a few extra dollars they may need. Whether they are on GIS or old age security or maybe are part-time workers, there are a lot of people who do not have the money they need.

One of the members from Saskatchewan talked about the child benefit and I wondered if I got the child benefit. Yes, despite the fact I am a member of Parliament, I was paid \$289 by the federal government last week for my 17-year-old son. People know how much money I make as a member of Parliament. What the heck do I need that money for when there are seniors in my riding who are going without food, when we meet so many people needing food banks? Yet the government sent me \$289 by way of the Canada child tax benefit, while giving our seniors \$300 in old age security despite the fact they are making less than \$20,000 a year.

This shows the incredible inequities, the scope of the fact that they have not looked into these programs and that a person making the amount of money I am making is being paid the same amount as a senior on old age security during this pandemic. Shame on you.

Not you, Mr. Speaker.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

• (1750)

The Speaker: I am glad the hon. member clarified that.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am also very pleased to join this debate. I want to note that within a couple of hours this will probably be the last debate we have in the House in a normal Parliament until September 21 because of the motion we are debating, which to me is quite a shame. I hope to talk about that a bit later in my speech.

I want to start by acknowledging the incredible work being done by our health care providers, the people who go to work every day, our grocery stores, which sometimes have customers who are feeling a little anxious, and the truck drivers who are having challenges finding basic things like washrooms and a place to buy their food. We all need to appreciate the amazing work they have done to keep us going for the last couple of weeks.

I also want to share my condolences with all of the families and friends who have lost someone to COVID. It breaks the hearts of everyone in the House to know that people who have lost a relative, friend or mother were not able to be with their loved one. Rather, there was someone dressed in protective gear, maybe holding a iPad with FaceTime up for those people, but they were not able to be there to hold the hand of their relative.

A lot of people have talked about their staff. I also want to do a shout-out about my staff both here in Ottawa and in my riding. What has not been discussed and what I want to talk about is what

Government Orders

the staff have been doing. Mostly, they have had to quickly transition to an adapted work environment. Then they have had to deal with probably the biggest volume of emails, phone calls and issues they have ever faced. I will give a couple of examples.

With travellers, for example, we have had hundreds of thousands of Canadians who were all over the world. Here I will acknowledge Global Affairs and the work its public servants have done in trying to help repatriate Canadians who were stuck in many places. I certainly have staff members who were up in the middle of the night phoning India to help support people through the process they had to engage in to get into the government system.

We had individuals who did not know where their next meal was coming from. They had lost their job, did not qualify for EI and were not sure how the EI and CERB were going to work, so my staff provided those folks with guidance, especially those with disabilities or those who had lost their jobs and were concerned. Unfortunately, Service Canada was closed and could not help those folks, so the staff helped them and the businesses. Who among us has not received a call from people who have put their life savings into a business that has been shut down and they do not know if it will open again or how they will survive, causing them pain and anxiety? The programs are helpful, but as we have already stated, some of them were flawed. Some of the flaws have been fixed, but there are still flaws in some of these programs that were brought in to see folks through these difficult times. Essentially, we had a country and global environment that was really upended very quickly. That is very important to know.

We talk about the role of a parliamentarian. I have to say I have been very appreciative of the opportunity to be home in the riding I represent for the last two months to focus on its needs and to help deal with all of the issues that were presenting themselves. Therefore, I appreciate the fact that Parliament had not been sitting over the last two months. However, I was thinking that it is time. I knew that May 25 was coming and that typically May and June are incredibly busy in the House and thought it was time. Things have eased a bit. We were starting to talk in our office about how we would reopen and we made the adjustments we needed to make, so it was time for Parliament to sit again.

• (1755)

When we saw the motion that the NDP apparently bought into and the Liberals presented, it was better than what we had been doing, but we need better than that. It was time to do better than what we had done. Yes, we had been having some committee meetings, but it was not Parliament. As our House leader likes to say, it is a fake Parliament. Her point is that it is not Parliament.

Government Orders

The Liberals have tried to present this as something where there is going to be so much more time for members to ask questions. To be frank, I would rather have less time to ask questions, because I am not particularly impressed with the answers we get, and more time for debate, like the debate we are having today, for the tools we have as parliamentarians to actually get answers to real questions and hold the government to account. What the Liberals have proposed is basically shutting down Parliament, except for one day with very prescribed circumstances so they can spend some money, and an opportunity for us to ask lots of questions and maybe every now and then be fortunate enough to get an answer.

It will be committee and questions. There are some committees that the Liberals have agreed can sit. To me, it has been a real puzzle. I am not quite sure of the dynamics in deciding which committees can sit or not. I sit on the natural resources committee, and natural resources are going to be incredibly important for the economic recovery of our country. We had a forestry industry in crisis and Alberta had significant issues. I can understand why the government would not want the natural resources committee to meet. It does not want to be embarrassed by what might come out of that committee. A few committees are going to meet, and we are going to have lots of chances to ask questions with no answers, but we are not going to have an economic statement or a budget.

My colleague talked earlier about private members' business. What about the bill regarding transplants? There are things happening in this country that are about more than just COVID. I know we have to be predominantly focused on COVID, but we need to also focus on other areas. Just yesterday, Liberals voted against allowing the special committee on China to look at the issue around Hong Kong. Perhaps an opposition day may have had a different outcome for that particular conversation. At least it would have provided an opportunity for some significant debate.

One of the most important things parliamentarians do is scrutinize the spending of the government. We will be back June 17, when there will be a process, I would say a sham of a process, to approve the estimates. For those listening, typically the committees that understand the departments, be it national defence or indigenous services, understand the spending and those budgets. They will typically have a minister come to the committee to defend the estimates to the committee, which can make changes. That whole process has been wiped out.

Therefore, we are not able to scrutinize the spending and we are not getting an economic update. The government is going to spend \$250-plus billion, taking our deficit to potentially \$1 trillion, and we will not be able to talk about that in this House. As we have seen in committees in the past couple of weeks, when the Conservative finance shadow minister asks questions, there have been very unsatisfactory answers from the finance minister. Therefore, there will be no debates on that particular area.

In British Columbia, there is the Wet'suwet'en agreement. That was done in secret with the hereditary chiefs. The elected chiefs are very concerned, but we are not going to be able to talk about it.

In closing, it is a difficult time for many. I know parliamentarians across this country are working very hard for their constituents in their ridings, but it was time for them to start working hard for them

here in Parliament and doing one of our fundamental tasks, which is holding the government to account. This motion is a sham. The NDP should be embarrassed to be supporting it, and the Liberals should be embarrassed that they are once again shuttering Parliament.

• (1800)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my colleague said she is eager to get back to committee work, and so am I. A firearms ban was introduced in recent weeks. As a member of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, I am eager to talk about that.

I am also a member of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources. Quebec has an amazing resource that could contribute so much if it were optimized. I am talking about the forestry industry, of course. It could be more profitable than developing other resources such as fossil fuels and oil sands. Given the opportunity, we can come up with solutions.

I would like to know my colleague's thoughts on fossil fuels because I think we are headed for a brick wall if we keep subsidizing them. Why not develop our forestry industry, which could really benefit us going forward?

[*English*]

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, I think this speaks to the arbitrary nature of which committees are going and which are not. I would suggest that the defence committee is absolutely critical and should be having conversations. I would suggest the natural resources committee. We were in the middle of a study on the forestry issue, and of course the forestry was in crisis before COVID.

The pulp industry is incredibly important for the production of the PPE that we use, the N95 masks. We need a solid supply chain. We should be looking at whether that supply chain is in jeopardy.

In terms of the energy industry, certainly my preference is that we would be looking at Canada, having New Brunswick and eastern Canada supported by Canadian oil. It is going to play an important role in the recovery of this country.

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member brought up a very poignant and all-too-familiar heart-break of seniors who have been left to die alone in long-term care facilities. I am reminded of my dear friend Mr. Lionel LeCouter, whom we lost just yesterday in a very similar situation, at a retirement centre in Hamilton where people were actually left to languish.

Government Orders

If we are still to go forward with the government's proposed position for the hybrid, what will the member and her caucus do to ensure that seniors who are languishing in our long-term care facilities and retirement homes are properly and well taken care of?

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, the report that was revealed today, and it sounds like the government may have had it for some days before it became public, was horrific and very concerning for all of us. I know that my colleague is new to the House, and he was not here when we were suggesting to the government that it be very careful about a state-owned enterprise purchasing 22 seniors residences throughout western Canada. He might be aware that four of those were taken over by the health authorities pre-COVID because of conditions similar to what we heard in this particular report.

We had warned the government, but I remember that the industry minister at the time said that it was not a big deal, that the provinces had excellent systems and excellent care and not to worry about it. We were suggesting that the government should have actually considered what it was doing. We have asked the Liberals if they did the 18-month review that they were supposed to do under the act. We are not able to find that out because, of course, we cannot ask an Order Paper question. The minister will give a fuzzy answer, but we will not be able to dig into whether they actually did what they were obligated to do under the act.

• (1805)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I must first mention that I will be sharing my time with my colleague, the hon. member for Longueuil—Saint-Hubert.

We are here today to debate a motion that would allow us to debate more often and at greater length in this place. Debate is what drives us, what drives democracy, and we look forward to doing it.

I remember seeing Gilles Duceppe's troops arguing with passion and guts when I was younger. Since October 21, my Bloc Québécois colleagues have been doing so well that we are very much looking forward to being here again.

Of course, circumstances dictate that we must find hybrid ways of doing things, not only to debate but also to point out the flaws in the government's response to the COVID-19 crisis. It is our job as parliamentarians to put forward proposals and ideas, and we have spent enough time in our ridings to understand how our constituents are dealing with the crisis and need help.

Directly on the ground, speaking virtually with local stakeholders, we can see that government assistance in times of crisis is extremely important, essential even. We are talking about the survival of small businesses and the financial security of our own people.

Since the crisis began, the federal government has announced many assistance programs. I am sure that most of my colleagues will agree or will have made the same observations as I have. These programs, as generous as they may be, are not suited to everyone. In my riding, Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, many people are still falling through the cracks.

Today I would like to talk about one example in particular, Gaston Berthelot. I briefly touched on his situation earlier today, in questions and comments, but I would like to tell the House more about him.

He is a 60-year-old paramedic. He has a congenital heart problem and had to stop working for health reasons, because he could have serious complications if he were to contract the coronavirus. He called Service Canada, and an employee told him he was not eligible for the CERB because it was his decision to stop working. His employer refuses to compensate him, and so does the government.

I will digress for a moment. We often seem to forget something of great importance in these times. What is being done in Quebec, Canada and elsewhere in the world, namely putting the economy on hold, is being done for the sole purpose of protecting people's health. However, those people in fragile health are the very people who have been forgotten. I am not going to dwell on long-term care homes in Quebec. The most vulnerable are in precarious situations and have been forgotten in this crisis.

Mr. Berthelot is at risk of serious complications. I am not the one saying so, but rather his attending physician and also a representative of the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada who was interviewed by Cieu FM, a radio station in Baie-des-Chaleurs that I want to salute.

I would remind members that Mr. Berthelot is a paramedic and that it is a little harder for him to telework. He is in direct contact with sick people every day. Therefore, he had to stop working, but not because he did not want to work. He tried to work. People who want to go to work are being encouraged to do so. The assistance programs are there for people who cannot go to work, but he was penalized.

In the case of Mr. Berthelot, the federal government has obviously failed. Why does he not qualify for the CERB just because he, himself, made the decision to stop working? This is nonsense to me.

Here we have a perfect example of someone who wants to work. We often find that certain program criteria are too restrictive for some people and too lax for others. You guessed it: I am talking about the Liberal Party of Canada and the Conservative Party, which will use the Canada emergency wage subsidy to pay their employees, but that is another issue I will not get into.

Mr. Berthelot is in a very unfortunate situation, being without pay for two months. He is not the only one in this kind of situation, because the government has also decided to close its Service Canada offices. That was justifiable early on in the crisis for reasons we can all understand, but as the lockdown gradually eases and certain sectors of the economy reopen, our local merchants are proving to us that it is possible to reopen businesses and serve the public by putting in place a number of health measures.

Government Orders

• (1810)

Services provided by Service Canada offices are fairly essential, especially in times of crisis. People often forget that about 45% of Quebecers are functionally illiterate, which means they struggle to understand what they are reading. That makes it virtually impossible for them to fill out forms online without help. Now those people are being asked to go online or call Service Canada, but it is practically impossible to get a hold of anyone there.

I do not know if you have ever tried it, Mr. Speaker, but I know a man in Baie-des-Chaleurs, Fortin De Nouvelle, who spent a whopping 18 days trying to reach an agent on the Service Canada line. He ended up calling my riding office, and of course my team rallied to help him out. We managed to put him in touch with an official, but we waited several days for a simple question, for a service that could have been provided while adhering to appropriate public health guidelines.

Forcing people to use online services completely ignores the reality of rural areas where, even in 2020, not everyone has Internet access. In my constituency office, we have received calls from families who were desperate because they could not register online, as they had no Internet access and could not talk to a Service Canada agent. Again, our office teams are taking action to help these people.

We end up wondering about the work that public service offices have to do and the work that constituency offices have to do. We want to be there for people, and it is our job to be there, but there is a certain amount of work in between that the government should be doing. These are not second-class citizens; there are no classes. They are entitled to effective service that should be available in times of crisis.

The solution is quite simple, and that is to reopen the Service Canada offices as soon as possible. I have just listed off some reasons, and it is possible to do so, unless the federal government has another motive, namely not to reopen them. I am thinking of the small regional offices, whose business hours have been cut back considerably anyway. Why not close them to save money? Maybe that is the government's reasoning. Who knows? If it wants to come clean, let it make the announcement and we will fight that battle.

Another one of the federal government's glaring shortcomings in this crisis is the silence surrounding the tourism industry in my region, the Lower St. Lawrence and the Gaspé Peninsula. We have heard my colleagues from eastern Quebec speak about this at length. Tourism is a major economic driver that is critical to our region's survival. In our region, it accounts for 1,500 businesses and 15,000 employees, half of them permanent. It also brings in 1.7 million visitors and generates more than \$6 million in economic activity each year. This is not insignificant for our population. The industry is in dire need of funding so that it does not collapse, so that it can restart and continue to showcase what the Gaspé and the Lower St. Lawrence have to offer.

We are still waiting for those announcements, because most of these industries are falling through the cracks of federal programs, again, because they are seasonal. Some of our businesses have been waiting for announcements and have been under stress since March 15, and there is still nothing for them. A vast number of pro-

grams have been announced for a vast number of sectors, but there are still people who do not qualify.

For a few weeks now in our region, the public health authorities of Quebec have set up roadblocks to prevent people from entering our region in order to protect the population. Only owners of a principal residence could travel there. The roadblocks were lifted on May 18, which caused a wave of concern in the region, and rightly so. People are worried. They want to welcome tourists this summer, but not at any cost. In order to reopen their doors and put health measures in place, restaurants, hotels and tourist attractions must have financial support, and they have yet to receive any.

The Gaspé and the Lower St. Lawrence are known for their lobster, but also their crab, a word that has a very particular pronunciation back home. Lobster fishermen were not fans of the assistance announced by the government, since it was too little. This industry sells the majority of its catch to the United States and has lost nearly all of its income. We are talking about tens of thousands of dollars. Furthermore, the measures that have been implemented are poorly designed, because the fishermen must be paid by percentage of catch and not by the week in order to be eligible for the program.

The measures for family-owned businesses are also poorly designed.

• (1815)

There are a lot of family-owned businesses in the Gaspé, fishermen with their sons or uncles, but they do not qualify either.

I will stop there. I think my colleague from Longueuil—Saint-Hubert will carry on. I shared a lot of examples to show that, regrettably, the federal government's programs are poorly designed; it is our job to make them better.

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her presentation. Clearly, the reality in the regions and in rural areas is quite different than that of large urban centres. My colleague said some measures were poorly suited, especially to the fishing industry. If she had had more time to continue her speech, what else could she have told us?

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for giving me the opportunity to continue what I was saying about something I care deeply about.

On most of the wharves in eastern Quebec, close to 50% of fishers are related. As I was saying, the crew members are often family members. It has been that way for generations. However, this means that they do not qualify for federal programs.

Government Orders

It is the same thing for a host of seasonal industries. I am thinking in particular of day camps, an issue that I have been interested in given my role as the Bloc Québécois youth critic. The Association des camps du Québec polled its members, and 71% of them will not be able to reopen despite the Government of Quebec's announcement giving them the go-ahead. They will not be able to reopen because they do not qualify for federal programs either, because they hire camp counsellors for only part of the summer, they are non-profit organizations, and so on. They have less revenue, because their revenue is in the form of deposits from parents. If parents cannot send their children to day camp, they will not put down a deposit, so the day camp will not have the revenue it needs to reopen.

There are many more examples like these, which show that the government could expand certain programs or make them more flexible, or provide direct assistance to those who need it most.

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her passionate determination to defend her constituents, to know her riding and to memorize her constituents' names.

I know she has another passion: the environment. I would like to hear her talk a little more about that. She ran out of time, and I am sure she would have done so if she had had a little more time. Would she not agree that it is about time we started talking about a green recovery once the pandemic is over?

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that my colleague is encouraging me to talk about this subject because it is another one of my passions.

It is crucial that we think about the future that we are going to leave to the next generations and even my generation. Unfortunately or fortunately, depending on how one looks at it, we are spending billions of dollars to help people in this time of crisis. By so doing, we are passing on a rather astonishing amount of debt to future generations. It is therefore time to think about our way of doing things and to come up with an economic recovery plan without forgetting about environmental measures. We have no other choice.

Shortly before leaving Parliament in March, I introduced a bill to compel the government to meet its climate change commitments. I was so looking forward to debating it, but we cannot do that in the current situation.

At some point, however, we will have to start talking about other subjects again, particularly the environment. That is absolutely essential. My colleague is working hard on a green recovery plan, and I am working with her. We are very much looking forward to debating it here in the House and to bringing forward suggestions, ideas and solutions that we will have no choice but to implement if we want to ensure a better future for generations to come.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie has the floor, for a 30-second question, followed by a 30-second response.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the pandemic and the current crisis have exposed all of society's flaws and failures, vulnerable populations, the

effects of privatization, the cuts and the austerity of unbridled capitalism.

Does my colleague agree with the NDP that things must not go back to normal, since what was considered normal before was a big part of the problem?

• (1820)

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his remarks. It is a very nice way of looking at things. I completely share his point of view. I think this crisis is the right time to rethink all the ways we do things, as I was saying earlier. Indeed, what was normal was not necessarily right.

We often talk about returning to normal after the crisis, but we do not want to go back there. Earlier today, I heard my colleague from Saint-Jean talk about the ice storm, and recall how quickly we forgot about it and went back to our old habits.

Our role as parliamentarians is to create something else, a different way of life from the one before. Of course, we would have preferred the pandemic not to have happened, but I think something good can come out of it, such as rethinking our way of life.

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the tone just changed. While I was listening to my colleague, I was thinking. As some of my colleagues know, I was an actor in a previous life. When I rise in the House, I always wonder if I am putting on a show for the camera or playing to the house.

Things are pretty strange right now. Because of the pandemic and social distancing, there are just 38 members here instead of 338, and right now it feels like I am playing to an empty house. This feels like the eighth performance of a pretty bad show that got panned by critics. The place is deserted, but nobody is going to listen to me anyway. Half the time, people are busy doing their own thing. Still, I hope people are following the debate.

I would be remiss if I did not begin my presentation by acknowledging Quebec's front-line workers, especially those working in our long-term care centres and hospitals, including all the orderlies, nurses and doctors. They are on the front line. We, meanwhile, are on the third or fourth line. It is hard to say. We are definitely an essential service, because we take care of the people.

That is the main thesis of my presentation. I think we must come back to this place. Parliament must resume its work. We must find ourselves face to face with one another, with people from the other parties, including the ministers and the Prime Minister. This is not about having little Zoom conferences for two hours a day only to turn around and negotiate behind the scenes. Parliament needs to do its work, because there are serious problems to address.

Government Orders

Let's back up a bit. I was commending the nurses. They are running the show. It is no small injustice in this crisis that the soldiers on the front lines, those who come out of the trenches and go to the front, are earning minimum wage. CHSLD workers earn \$13 an hour. That is an outrage. This is not Zimbabwe or Eritrea, it is Canada, the best country in the world, and yet the soldiers we send to the front lines are earning minimum wage.

Where is the answer to this crisis? It is here, in the House. We have been talking about health transfers for 30 years. Health care is underfunded. People are underpaid. We are looking for the problem in the CHSLDs. We all have a responsibility here to ensure that the federal government covers 50% of the provinces' health care costs to pay for doctors, hospitals, nurses, surgeons and orderlies. We must give them a decent wage. We have to take care of the people who take care of our people. Right now, the federal government is paying 23% of provincial health care costs. That is billions of dollars. What would we do with that money during this period? We would pay people well.

We all have the power here to change that. Are we going to use it, or are we going to continue to do little Zoom meetings from time to time, sitting comfortably in our living rooms, where we can see what books the ministers are reading and the hockey trophies they won when they were young?

We want to make meaningful decisions. We want to sit so we can take care of people's problems. That is what I am thinking.

I was speaking about nurses. I wanted to pay tribute to them because they are working on the front lines. We are debating whether or not we will continue with Parliament. In two months, the government signed cheques totalling \$300 billion. It threw together some laws. For years, we came here to debate and try to do things. Three or four public servants and two or three ministers got together and in two months cheques totalling \$300 billion were hastily signed.

● (1825)

That is unbelievable. They signed \$300 billion in cheques to solve some problems. We want to continue doing that because there will be more problems after the crisis. There are problems now and there will be some after.

Our nurses are dying. That upsets me. That is another thing. I do not think that anyone is at risk by coming here. It is always possible, but it would be an accident. We could get hit by a car on Wellington, but that is not very likely to happen. Young men and young women, who often come from another country, which is another issue, get up every morning and may contract a deadly virus. They can wear protective equipment, but it could happen anyway. No one here can say the same thing. Our job is make sure that they do not get sick. We have that power. The best way to pay tribute to all these people is come sit here to do our work, vote on legislation and distribute money. We were able to inject \$300 billion into the system. I think there is still some missing. Even today, long-term care homes in Quebec are having a hard time finding people. We have to find people, and for that we have to pay them. This money needs to go to serving these people, not into the pockets of the Liberal Party or the Conservative Party. People who are working need to get paid. That is what we want to do.

That is the kind of work I want to do. I want to come here and vote to give money to the people who really need it. It would be the best way to thank them. It is one of the needs that could be met.

I have three minutes left. I wanted to talk about housing.

An hon. member: Do not forget to talk about nurses.

Mr. Denis Trudel: I think I talked enough about nurses. That is one problem, but there is a slew of problems that could be resolved. We need to sit down here to do that.

Let's talk about housing in Quebec. There was a crisis, there is a crisis and there will be a crisis. Right now, we do not know what we are going to do, but all parliamentarians can take action in this regard. Three or four years ago, the Government of Canada implemented the national housing strategy. It promised that it would find housing for people, that it would take care of that. It allocated \$55 billion, which was spent all across Canada, except in Quebec. Over the past two months, it has signed \$300 billion worth of cheques. We need \$1.4 billion to house people who are going to end up on the street in two months. When will the government give out that money? People are going to be out on the street tomorrow morning. We know that. Just ask all of the organizations involved in housing, homelessness or low-income housing. In three months, these people will be out on the street. Just ask all of the food banks. The crisis is happening now, but it will start all over again in six months.

A woman from one of the food banks in my riding told me that if she does not bring in \$80,000 over the coming year, she will have to shutter the place. That woman feeds 100 people every week. Where will she find the money? On the housing front, Quebec needs \$1.4 billion to house its people. Just because of a flag, the government across the way is refusing to hand over \$1.4 billion even though it has pumped \$300 billion into the system over the past two months. That is unacceptable. Parliament must sit. We will not do this online. We need to be here, face to face, talking about what folks need and cutting people cheques.

● (1830)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one thing that Bloc members have in common with the Conservatives is their Confederation approach to dealing with things such as housing and health care. If it were up to the Bloc and the Conservative Party, there would be virtually no role whatsoever for the national government to participate in housing. As for health care, under the previous Conservative government there was a genuine lack of commitment to it, and the Bloc would suggest that the federal government has no role to play there.

Being a nationalist who believes in all regions of our country, I am very proud of the fact that we, as a government, have committed to a national housing strategy, lifting many people out of very serious situations. We have committed historic amounts of health care dollars. There were increases, actually, even though Bloc members will often say in their speeches that there were decreases.

All of the issues the member across the way talked about could be addressed if this motion were to pass. It allows for a wide spectrum, with debate, questions and answers, petitions from his constituents, members' statements and more.

I encourage the member to recognize the very nature of the pandemic and look at the motion as a way forward for us to ensure that the institution is providing a high sense of accountability. That is happening with this motion.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Trudel: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure I understood what my colleague said, since I switched over to the interpretation a bit late.

I will say it again. There are needs, especially with respect to housing. I did not mention figures earlier, but 150,000 households in Quebec did not pay rent in April as a result of the crisis. That is a whole lot of people. That figure comes from Minister Laforest, in Quebec City. On May 6, we already knew that people had not paid their April rent, even if they had received the CERB cheque. The same is true for May: 10% of Quebecers did not pay their rent. The figure for Montreal is worse, at 15%. That is not nothing.

I have some interesting figures from another study. In the past two months, 300,000 Quebecers went to a food bank for the first time in their lives. Three hundred thousand people were already using food banks, so that brings the total to 600,000.

I have one more thing I want to say about that. In a survey, people said they already knew that within a month of these measures ending, they would not be able to feed their families. These are real issues. I want to know how we are going to solve these very real problems, which are going to smack us in the face in the coming months. I want us to be able to talk in person.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When my colleague gets emotional, his voice gets a little raspy and he reminds me of Jean Garon.

I just want to say two things, Mr. Speaker.

First, I completely agree that we must improve the working conditions of front-line health care workers. These workers are often nurses or orderlies.

The NDP has been saying for a long time that we must increase provincial health transfers. However, with regard to increasing orderlies' wages, we should not meddle too much in provincial jurisdictions. I am nodding to my colleague as I say that it is Quebec's jurisdiction.

Second, two weeks ago, the government did an interesting about-face, and I would like my colleague to comment on that.

Countries such as Denmark, France, Poland and even Scotland stated that if businesses resort to tax havens, do not pay their fair share, cheat and do not contribute to the public coffers, they will not be entitled to government assistance.

The Liberals woke up one morning and announced that they were going to do the same thing. It took less than 24 hours before

Government Orders

we heard the “beep, beep, beep” of the government backing up. It was no longer going to do that.

I would like the member to tell me why he thinks that the Liberal government is incapable of mustering this political courage.

• (1835)

Mr. Denis Trudel: That is another thing I do not have enough time to talk about. I have eight pages of things that are not working in Canada during the pandemic, including tax avoidance.

Billions of dollars are legally held elsewhere. I am not even talking about tax evasion. This is allowed under tax laws. God knows that people who have that much money can afford the services of people who spend days finding loopholes in the law and figuring out ways to take advantage of them.

Earlier there was talk of what happens after the crisis and everything we might do, including with regard to the environment. We might also deal with tax avoidance. Is this not the right time to do that? We need billions of dollars, and billions of dollars happen to be lying around.

That is not what the government across the way is doing. It is even worse. It is giving money to those companies. We immediately asked them multiple times not to give money to people who avoid taxes. They told us no.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Edmonton Centre.

[*English*]

Mr. James Cumming (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a great pleasure to follow that very impressive intervention.

I will be sharing my time today with the member for Thérèse-De Blainville.

It is a great honour for me to rise today and debate this motion on the floor with my colleagues, but I want to start by talking a bit about my staff that is serving the great constituents of Edmonton Centre. Edmonton Centre is an urban centre that has certainly been impacted by COVID, and the work that they have put forward is quite remarkable. Along with my responsibilities as shadow minister for small business and export promotion, I have the added burden of trying to work through the issues with small businesses and trying to help those small businesses that are struggling throughout the country.

I also want to talk about the people who have had to make adjustments in this very difficult time. I have a very personal story on that. I have a son, Garrett, who has Duchenne muscular dystrophy. Garrett has been struggling through this difficult time with COVID, but he has managed to complete his masters in global security online. It proves to me that we can do remarkable things when we set our minds to it.

If Garrett were here today, he would tell members that I am his voice, and he believes I should be here debating legislation. He would tell me that is why I am here. That is what I should be doing: not serving on a committee, but debating legislation. That is important to him, and it is important to my constituents.

Government Orders

Conservatives have been calling for Parliament to get back in a full way to be able to debate legislation. Of course we want to do it in a healthy way, following all the particular guidelines.

This proposal by the Liberals is an improvement from what we heard before, but it still fails in that it does not allow us to debate legislation. With that, we miss other things. We miss opposition days. We miss emergency debates. We miss the opportunity to debate private members' bills, order publication of government documents and debate and vote on committee reports. We also do not have all the committees sitting, so it is not full Parliament: It is a committee.

On the notion of private members' bills, it is incredibly important for members here, and particularly for new members like me, to be able to put forward bills and have them be debated, which we have not been able to do. I happen to be one of the lucky people: I drew sixth in line.

The private member's bill that I put forward, if someone would like to look at it, is Bill C-229. It is a bill that we are really going to need as we come out of COVID, because we are going to have to generate enormous amounts of revenue in this country to try to get back on track. This bill repeals the restrictions on tankers off the coast of B.C. This is an incredibly important issue in my province and for the rest of Canada, because the resource industry in this country has helped to fuel a lot of the infrastructure, a lot of the things that we have come to enjoy and the lifestyle that we have come to enjoy.

There is another important private member's bill. It breaks my heart that we are not able to debate it and see it go through. It was from one of my colleagues who drew the number one spot. It is from the member for Calgary Confederation, on the establishment of a national organ and tissue donor registry in Canada. It is Bill C-210, and I am hoping my colleagues will support it, but we should be talking about it now.

We need tremendous oversight in these times, with what is going on with COVID. That oversight has to include watching the spending of the government. The Auditor General said he needs another \$10 million to properly do his job, to make sure that he can audit and do performance audits on those things that are important to this country. We are not able to pass any legislation. The Auditor General should be doing his job, and that oversight is even more important now, because we have heard from the PBO suggesting that there could be \$250-billion worth of debt.

• (1840)

In questioning the PBO at committee, the level of confidence on \$250 billion is very low. I suspect it could be at a three or a four. It is not just about the money; it is about how the money is spent and being accountable to the taxpayers. That does not even talk about the increasing household debt. It does not talk about the increase in provincial debt and municipal debt.

We need to see a budget. We need to be able to debate a budget, given the stresses of the economy, with a budget that will give a go-forward plan. Currently we do not have a go-forward plan. We have a reaction to the issue, but we need a plan to be able to understand where we are going and how we are going to come out of this.

We need to be able to debate this economic recovery after this first wave of the pandemic. What will happen to investments in the country, both the investments that we have now and the investments that have gone out of the country?

We need to talk about the debt that people are taking on. Almost every program is debt, debt, deferral; debt, debt, deferral. It is hard for businesses. They are going to have a hard time recovering from this.

Small businesses, of which I have been hearing from thousands, are working hard just trying to keep the doors open. These programs for further debt and deferrals are going to hit hard in September. We should be debating these issues. We should be talking about legislation to help those businesses before that happens in the fall.

Another point that the Liberals have been quiet on includes the changes to the Patented Medicine Prices Review Board regulations and especially for patients with cystic fibrosis. These changes incorporate new factors in determining whether a medicine is being or has been sold at excessive prices. The review board's changes would require patented drug manufacturers to significantly reduce their prices, a good thing, but making Canada a less attractive market to launch innovative therapies such as precision medicines that can alter the course of conditions such as cystic fibrosis.

The review board's changes affect private drug plans and patient access to new medicines for Canadians. These changes are currently on track to be implemented July 1. Already registration for new clinical trials have decreased by over 60%, from November 1, 2019 to February 29, 2020, because of these changes. These changes also affected the approval of new drugs, showing a drop of more than two-thirds.

One of the advocates to fight against these changes is Sandy. She lives in my riding. Her 14-year-old daughter, Laura, is battling cystic fibrosis. They, along with thousands of other Canadians, are fighting for access to a new drug called Trikafta, which has shown significant improvements in the lives of people suffering from cystic fibrosis by treating all cell levels and helping with lung performances. While other drugs in the past were treating symptoms, this actually improves lung performance and has been deemed the closest thing to a cure.

The parent company, Vertex Pharmaceuticals, has not yet applied to Health Canada because of the review board's regulatory changes, while it has been ready for approval in the U.S. market since last year. Canadians need access to this life-changing drug.

I want to acknowledge my colleague, the member for Parliament for Edmonton Riverbend, who has been working hard on this issue. These are the sorts of things we should be debating.

I ran for office and I came to this place to debate legislation. That is why I am here. That is what my constituents want me to do. They want me to serve them at home, but they also want me to serve them in this place and debate legislation. Let us get on with it. I know we can do it. I look forward to when we can actually debate legislation again.

Government Orders

• (1845)

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I had a conversation with a mom from Saskatchewan who is fighting for her daughter's life. She set up Cassidy's Lemonade Stand. Cassidy's mom is pleading to get Trikafta approved because this drug will save her daughter's life. She was crying and begging to me on the phone. I know that a letter was sent to the health minister, and it is unfortunate to see how slow the process is for getting this drug approved. It is disappointing, but we will debate these things.

The member for Calgary Confederation had a bill, and the member for Edmonton Centre talked about it earlier. The member from Edmonton is number six on the list. It is disappointing to see the NDP vote with the Liberals to prevent private members' bills from being debated in this place.

I am wondering if there are other private members' bills or other business items that are missing out because we cannot debate. Does the member see a missed opportunity there?

Mr. James Cumming: Mr. Speaker, of course there are all kinds of things we could be debating. A private member's bill is just one of many things. There are numerous bills that are life-changing for people. That is why we come here. That is why members put in private members' bills. They want to debate them and want to see that they at least have a chance of becoming legislation. As we delay, the likelihood of this happening diminishes. We should get back to debating those sorts of things in the House.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I heard the member say that small businesses are working hard to keep their doors open. I also heard the member say, in earlier comments, that businesses in his riding, such as hair salons, are looking for access to the Canada emergency business account that the government has put in place. As a reminder, these are \$40,000 loans that are made available to small businesses interest free and guaranteed by the government, of which \$10,000 is a grant if the remainder is reimbursed on time.

Is the member supportive of the changes we have made to the business account to make it more accessible, despite his comments about the deficit and the spending that our government is undertaking in response to the pandemic?

Mr. James Cumming: Mr. Speaker, I am glad we have a program in place that can allow people to borrow more, but if the member had listened to my speech, she would know the issue is not the borrowing. Businesses do not have the capital to generate the revenue to repay the loans. Granted, they have no interest for two years and then eventually have a market interest rate, but that is not what businesses need. They need equity. They need the government to start modifying these programs so that there is greater accessibility. We have been hearing for weeks that there will be changes to allow people to use personal bank accounts, but those sorts of things have not yet happened.

Businesses need certainty and they need this to be timely. The delays that are happening with that program are hurting businesses.

• (1850)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my esteemed Conservative colleague for sharing his time with a Bloc member. Everything will be all right.

I would like to look back in time, because there was a time when things were done right. March 13 was our last day in the House. After that, the country was put on hold. This break turned our lives upside down, our personal lives, our collective lives and our lives as members of Parliament, as parliamentarians. However, we were able to adjust.

I heard my colleague from La Prairie say that solidarity was one of the greatest strengths we showed during this time. I agree with him on that. What is more, we hope that we will be able to continue to work in solidarity after the crisis.

We also had the opportunity to talk about things that we needed to do. One of the things that we had to do was to allow for an exception regarding our role in the House. The Bloc Québécois helped with that. We had to give the House exceptional powers. I would like to remind my colleagues that, from an economic perspective, the current crisis is as significant as the Second World War. That is no small thing.

I thank the member for Longueuil—Saint-Hubert for his kind words about my previous career as a nurse.

With respect to health, we are dealing with a virus that we do not yet fully understand. That is why public health officials are asking the public to be cautious about reopening. We must keep this in mind, because it would be irresponsible not to do so.

That said, the government has brought in emergency measures. The Canada emergency response benefit had its problems at first, but then it became inclusive. The Canada emergency response benefit was intended primarily to address a flaw in the social safety net, a flaw in the employment insurance system. We realized that the EI system could not provide for the eight million workers who lost their jobs.

There is also the Canada emergency student benefit. We called for it because some students had fallen through the cracks. This benefit is more recent. The Bloc Québécois demanded that these support measures, which benefit workers and students alike, come with work incentives. We saw this coming.

I also want to point out that, on April 29, if I remember correctly, we were promised that we could keep doing our work as usual. That promise was broken.

The emergency wage subsidy started out at 10%, but we worked hard to push it to 75% and to make the rules more flexible so that more businesses could get it. We need to keep people employed for a strong recovery.

Government Orders

We never thought that the scope of the benefit would be expanded. When you eat your Smarties, you usually eat the red ones last. In this case, the Reds are eating first.

I find it disappointing and even indecent that wage subsidies meant to help businesses will be propping up partisan salaries.

At this point, I find it deplorable that no solutions have been found. People can no longer put their lives on hold and remain in lockdown. People need to “open up”.

• (1855)

Besides, our society is already doing it. It has begun in every province, and I would even say it was happening during the crisis, because we had Zoom.

Incidentally, Zoom is the first thing I would like to get away from.

Chambers of commerce and the municipalities had to respond to the crisis. Right away we saw people mobilizing to come up with solutions to address gaps and trying to think ahead, because everyone knew this situation would not last forever and one day the recovery would begin.

That is where we are in the House. If we want to think about the “now” and the “after”, we must take back our power to legislate. I will give some examples. One of my colleagues talked about this earlier, but I want to talk about the environment.

If we can envision a green, sustainable recovery, we also have to consider—and I will talk about workers because that has been my field all my life—how this transition can also be done for the workers. This is crucial, and it will require legislation.

The Canada emergency response benefit will end. Our federal employment insurance program as we know it will not be able to respond to everyone when the CERB ends because it leaves behind primarily women, who are most likely to hold atypical and part-time jobs and who are therefore excluded, because workers in the seasonal industry are currently in the EI spring gap when pilot projects were ending on May 20 but for which there is still no answer, and so forth.

We are talking about sick leave. If there is one measure that people needed before and we could put in place it is special sickness benefits, which are only 15 weeks and should increase to 52 weeks.

For that we need a Parliament that legislates. We are going to need permanent, lasting and predictable measures if we want to avoid another wave, another pandemic. Some are already saying that there is going to be another wave in the fall. We hope not. There also may not be one, but we have to be able to prevent it. We cannot do that just by asking questions, by wondering what works and what does not and how we might react.

I want to talk about what is happening with businesses. We are seeing more and more bankruptcies. More and more businesses will not be able to survive and are filing for protection under the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act.

What happens to the pension plans, to workers' nest eggs? On top of losing their jobs and earning wages well below the value of

their work, they are at risk of losing their nest eggs if we do not protect pension funds.

There are many things we should have been debating, but instead, the Prime Minister decided to be opportunistic by touting the 10 days of sick leave—which we certainly support—knowing full well that this requires amendments to each of the provinces' laws. It is impossible to impose this, and he was bound to get agreement.

This makes me angry, not because this is not an important issue, but because it does not fit in with what we should have been doing today in the House. We should be deciding that we can and must resume work in Parliament because we have a duty to implement long-lasting, sustainable and predictable legislative measures. We cannot take a piecemeal approach.

• (1900)

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her inspiring speech.

I am going to go back to something she said just to expand on it a little.

My colleague stated that she detests Zoom meetings. There may be a second wave and we do not know what the future holds. There may even be a case of COVID-19 in Parliament one day, which would force us to actually physically close Parliament. We do not yet know.

She also spoke about very important bills that we could have debated.

Although she hates virtual meetings, I would like to know what she thinks of a hybrid-format Parliament where we could have debates both in person and virtually.

Ms. Louise Chabot: Mr. Speaker, it was truly heartfelt.

Our role as members is also to take care of others. The political role also entails getting together with people, being with them and socializing. How many events and presentations have we had to cancel? We now have to meet on Zoom. I completely agree that we need a hybrid format where electronic means are available. That is also something that we have to provide for and put in place because it is very likely that this will last much longer than what we would like. We will take whatever time is necessary before being physically present in the House, which is impossible to do right now with 338 members.

We must allow this, and we could have been proactive in asking that it be worked on. I will be very pleased if we have both.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

Government Orders

Regarding one of the last points she raised, I have to say that one of the things I like best about being a politician is going door to door. I have a feeling people might not be too keen to open their doors and shake our hands. We will have to rethink how we do a lot of things.

Regarding how we do things, I am having a hard time understanding the Bloc Québécois's stance, which seems kind of contradictory at the moment. We are indeed legislators. That is our role, and we want to debate legislation, but because there is no safe way to vote on legislation, what is the point of debating it if we cannot vote?

Ms. Louise Chabot: Mr. Speaker, we must plan for that. Already, in the House, we thought that virtual meetings were impossible. I remember the debates. We could not conceive of doing it virtually. We thought the world would be turned upside down and the technology would not work. Now we see that it is possible. We therefore must plan for that kind of voting, and we are open to electronic voting.

We cannot do so if we do not change how we vote, which could involve some kind of hybrid Parliament. It will be impossible to conceive of any kind of recovery if we do not give ourselves the ability to act using our legislative power. We must therefore work on this.

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in another life, my colleague was a nurse, and my colleague from Longueuil—Saint-Hubert just paid her a beautiful tribute. At least she knows what it is like for people on the front lines. She knows the needs, or what the needs were in the past, and I do not think much has changed.

She must surely agree that health is a provincial jurisdiction. I heard an NDP member earlier say that the pandemic knows no jurisdictions, but it seems to me that the federal government is the one that knows no jurisdictions, as it encroaches on Quebec's jurisdictions.

Does my colleague agree that the federal government should use this crisis as an opportunity to increase health transfers to Quebec and the provinces?

• (1905)

Ms. Louise Chabot: Yes, Mr. Speaker, absolutely. That should have been done long ago.

I was a nurse in my previous life, and I also took part in a number of commissions of inquiry on health care systems, in my province, Quebec, and also across Canada. I can even say, since I am a young person with experience, that I presented a brief to the Romanow commission, the last major commission of inquiry in Canada.

Even then, a minimum threshold of 25% was recommended. Above all, the three factors recommended were stability, sustainability and predictability. However, health transfers have been reduced. We are below the 25% and we have already been below 20%. To meet health care and social services needs in each province, it is imperative that Canadian health transfers be increased by 6%.

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Shefford.

I would like to begin by thanking the people with whom I work in my riding office, namely Célia, Caroline, Joël and Daniel. They have all been doing an extraordinary job since the pandemic began. They are there to listen to and comfort people. They are also trying to sort out the mishmash of measures that are announced day after day, when, in the end, the measures take effect two or three weeks later.

It is not always easy to respond to our constituents. The riding of Repentigny, like all ridings, has many industries that were quickly affected by the pandemic. In Repentigny, there are a lot of SMEs. That is why fixed costs are a problem. The government has not made any improvements yet, despite all of the proposals we made.

Repentigny is a riding that has areas that are largely agricultural. There again, very little new money was distributed.

It is a riding rich in culture. It is home to major institutions such as the Théâtre Hector-Charland, the Centre d'arts Diane-Dufresne, and Aramusique, which disseminate culture. What is going on with culture right now? Some measures were announced in the last budget, but since we cannot discuss them right now, those amounts may not be protected.

I am obviously going to talk about the environment because the environmental destruction that we are currently seeing is also destroying the systems that support us and keep us alive. We are destroying these systems and life on earth, including human life. That is what is currently happening.

The environment cannot be subject to political compromise. The cause of the pandemic is debatable. However, a growing body of research is showing that the majority of infectious diseases are transmitted from animal to man and vice versa. That was the case with Ebola, avian flu, SARS and probably this new coronavirus. This is happening because we are interfering with biodiversity and natural habitats and because of unchecked urban sprawl, intensive animal husbandry and poaching. Environmentalists have long condemned these practices.

Some are also saying that we have no way of knowing what viruses will be uncovered when global warming melts the permafrost. We cannot see the forest for the trees. The impact of the immediate effects of the virus tends to eclipse the much more profound and lasting environmental problems that are not unrelated to our current crisis. Governments were quick to impose draconian measures to combat the novel coronavirus. I cannot wait to see whether, after the crisis, they will be just as quick to bring in measures to combat climate change.

Government Orders

We know that many biologists predict that there will be more pandemics in the future given our relationship with wildlife, the overcrowding of livestock in farms and so on. We might want to start by acknowledging that and then being proactive. This crisis is related to climate change, the collapse of biodiversity, and the rise in extreme events. The outlook is grim. Human and animal health as well as that of our ecosystems and the economy go hand in hand.

The government is forming a post-crisis and economic recovery committee. It is made up of the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, the Minister of Infrastructure, formerly minister of environment, and the Minister of Canadian Heritage, given his knowledge and experience in the matter. What is this? How is it that the Minister of Natural Resources is not included?

Eventually they will reach an impasse. Who will win? Who will get the final word?

The Bloc Québécois has taken the green recovery seriously. We see the environment as a holistic issue with connections to all the other issues. We have already had a few Zoom meetings about that.

• (1910)

Whatever happened to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development? It has stopped meeting. It is not there anymore, and not for lack of asking. The Bloc has asked for it.

It is being said that oil companies lobbied the government particularly hard in April. That is what I read in the Hill Times. Do the Minister of Environment and Climate Change and the government realize how important it is to fight climate change, or are they going to pay more attention to oil lobbyists than to science?

During the lockdown, we heard some great things and some positive news about the environment. For example, the canals in Venice ran clear; the mountains were visible in Wuhan; the Acropolis rose crystal-clear above the sea in Athens, Greece; city air was less polluted. This is all likely to be short-lived, however. Less pollution for the time being will not slow down the climate crisis. As all the experts say, a temporary reduction in emissions does not matter nearly as much as an ongoing, sustainable reduction.

What will make a difference is the recovery plan. Will we move towards a green recovery or a brown recovery? In all the newspapers, many studies and articles have been published calling for a green recovery. Apparently, in 2020, greenhouse gas emissions have dropped by 4%. However, they need to drop by 7% in order to meet the Paris targets. I am not saying we should stay confined for a year. Measures can be taken, and there are things we can do before the end of the year.

A research scientist with Environment Canada reminds us that air pollution in Canada's big cities has dropped by roughly a third since the pandemic began. It is great that we are breathing cleaner air. Health and the environment are closely linked. According to Health Canada, 14,000 Canadians die prematurely because of pollution. Globally, that translates to millions of premature deaths because of pollution.

The Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment, the Association québécoise des médecins pour l'environnement and

the Canadian Medical Association have joined 40 million health care professionals from 90 countries in calling for public health and the environment to be at the heart of the economic recovery. Will anyone listen? I am very eager to see what the government's recovery plan is.

There is also the economy. The managing director of the World Economic Forum said:

We now have a unique opportunity to use this crisis to do things differently and build back better economies that are more sustainable, resilient and inclusive.

Here are some ideas of what we can do. We can increase the carbon tax. Yes, I said it. We can penalize long-distance imports by companies that are not good environmental stewards. We should provide support to develop compostable containers and packaging, limit the use of fossil fuels, implement energy retrofit incentive programs, improve insulation in buildings, build public transit infrastructure, share assets, and provide support for low-carbon infrastructure. There are more. This is but a short list.

It is true that the pandemic has created a crisis. Now it is time to be accountable, and that is why the Bloc Québécois will vote against this motion. We want to be able to have a more robust discussion about what will happen in the economic recovery. Will it be green or brown? I repeat, we want to have a more robust discussion on the promises that were not kept and all the environmental issues. We want to be able to move motions, draft laws and hold the government to account. The formula being discussed here will only limit our members and our interventions.

This is the 21st century. We should find a formula that lets everyone participate and advocate for issues, ask questions, get answers and introduce bills.

• (1915)

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my colleague mentioned the bills that, sadly, we will not have an opportunity to discuss because the House will, for all intents and purposes, be shut down and restricted only to question period.

Just as an aside, I would like to respond to my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie. We already have the in-person sitting set-up, which allows for some voting. That is in place until we come up with an alternative. That is something that could have been done.

I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on private members' bills and have her go over what the Bloc Québécois had on its environmental legislation agenda.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her question.

Government Orders

One of the first 10 bills the Bloc Québécois would like to debate is by my colleague from Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia. Her bill would force the government to respect its Paris commitments and therefore adhere to its greenhouse gas reduction targets. It is an interesting bill that includes accountability. If the government fails to meet its targets, it has to explain what steps it will take. That means we can track changes in our fight against greenhouse gas emissions year over year, and that would give Parliament a chance to debate it.

Another bill that we put forward deals with jurisdiction. The federal government's areas of jurisdiction give it priority over what happens in the provinces, particularly when it comes to the environment.

A private company in Limoilou refused to talk to an environmental inspector from the Government of Quebec on the pretext that the environment was an area of federal jurisdiction and that the inspector had no right to be there. This company was responsible for the red dust that was settling all over Limoilou, on window sills and balconies. The case spent a lot of time winding through various courts before ending up before the Supreme Court, which refused to consider the case, thereby maintaining the most recent previous ruling, which gave Ottawa priority in environmental matters.

Quebec therefore has no power in this area because it has been stripped of its authority to defend the environment for the sake of the health of Limoilou residents, and this situation applies to the entire province.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech, which clearly demonstrated her interest in and passion for defending the environment. I obviously share that interest, since I was the NDP critic on that file for many years.

What is more, I really like her bill on the Paris targets and the need to table annual reports in that regard. I tabled the same bill in June 2019, before the last election. It is a very good bill.

As for House procedures, I think we need to acknowledge that we cannot continue to function with the maximum number of members currently authorized to debate and vote in the House, specifically 10% of the total number. That is discriminatory towards the other 90% of our colleagues, mainly those who live in remote areas and have a hard time getting here.

We need to find other solutions. I think the motion moved today allows us to continue to hold the government to account while tasking the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs with coming up with a way to have hybrid debates that meet public health guidelines, as well as secure hybrid voting. That solution does not exist at this time. We are therefore at an impasse, and we will have to wait for the committee's report to see how we should proceed.

• (1920)

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie for his question.

At one point, we were told that we could not have video conferences or virtual sittings of Parliament or the Special Committee on

the COVID-19 Pandemic. However, all that was implemented quickly. I do not see why we would still need God knows how much time to implement something else. We have already managed to do it, and it went well. We got everything together in a short amount of time, and we got to question the minister for five minutes.

This is the 21st century. We should be able to do what is needed. Britain has developed a hybrid Parliament, and other countries have done so as well. I think they can vote, and they found solutions. Do we really need to delay all that even further instead of speaking out right now, instead of being able to ask questions right now and voice our concerns, especially about the economic recovery?

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I may be a bit more brief than some of my more eloquent colleagues, but I still wanted to add my two cents to conclude this important debate.

I would like to add my voice to those of my colleagues who said that they have been working harder since the beginning of the crisis, and I, too, would like to thank my assistants: Ruth, Sandra, Maxime and Arnaud. Like me, they are listening to the people of Shefford.

This is already my fourth visit to Parliament since the beginning of the crisis. I came here mainly to debate improving seniors' purchasing power, but I was also able to support my colleagues who came to talk about additional targeted help for sectors that are still greatly in need of assistance, including the agricultural industry, which is so important in my riding; research; science; and tourism, which is at the heart of Shefford. In short, I think I managed to convey my requests to the government. However, if the government was unable to keep its word, that is a sad reality for our democracy.

I will therefore address three concerns in my short speech today. I will talk about seniors, women and others who have been forgotten in this pandemic.

While everyone else is talking about lifting restrictions and a very gradual return to normal, the situation remains tragic for many seniors who are still dying in conditions unworthy of a developed nation. The stories we have heard from people working in long-term care centres are shocking and appalling. I feel I have to say it again: The government should have done more for seniors who are isolated at home. The government should have extended measures to help seniors and used the crisis to keep its election promise to increase old age security benefits and enhance the guaranteed income supplement.

Government Orders

It is true that measures were implemented for seniors, but at the eleventh hour. The financial assistance that we asked for many times finally arrived. It was needed, but it fell short and too many questions remain unanswered. The old age security pension and the guaranteed income supplement were increased, but only temporarily. Seniors' needs, however, are not temporary. Far too many seniors have lived in inexcusably precarious conditions since before the COVID-19 crisis. What is more, the cost of groceries, medications and housing continues to increase. Many people are receiving the \$2,000 Canada emergency response benefit. However, in some municipalities and larger cities, this is not even enough for adequate housing. I am giving a nod to my friend Denis Trudel, as I am taking up this fight with him. It is a problem in my riding of Shefford.

While the government clearly indicated that the increase is only temporary, we do not yet know exactly when it will start, when it will end and under what conditions it will be extended. This is all important information that a responsible government should have provided a long time ago.

All these unknowns are sources of additional stress that our seniors really do not need right now, and things that the government could easily avoid. It was, however, a very legitimate condition for work to continue, especially since the Liberals had committed to this in a motion.

The current assistance is not only imperfect, but also insufficient. Despite our repeated requests, the government's inaction on the health transfers file is damaging and will continue to be damaging. The situation has become sadly ironic. Quebec was supposed to receive money from the federal government that would have allowed it to take better care of its seniors before the pandemic. Increasing health transfers is a unanimous request made by Quebec and the provinces.

Internet access is another thing the Bloc Québécois has been calling for since long before COVID-19. This is even more important now, and it just might be enough to make the government want to follow our advice quicker.

First, if the Internet had been deemed an essential service when the Bloc raised this concern, that would have allowed seniors to break the isolation they feel in normal times, but even more so these days. The Internet is necessary for the small things in life, such as staying in touch with loved ones, the new trend of tele-parenting. The Internet has also allowed some to say their final good-byes via video call, while many people are dying these days without being able to say goodbye to their loved ones.

There is also the whole issue of the closure of Service Canada offices, which happened back home in Granby, leaving several people to fend for themselves when they have to navigate the different measures being offered. Illiteracy, connectivity problems and lack of money to gain access to technological tools are just a few examples of the problems people without help are facing.

This crisis is exposing our collective failures by disproportionately impacting the most vulnerable; in fact, that might just be the nature of crises. I hope that, like me, you will think about the living

conditions of our seniors, but we must also talk about other inequalities.

During this pandemic, we realize that it is much harder for people with a low income to protect their health by physical distancing and self-isolation.

I will now talk about the different, perhaps more subtle, but equally worrisome situations that women are in.

• (1925)

The structural disadvantages in our workplaces mean that women are more likely to work in essential services, putting their health at risk to ensure our survival. For example, I am talking about orderlies, nurses, and I want to give a shout-out to my colleague Louise, nursing assistants and doctors. Women are more likely to be employed part time and are more vulnerable to the crisis. Many of them are refugees. My colleague Christine Normandin moved a motion about this.

Women are more likely than men to be unemployed in recent—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Longueuil—Charles-LeMoine on a point of order.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: I would just like to mention to my colleague opposite that we cannot use members' names in the House.

The Deputy Speaker: Members should indeed refrain from naming their colleagues. They can refer to them by their riding name or by their title in the case of a parliamentary secretary or minister. I thank the member for Shefford for not repeating this mistake.

The hon. member for Shefford.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Mr. Speaker, I will not do it again.

As a result of systemic disadvantages, women have not had access to the help they deserve. It is necessary to be aware of the realities women face and the injustices in our society to see what I am talking about, not to mention all the victims of domestic violence who are confined to their homes.

That is why we also hope to provide funding to organizations working to meet the increased demand. The funding would have to be provided through the Canada social transfer, or CST, so that it can be administered directly by the provinces, since this falls under the jurisdiction of the provincial governments and Quebec. What is more, the provinces and Quebec are in the best position to identify these women's needs and allocate the funding more efficiently.

Government Orders

The gender-based analysis plus helps document these injustices, and that is why we hope it will be applied in each component of the government's response to this crisis.

In closing, I would not want to forget the cases that are falling through the cracks. For example, tourism operators in my riding could use more assistance for fixed costs, and businesses in Shefford could have benefited from a CESB that provided more incentive for students to work. That would have helped a lot of employers replace employees while they are on summer vacation or even fill positions created under the Canada summer jobs program, for example. That is a big puzzle. Unfortunately, I am also thinking about a young man with autism who does not qualify for any program and is wondering what he will be able to do this summer.

In closing, the crisis has brought to light our collective failures, but it also provides an opportunity to build back better. We need to seize this opportunity. We should be outraged about our failures, and that outrage should push us to build a decidedly greener post-COVID-19 society, using money taken from tax havens so that everyone pays their fair share, and most importantly, a society that stands in greater solidarity with seniors, women, workers, business owners, artists, farmers, the less fortunate and others.

Let's take action.

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Shefford talked about women and the systemic inequalities that persist to this day. Just yesterday, the Minister of Natural Resources celebrated the second anniversary of the Equal by 30 campaign, which was launched in partnership with the Government of Sweden in May 2018.

Right now, just 23% of employees and 18% of executives in the clean energy sector are women. That is less than in other sectors. I wonder if Canada would like to show some leadership. Research proves that putting women in charge of companies is good for everyone.

What should the Government of Canada do to give women a better chance, especially during a crisis? I would like my colleague to comment on that.

• (1930)

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question, which hits home for me.

I hope that the Standing Committee on Status of Women will be able to resume one day. This is one of the committees that is not expected to resume work in the short term. I had already started talking with my colleagues on the committee about increasing women's participation in businesses and on boards of directors and about getting women out of the cycle of poverty. That is also what it is about, and these are important issues. When we talk about post-crisis resources and when we talk about all of the committees and all of the measures that will be taken after the crisis, we will have to take gender equality into consideration.

The Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

[English]

The Speaker: The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Speaker: Call in the members.

• (1935)

[Translation]

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

(Division No. 26)

YEAS

Members

Amos	Anand
Atwin	Bendayan
Bibeau	Blair
Boulerice	Dhillon
Duclos	Duval
Freeland	Garneau
Hardie	Holland
Hussen	Iacono
Lamoureux	Lattanzio
Lebouthillier	Mathysen
McCrimmon	Miller
Ng	Rodriguez
Romanado	Scarpaleggia
Singh	Vandenbeld— 28

NAYS

Members

Barlow	Bergen
Bezan	Blanchet
Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)	Cumming
DeBellefeuille	d'Entremont
Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)	Genuis
Gill	Gray
Harder	Kurek
McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)	Normandin
Rood	Schmale
Sweet	Therrien
Vecchio	Wagantall
Waugh— 23	

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Government Orders

Accordingly, pursuant to order made earlier today, the House stands adjourned until Wednesday, June 17, 2020, at the conclusion of the proceedings of the Special Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic.

(The House adjourned at 7:36 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Tuesday, May 26, 2020

Business of the House

Suspension of Certain Standing Orders for Current Sitting

Mr. Rodriguez	2399
(Motion agreed to)	2399

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Parliamentary Budget Officer

The Speaker	2399
-------------------	------

Government Response to Petitions

Mr. Lamoureux	2399
Motion	2399
Motion negatived	2400

Questions on the Order Paper

Mr. Lamoureux	2400
---------------------	------

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Proceedings of the House and Committees

Motion	2400
Mr. Barlow	2400
Mr. Lamoureux	2403
Mrs. McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)	2403
Ms. Pauzé	2403
Mr. Green	2404
Mr. Alghabra	2404
Mr. Sweet	2406
Mr. Angus	2406
Mrs. Vecchio	2406
Mrs. Atwin	2407
Mr. Scarpaleggia	2408
Mr. Waugh	2408
Ms. Larouche	2409
Ms. Mathysen	2409
Mr. Therrien	2409
Mr. Lamoureux	2410
Mr. Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)	2411
Ms. Normandin	2411
Mr. Lamoureux	2412
Mr. Barlow	2413
Ms. Lattanzio	2413
Mr. Angus	2414
Ms. Larouche	2414
Mrs. Gray	2415
Ms. Bendayan	2415
Ms. Harder	2416
Mr. Scarpaleggia	2417
Ms. Harder	2417
Mr. Angus	2420

Mr. Lamoureux	2420
Mr. Trudel	2421
Mrs. Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)	2421
Mr. Scarpaleggia	2421
Mr. Perron	2422
Mrs. Vecchio	2423
Mr. Boulerice	2423
Mr. Amos	2423
Mr. Lemire	2424
Mr. Sweet	2424
Mr. Green	2425
Mr. Lamoureux	2426
Mrs. Gray	2426
Ms. Michaud	2426
Mr. Angus	2427
Mrs. Romanado	2428
Mr. Perron	2429
Mr. Bezan	2429
Mr. Lamoureux	2431
Mr. Perron	2431
Mr. Angus	2431
Mrs. Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)	2432

Vote on Motion to Proceed to Orders of the Day

The Speaker	2433
Mr. Holland	2433

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Front-line Workers

Mr. Lamoureux	2433
---------------------	------

Sex Selection

Mrs. Waganall	2434
---------------------	------

Community Service

Ms. Vandenberg	2434
----------------------	------

Air Transportation

Mr. Lemire	2434
------------------	------

Asian Community

Mr. Hardie	2434
------------------	------

Bob Pitzel and Hugo Alvarado

Mr. Waugh	2434
-----------------	------

Farmers in Alfred-Pellan

Mr. Iacono	2435
------------------	------

Kanata—Carleton

Mrs. McCrimmon	2435
----------------------	------

Scleroderma Awareness Month

Mr. Sweet	2435
-----------------	------

Science

Mr. Amos	2435
----------------	------

Louis-Saint-Laurent	
Mr. Deltell	2436
Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
Mr. Schmale	2436
Leonard Rodrigues	
Mr. Green	2436
Canada Emergency Response Benefit	
Mrs. Gill	2436
Nova Scotia	
Mr. d'Entremont	2437
Paramedic Services	
Mr. Drouin	2437

ORAL QUESTIONS

Seniors	
Mr. Scheer	2437
Mr. Trudeau	2437
Mr. Scheer	2437
Mr. Trudeau	2438
Mr. Scheer	2438
Mr. Trudeau	2438
Ethics	
Mr. Scheer	2438
Mr. Trudeau	2438
Mr. Scheer	2438
Mr. Trudeau	2438
Employment	
Mr. Blanchet	2438
Mr. Trudeau	2438
Mr. Blanchet	2439
Mr. Trudeau	2439
Seniors	
Mr. Singh	2439
Mr. Trudeau	2439
Mr. Singh	2439
Mr. Trudeau	2439
Mr. Bezan	2439
Mr. Blair	2439
Mr. Bezan	2439
Mr. Blair	2440
Finance	
Mr. Deltell	2440
Mr. Morneau	2440
Mr. Deltell	2440
Mr. Morneau	2440
COVID-19 Emergency Response	
Ms. Bergen	2440
Mr. Duclos	2440
Ms. Bergen	2440
Mr. Duclos	2440
Ms. Normandin	2441

Mr. Morneau	2441
Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship	
Ms. Normandin	2441
Mr. Blair	2441
Health	
Mr. Waugh	2441
Ms. Hajdu	2441
Mrs. McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)	2441
Ms. Hajdu	2441
Foreign Affairs	
Mr. Sweet	2441
Mr. Garneau	2442
Mr. Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)	2442
Mr. Rodriguez	2442
Health	
Ms. Mathysen	2442
Mr. Duclos	2442
Mr. Duvall	2442
Mr. Duclos	2442
Transportation	
Mrs. Lalonde	2442
Mr. Garneau	2442
Agriculture and Agri-Food	
Mrs. Vecchio	2443
Ms. Bibeau	2443
Mr. Barlow	2443
Ms. Bibeau	2443
Public Safety	
Mrs. Wagantall	2443
Mr. Blair	2443
Mrs. Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)	2443
Mr. Blair	2443
Intergovernmental Relations	
Mr. Therrien	2444
Mr. Duclos	2444
Mr. Therrien	2444
Mr. Duclos	2444
COVID-19 Emergency Response	
Mr. Schmale	2444
Mr. Duclos	2444
Mrs. Gray	2444
Mr. Duclos	2445
Mr. Cumming	2445
Ms. Ng	2445
Canadian Heritage	
Mr. Scarpaleggia	2445
Mr. Duclos	2445
Access to Information	
Mr. Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)	2445
Ms. Hajdu	2445
Ms. Harder	2445
Ms. Hajdu	2446

Public Safety	
Mr. d'Entremont	2446
Mr. Blair	2446
Small Business	
Mrs. Romanado	2446
Ms. Ng	2446
Social Development	
Mr. Green	2446
Mr. Hussen	2446
Tourism Industry	
Mrs. Atwin	2446
Mr. Duclos	2447
Points of Order	
Oral Questions	
Mr. Bezan	2447
Mr. Blair	2447

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Proceedings of the House and Committees

Motion That Debate Be Not Further Adjourned

Mr. Rodriguez	2447
Motion	2447
Ms. Bergen	2448
Mr. Therrien	2448
Mr. Angus	2448
Mrs. Lalonde	2449
Mrs. Wagantall	2449
Mr. Bergeron	2449
Mr. Boulerice	2450
Mr. d'Entremont	2450
Ms. Normandin	2451
Mr. Deltell	2451
Ms. Lattanzio	2451
Mrs. Gill	2451
Mr. Angus	2452
Motion agreed to	2453

Proceedings of the House and Committees

Motion	2453
Mrs. Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)	2453
Mr. Lamoureux	2453
Ms. Harder	2454
Mr. Boulerice	2454

Mr. Sweet	2454
Mrs. Gill	2454
Mr. Hardie	2456
Mr. Cumming	2456
Mr. Boulerice	2457
Mr. Lemire	2457
Mr. Lamoureux	2457
Mrs. Wagantall	2458
Mr. Drouin	2459
Ms. Normandin	2459
Mr. Waugh	2460
Mr. Barlow	2461
Mr. Boulerice	2461
Ms. Chabot	2462
Mr. Bergeron	2462
Ms. Michaud	2463
Mr. Boulerice	2463
Mr. Lemire	2464
Ms. Michaud	2466
Mr. Boulerice	2466
Mrs. Vecchio	2466
Ms. Mathysen	2468
Ms. Bergen	2468
Mrs. McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)	2469
Ms. Michaud	2470
Mr. Green	2470
Ms. Michaud	2471
Ms. Chabot	2472
Ms. Pausé	2473
Mr. Boulerice	2473
Mr. Trudel	2473
Mr. Lamoureux	2474
Mr. Boulerice	2475
Mr. Cumming	2475
Mrs. Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)	2477
Ms. Bendayan	2477
Ms. Chabot	2477
Ms. Normandin	2478
Mr. Boulerice	2478
Ms. Michaud	2479
Ms. Pausé	2479
Ms. Normandin	2480
Mr. Boulerice	2481
Ms. Larouche	2481
Ms. Michaud	2483
Motion agreed to	2483

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