



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

43rd PARLIAMENT, 2nd SESSION

House of Commons Debates

Official Report
(Hansard)

Volume 150 No. 059
Tuesday, February 16, 2021

Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, February 16, 2021

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*Translation*]

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES (C), 2020-21

A message from His Excellency the Administrator of the Government of Canada transmitting supplementary estimates (C) for the financial year ending March 31, 2021, was presented by the President of the Treasury Board and read by the Speaker to the House.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the supplementary estimates (C), 2020-21.

* * *

[*English*]

CRIMINAL CODE

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-21, An Act to amend certain Acts and to make certain consequential amendments (firearms).

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

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INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, a report of the Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association respecting its participation at the first part of the 2021 ordinary session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, PACE, by video conference, from January 25 to 28, 2021.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, two reports of the Canada-U.S. Inter-Parliamentary Group.

The first report relates to the annual meeting of the National Conference of State Legislatures held in Nashville, Tennessee, U.S., from August 5 to 8, 2019.

The second report concerns the annual national conference of the Council of State Governments, held in San Juan, Puerto Rico, U.S., from December 4 to 7, 2019.

* * *

• (1010)

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

FINANCE

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on Finance, entitled “Investing in Tomorrow: Canadian Priorities for Economic Growth and Recovery”, the pre-budget consultation report prior to the 2021 budget, as ordered by the House.

It was a somewhat difficult trail to get to the conclusion of this report. COVID happened, scheduling changed and Zoom capacity in Parliament made it very difficult to find enough time. I want to thank the many organizations and individuals who submitted briefs, some 793 prior to mid-August, and also thank those who appeared over the summer on COVID-19, and the witnesses who were able to appear in the fall. A special thanks to members of all parties who put a lot of hard work and endurance into completing this task, and a very special thanks to the analysts with the Library of Parliament and the clerks who helped to finish this process.

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Orders 104 and 114, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 11th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding the membership of the committees of the House.

If the House gives its consent, I move that the report be concurred in.

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

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

There being no dissenting voice, I declare the motion carried.

(Motion agreed to)

Routine Proceedings

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if you seek it, I am sure you will find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That the membership of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs be amended as follows: Mr. Nater (Perth—Wellington) for Mr. Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George), and Mr. Kent (Thornhill) for Mr. Tochor (Saskatoon—University).

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

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

There being no dissenting voice, I declare the motion carried.

(Motion agreed to)

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BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties and, if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent to adopt the following motion:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order, special order or usual practice of the House, the time provided for Government Orders shall end no later than 5:30 p.m. today.

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

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

I declare the motion carried.

(Motion agreed to)

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Jag Sahota (Calgary Skyview, CPC) moved:

That the second report of the Standing Committee on Status of Women presented on Thursday, February 4, 2021, be concurred in.

Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Peace River—Westlock.

I am pleased to rise today to voice my support for declaring February 22 as national human trafficking awareness day. Human trafficking is the recruitment, transportation, harbouring and/or exercising control, discretion or influence over the movement of a person in order to exploit that person, typically through sexual exploitation or forced labour. It is often described as a modern form of slavery.

Human trafficking is not something Canadians think of often, if at all. When we do, we often think that this horrendous and dehumanizing crime is being committed elsewhere in the world: somewhere that is less fortunate and that lacks effective law enforcement. However, as the Conservative shadow minister for Women and Gender Equality, I have learned from several of my colleagues, including the member for Peace River—Westlock, and from stake-

holders and organizations across the country just how vast the human trafficking network is in Canada.

Statistics Canada's 2018 report on human trafficking indicated that 90% of human trafficking in Canada was reported in census metropolitan areas, and that 97% of victims are women and girls with 74% of them being under the age of 25. Of that 74%, 28% were under the age of 18. These numbers are absolutely horrifying and break my heart. These are not just numbers. These numbers represent somebody's daughter, son, grandson, granddaughter, niece or nephew. No one underage, particularly those who are trafficked, has the ability to consent to sexual acts or exploitation.

When I look at my party's record on this issue, I am grateful that we have taken this issue seriously and made significant overhauls to our Criminal Code to address this very serious crime. The member for Haldimand—Norfolk, during her tenure as the minister for Citizenship and Immigration and as minister for Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, introduced several changes to the temporary foreign worker program and the immigration act to prevent situations where temporary workers in Canada, including strippers, might be abused, exploited or possibly become victims of human trafficking.

In 2010 and 2012, former member of Parliament Joy Smith introduced and passed two private members' bills: Bill C-268, minimum sentence for offences involving trafficking of persons under the age of eighteen years, and Bill C-310, trafficking in persons. Bill C-268 amended the Criminal Code and set mandatory minimums for those who were convicted of trafficking anyone under the age of 18, while Bill C-310 addressed a major loophole in our Criminal Code and made sure that Canadians or permanent residents who went abroad for the purpose of exploiting or trafficking foreign individuals would be brought back to Canada for prosecution.

In 2012, our Conservative government launched a four-year national action plan to combat human trafficking. This included Canada's first integrated law enforcement team dedicated to combatting human trafficking, and increased front-line training to identify and respond to human trafficking, enhanced prevention in vulnerable communities, provided more supports for victims of this crime, both those who are Canadians and foreigners, and strengthened our coordination with domestic and international partners in combatting human trafficking.

Our Conservative government also recognized that the majority of people who are trafficked are trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation. This is why, when our government had to revisit Canada's law regarding prostitution and pass Bill C-36, the Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act, we put a heavy focus on protecting these victims.

Routine Proceedings

• (1015)

Until this law was passed, those forced into the sex trade were often treated as criminals by the law instead of being treated as the victims. This law was a made-in-Canada approach recognizing that those who sell sexual services are often victims of human trafficking and often underage. We recognized those people as victims of a more heinous crime, and instead of further victimizing the victim, our Conservative government focused on the pimps and the johns. This included those convicted of procuring, recruiting or harbouring another person for the purpose of prostitution, with a maximum penalty of 14 years in prison. If the victim was a child, the penalty carried a mandatory minimum sentence of five years.

We have done a lot to address human trafficking in Canada and stand up for the vulnerable in our society. However, there is still much more work that needs to be done.

Despite all of our hard work as parliamentarians, human trafficking is still a growing crime in Canada and remains very much below the public radar. At the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, one of the facts we have constantly heard from witnesses is the importance of raising awareness to help combat the prevalence of human trafficking. That is why I strongly support declaring a national awareness day. It would give us an opportunity to create an awareness campaign to educate Canadians that this crime happens and happens locally. It would show them the signs of someone who is being or is about to be trafficked and how to report that to the authorities.

The time is now to act on this very important issue. It has been over 16 years since Canada added human trafficking offences to the Criminal Code and 14 years since the House unanimously adopted a motion to condemn all forms of human trafficking and slavery.

The motion also calls for making February 22 the day to be declared national human trafficking awareness day. I believe this is the best and most practical day to use. The Provinces of Ontario and Alberta already use February 22 as the day to bring awareness provincially. Also, the government's own special adviser for combatting human trafficking has said that they would like to see this day declared as the national human trafficking awareness day.

• (1020)

There are several motions from all parties on the Order Paper: Motion No. 45 from the Conservative member for Peace River—Westlock, seconded by the Bloc member for Shefford; Motion No. 59 from the NDP member for Edmonton Strathcona, seconded by the Green member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith; and Motion No. 57 from the Liberal member for Scarborough—Guildwood, seconded by the Green member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith. All of their motions call for the House to condemn all forms of human trafficking and slavery, promote awareness, take steps toward combatting human trafficking and declare February 22 as national human trafficking awareness day.

Human trafficking is one of the most lucrative and quickly growing crimes in Canada. I hope all members of the House will agree with me and join me in declaring February 22 as national human trafficking awareness day.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague across the aisle highlighted the fact that a lot of people assume human trafficking is not something that can happen right here in our own communities. The reality of the situation is, as the data shows, that it can happen in my community, in her community and in communities right across Canada, and that it is actually happening.

If she had one message for families and people responsible for children so they become aware of this issue and recognize that it is a reality, what would that message be?

Ms. Jag Sahota: Mr. Speaker, the message would be that it is Canadian children and children from everywhere in the world who are being trafficked. This is not a message limited to Canadians; it is a message for the world. We need to protect our children, and awareness is the first step toward that. We should make sure we have a campaign, set on this day, to talk about becoming aware of the situation, how to identify where trafficking is about to happen and how to take steps to notify authorities so that it does not happen.

• (1025)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, quite bluntly, government and Parliament love symbols, so if we have a national day on human trafficking, we are all going to feel better. However, I have found that while we have laws on the books, nobody follows those laws. We are talking about having a national day to talk about this issue, when we are dealing with a company like Pornhub, which is owned by MindGeek, in Montreal. When I look at the Criminal Code, I see we have all the laws, but they have never ever been applied.

Would it not be better to spend our time in Parliament pushing to make sure we actually followed through with laws so that people who are victims of trafficking and sexual crimes know that Parliament will be there for them and that the laws we have on the books are being used to protect victims?

Ms. Jag Sahota: Mr. Speaker, that is exactly the purpose of setting February 22 as a national awareness day to talk about these things. We pushed for this motion to be passed last year, but it did not happen. We are already a year late. Let us get on with it and pass this motion to declare February 22 as the national human trafficking day.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is indeed 2021. Proposals were put forward in previous Parliaments, including a bill introduced in the 41st Parliament that did not receive royal assent.

A national day is a day that causes us to reflect, but what does my colleague think of the urgent need to enforce laws and modernize them to put a stop to all this?

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Ms. Jag Sahota: Mr. Speaker, it is urgency that has brought this motion to the House. As I said, we are already about a year late in setting a day to talk about human trafficking and creating a campaign to deal with it. There was urgency a year ago, and to wait any longer makes this even more urgent.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to this important concurrence motion moved by the member for Calgary Skyview. I would like to thank her for her work and the status of women committee for its work on this important issue.

Today we are discussing the recognition of February 22 as Canada's national human trafficking awareness day. Human trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery that turns people into objects to be used and exploited. It is vicious, profitable and growing, and it is happening right here in our country and across the globe. It takes on many forms such as sex trafficking, forced labour, forced marriages, organ trafficking and cybersex trafficking.

While exploitation and slavery have existed for all of humanity, so has the responsibility to abolish it. In the 8th century BC, the prophet Isaiah brought God's words to the people of his time, saying they should:

Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.

The responsibility to stand for justice and exploitation is a responsibility for all of us.

Here in Canada, human trafficking remains far too common. Within our ridings and across the nation, each day, more and more people fall victim to traffickers in Canada. I often say that human trafficking is happening within 10 miles of where one lives. Even in my large rural northern Alberta riding, human trafficking is taking place. Last year, the RCMP charged a 30-year-old man from La Crete, Alberta, with trafficking of a minor.

In Canada, 93% of Canada's human trafficking victims come from within Canada. The predominant form of human trafficking in Canada is sex trafficking. We know that in Canada, 97% of sex trafficking victims are women and girls. Three-quarters of these victims are under the age of 25. Fifty per cent of these victims are indigenous, and 75% of those in prostitution were forced into it as children.

Many examples of forced labour also exist in Canada. Victims of human trafficking can be found in restaurants, in the agriculture industry, in the mining sector, as live-in caregivers, or in the manufacturing industry. Just two years ago here in Ontario, over 20 men from Mexico were rescued from forced labour within the hospitality industry, enslaved in plain sight within hotels.

Globally, more than 40 million people are in some form of slavery today. That is more than the population of our country and more than ever in human history. Worldwide, slavery is a multi-billion-dollar industry that generates more than \$150 billion annually. These global and national numbers are truly terrifying. It is incumbent upon each of us to help end it.

That is why the designation of February 22 as Canada's national human trafficking awareness day by this House would matter. This is important because ending human trafficking cannot be done merely by governments alone. It requires the participation of all of us.

By adopting this motion, this House would not only be recognizing February 22, but also encouraging Canadians to hear from victims and survivors of human trafficking, raise awareness of the magnitude of modern-day slavery here in Canada and around the world, and to take steps to be able to identify and combat human trafficking.

As a national day of human trafficking evokes in all of us the responsibility to learn, educate and act, the words of this motion point to this individual and collective responsibility as a nation. That is why the all-party group to end modern-day slavery here in Canada, the APPG, has been hard at work to get February 22 designated as the national day of awareness. This date recognizes the unanimous adoption by this House of former MP Joy Smith's Motion No. 153, which happened back in 2007. That motion condemned the trafficking of women and girls, and called for Canada to combat the trafficking of persons worldwide. Joy Smith was the trailblazer in the fight to end human trafficking and is an inspiration to many of us today.

The APPG also consulted organizations and survivors from across Canada and the selection of February 22 was close to unanimous. The APPG co-chairs have produced motions since 2018 to designate February 22 as a national day of human trafficking awareness, and members will notice that currently there are three motions on the Order Paper tabled by Conservative, Liberal, NDP, Bloc and Green MPs, which is all five parties.

● (1030)

I would like to thank my fellow co-chairs for their relentless work: the member for Scarborough—Guildwood, the member for Shefford and independent Senator Miville-Dechéne. Each has worked hard to advance the recognition of February 22 as national human trafficking awareness day. I was delighted to see the status of women committee improve our wording by adding the necessity to listen to victims and survivors. Their voices are critical.

I would like to share with this House, and all Canadians, the words of Tímea Nagy, a tenacious Canadian survivor and hero, who said, "Having a national human trafficking awareness day would mean that we are no longer invisible to society and to the Canadian people. It would mean that more people would finally learn about this terrible crime and how to protect their children. It would mean that we are taking serious [action]...to eradicate this in our lifetime."

Routine Proceedings

An awareness day for human trafficking would bring us together as a nation to end modern-day slavery. It is a fight that unites us across political lines, and despite religious beliefs and geographical divides. Working together on this actually works.

We have seen this right here in Parliament with Bill S-216, an act to enact the modern slavery act. This bill is a result of the work of my colleague from Scarborough—Guildwood. It was introduced in the Senate by our Senate co-chair and supported by all APPG chairs. If we, a Conservative, a Liberal, a Bloc Québécois and an independent senator, can come together, I have great confidence in our country to unite and abolish human trafficking.

I want to challenge Canadians with four things they could do on Canada's national human trafficking awareness day: learn, share, act and support. Number one is to learn more about it. What does it look like in one's community or province? Would Canadians be able to identify a victim of human trafficking? Do they know of the national human trafficking tip line? All Canadians should visit The Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking website to learn more about awareness that can lead to action.

Number two is to share, to tell other people about it. Joy Smith always says that when it comes to human trafficking, education is our greatest weapon. Canadians can organize webinars for their churches, communities or workplaces. I would be happy to speak at that webinar, and I am sure that any of the APPG co-chairs would as well.

Number three is to act, to take steps to eliminate one's role in the fuel for the demand of slavery. Do Canadians know who harvested their coffee or the clothes they buy? Do they know that looking at pornography likely involves victims of sex trafficking? Canadians should make sure the choices in their lives reduce the demand for human trafficking.

Number four is to support. There are incredible organizations across this country that are fuelled by passionate individuals who are hard at work to end human trafficking and support survivors. They would benefit from people's time and support.

Recognizing human trafficking awareness day on February 22 would give voice to survivors, increase awareness, and unite Canadians in their efforts to abolish human trafficking and modern-day slavery in our time. I want to thank all the individuals who have worked tirelessly with me over the last number of years to bring forward an awareness day for human trafficking in this country and all of the organizations that work hard in their communities to end modern-day slavery.

One of the organizations I would like to highlight is the #NotInMyCity campaign headquartered in Calgary, Alberta. The ambassador for that program is a country music singer everyone may have heard of named Paul Brandt, who has done amazing work in bringing together all sectors of Canadian society to end human trafficking in Calgary. One of its really cool partners is the Calgary International Airport. One of the universities is also on board and helps out. It has been amazing project, and I want to congratulate them on that.

The other organization that I would like to recognize is called CEASE. It is located in Edmonton, Alberta. It does amazing work

helping trafficked victims get back to a normal life and reintegrate into Canadian society.

Finally, I want to thank the member for Calgary Skyview for her advocacy on this and her work at the committee to bring this forward. When we all work together, we can accomplish great things. I want to thank the House and colleagues I have worked with across party lines to bring this forward.

• (1035)

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague for his tireless efforts.

I ask him to reflect on one of the previous questions, which was to the effect that this is simply a day where we would raise awareness, and whether this is an effort that is not as vigorous as it possibly should be. In the context of Black History Month, 10 or 15 years ago, it was simply not recognized. Now it has had a significant impact on raising Canadians' awareness about the contributions of Black people to our country.

I am interested in his thoughts on how he expects this initiative of recognizing February 22 to roll out over the course of the next number of months, years and possibly decades.

• (1040)

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Mr. Speaker, I know the question hon. member is referring to. The member for Timmins—James Bay made the comment, and he was entirely correct. We have very good laws in this country to capture and build the society we want, but in many cases they are not being enforced or the police forces just purely do not have the bandwidth to enforce them. Therefore, an awareness day would allow each and every Canadian to do their part.

If human trafficking is not happening in Canada, we would not need really good laws to combat it. If it is just not happening, it is just not happening. An awareness day would really say that this is the law and that this is happening right here. Both those things are not necessarily widely known by Canadians. An awareness day would bring that awareness to the issue.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I commend my colleague on his speech. There is no question that this is a sensitive subject.

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In 2002, the House of Commons ratified the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons.

Every year, July 30 marks the World Day against Trafficking in Persons. It is now being proposed that we hold a national awareness day, and I think that is an excellent idea.

As my colleague said, former MP Joy Smith moved a motion in that regard in 2012. Then, Bloc Québécois MP Maria Mourani introduced a bill that passed through all stages except royal assent. At the time, the Harper government failed to complete the process. In 2015, the Liberal government failed to keep its promise to take up where we left off with that bill.

If we proposed to examine a bill that addresses many of our concerns regarding human trafficking, would my colleague and his party agree to that?

[*English*]

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Mr. Speaker, I know well the bill that the member speaks of, as it was one I advocated for immensely. The Liberals took the consecutive sentencing out of it, made it concurrent sentencing and waited three and a half years to bring it in.

The concern my colleague raises is a valid one. That bill should have been brought into force as soon as possible. The bill was passed in this place in 2014. It was supposed to be declared in force in early 2015, but it only happened until Bill C-75, which was at the end of the last Parliament.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I have had the honour to work with my colleague on the committee addressing human trafficking. I am very much in favour of the motion today. I appreciate the member for Peace River—Westlock mentioning things that individual Canadians can do.

Can the member underscore what people can do individually to end human trafficking?

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Mr. Speaker, one thing people can do is to keep their eyes open and listen if something is putting their spidey senses off and be aware of that. People need to know there is a human trafficking hotline. In the modern day with Google, we do not have to memorize that number because we can Google it, but people need to know that it is there. People should know there is a Canadian hotline to call if someone suspects human trafficking is taking place. If someone sees something, they need to say something. That is the biggest thing.

The other thing is that “stranger danger” is not always the case. In most human trafficking cases, the victims are being trafficked by somebody they know, so be aware of that.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I look forward to the opportunity to speak to colleagues in the chamber today.

I am here in two capacities, one as the member of Parliament for Scarborough—Guildwood, and the other as the co-chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group to End Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking. The APPG has two tasks, one with respect to supply-chain slavery and the second with respect to human trafficking. Today we are speaking about the second task, but I also want to take this opportunity to speak about the first a little later.

I do not know whether members know the name William Wilberforce and whether it means anything to them. To me he is one of the finest examples of what a determined non-cabinet member can do when the legislative odds are stacked against him or her. Wilberforce was the member for Yorkshire from 1780 until 1825, some 45 years. He was asked several times to become a cabinet minister in several different governments, but declined each time because God had set before him two great tasks, one of which was the abolition of slavery in the British empire. At the time, the British empire reigned supreme throughout the world. Its economic foundation was the slave trade. Slaves went from Africa to the Americas; then slave products came from the Americas to Britain; then the slaves returned back to Africa to pick up more slaves. The monies generated from those slave products constituted 80% of Great Britain's foreign income. Wilberforce set out to turn the economic underpinnings of the British empire on their head. It was a formidable task from a relatively weak position. However, with persistence, luck, procedural smarts and hard work he was witness to the passage of the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833. He died three days later.

I tell that story to say two things: first, that slavery is still not being abolished in Canada, and second, that persistence, hard work and some luck can yield results. Humans are still being trafficked in 2021. I know it is shocking and I do not know how a country like Canada that calls itself civilized can allow this to continue. Members will hear statistics repeated over the course of this debate and realize that statistics do not necessarily tell the entire story. Of the victims who are reported to police, 45% are between the ages of 18 and 24, and 97% are girls and women. According to a 2014 report by the Canadian Women's Foundation, 50% of trafficked girls and 51% of trafficked women are indigenous. These are statistics that, frankly, do not speak to the human suffering behind them. Stalin once said, “If only one man dies of hunger, that is a tragedy. If millions die, that's only statistics.” Let us not forget that behind every statistic is a human tragedy.

This day is long overdue. Initiated by Joy Smith, the former member for Kildonan—St. Paul, February 22 has been proclaimed by Ontario, Alberta, multiple Canadian cities and indeed the United States. Thanks to the persistence of my colleague, the member for Peace River—Westlock, the able assistance of the member for Shefford, Senator Julie Miville-Dechéne and the welcome support of the members for Edmonton Strathcona and Saanich—Gulf Islands, February 22 is about to be designated human trafficking awareness day.

• (1045)

I also want to recognize those who work with us on these initiatives. In my office they are Shawn Boyle, Jenisa Los and Inessa De Angelis, and in the member for Peace River—Westlock's office, it is Joel Oosterman. These are the kinds of initiatives that are really full-on efforts by entire offices, and I want to recognize each and every one of these people for their considerable efforts to make sure that we talk about this today.

This was originally conceived as a unanimous consent motion, and I particularly want to thank the leadership of the government for co-operating in this anticipated motion. The fact that the unanimous consent motion has been overtaken by this concurrence motion is irrelevant in the greater scheme of things, and the member for Peace River—Westlock can take some satisfaction for a job well done.

Shortly, members will hear about all of the government's efforts to rid our nation of this scourge. Some will criticize it as too little, too late, but just before members get too enthusiastic in criticizing the government, I would encourage them to look in the mirror. Governments, after all, are elected and reflect our priorities. Has human trafficking received enough attention? Of course it has not. Should it receive more attention? Of course it should. Will it receive more attention? I would like to think that our efforts today will help, and hopefully this motion will shine a light on this national scourge. That, after all, is the point of this motion.

At this point I want to turn to the other initiative of the APPG, namely, the effort to expose the supply-chain slavery in Canadian products. World Vision estimates that Canadians consume about \$34 billion in goods annually that contain some elements of slavery in the supply chain. World Vision further estimates that 1,200 Canadian companies are importing slave-made products, and the Walk Free foundation conservatively estimates that some 40 million people are enslaved globally.

Bill S-216, sponsored by Senator Julie Miville-Dechêne, and its predecessor Bill C-423, sponsored by me, stipulated that companies of significant size be required to report annually to the Minister of Public Safety that the company has examined its supply chain and is satisfied that no slavery exists in it. The bill has been enthusiastically embraced by many NGOs and corporations, all of which understand the moral hazard argument and the human rights arguments against slavery, but also find themselves in an economically disadvantaged position when competing with slave labour. Multiple examples have been highlighted recently in *The Globe and Mail*, the *Toronto Star* and by the CBC. We are urging the government to take over this bill, not only for its obvious human rights and moral arguments, but also because Canadian companies find themselves at a competitive disadvantage when competing with slave labour.

In addition, it should be noted that the Canadian government will be negotiating a free trade agreement with Great Britain in the next number of months. Great Britain has been a legislative leader in this field. Its own legislation is a model not only for our Bill S-216, but also for a number of other pieces of legislation around the world. Great Britain will be hosting the G7, and while no one publicly knows the agenda, Canada would be in a much better position

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if we had robust supply-chain legislation, rather than what currently exists.

In conclusion, I would urge my colleagues to support this motion. I encourage the good work of the APPG. In the words of William Wilberforce, "You can choose to look the other way but never again can you say that you never knew."

I thank the House for its time and attention.

• (1050)

Mr. Jeremy Patzer (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is great to hear that people from all parties are on the same page on this topic.

However, tangibly speaking, what are the next steps we need to take in Parliament? The member alluded to this in his speech, but could he elaborate further on what the next steps need to be and on what we should focus?

• (1055)

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, I would be very encouraged if enforcement mechanisms were stepped up. It is not as if this is an unknown problem; it is a known problem. It would be encouraging if, as a result of awareness, the Canadian public said to those enforcement agencies, whether the RCMP or others, that they want them to act on these matters. That would be a welcome outcome of this day where we recognize human trafficking.

The second outcome is, as I alluded to, with respect to supply-chain slavery. Not only is trafficking of human beings inextricably linked to supply-chain slavery, but supply-chain slavery is inextricably linked to human trafficking. Were the government to see fit, I think it would be a happy outcome if in fact Bill S-216 or some version thereof be adopted sooner rather than later.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I very much liked my colleague's speech and I am very pleased to be here today to speak to this serious and very sensitive issue.

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I agree on the importance of symbols and on establishing a human trafficking awareness day, but human trafficking is a crime, and when we talk about crime we must also talk about poverty. Beyond the symbolic nature of this awareness day, could we not invest heavily in anti-poverty campaigns? I am thinking of housing, groups that help women who are victims of domestic violence, addictions support groups and all these issues that contribute to the problem we are talking about today.

Does my colleague not think that we should be investing heavily in anti-poverty campaigns in Canada?

[*English*]

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, while not directly on point, the hon. member does make a valid point.

Certainly, the socio-economic conditions of any society writ large do yield to people being involved in things like supply chains of slavery or human trafficking. The people who are the victims of this clearly, in many instances, have little or no choice. The concept of consent is a bit dubious. It may be clear in lawyers' minds but nowhere else.

Clearly, many of the people behind the statistics cited by myself and other colleagues indicate that conditions of poverty yield these kinds of outcomes. In my judgment, it behooves us all to get behind a number of the initiatives that have been put forward with respect to poverty alleviation by this government and previous ones.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in my riding in London, Ontario, human trafficking is a growing issue of concern for sure. However, one of the major providers of programs and supports for victims of trafficking had its funding cut. A previous government gave funding under a project-based funding model, and the current government did the same thing. However, right in the middle of a pandemic that funding was cut. The program providers were scrambling to try to find alternate resources, and ultimately that impacts those victims of human trafficking.

Maybe the member could talk about the impacts of governments not providing core, long-term, operational-based funding and what his government is going to do to resolve that.

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, I have been made aware of this issue by my Liberal colleagues in the London area. It certainly does seem to be a regrettable situation. I cannot speak specifically to the issue raised by the hon. member, but funding is certainly one element of ensuring that the consequences of human trafficking are mitigated and alleviated.

I am concerned that we sometimes have these programs after the horse is out of the barn. It would be much better if in fact people did not find themselves in situations where they are effectively and without their consent forced into situations, which, in 2021, every one of us would find appalling.

• (1100)

Mr. Garnett Genus (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I found my colleague's discussion on the economic impact on the British Empire of the abolition of slavery or the potential impact particularly interesting. I know a bit about the story of Wilberforce, but this was a detail of which I was not aware.

It really underlines how doing the right thing can often involve economic sacrifice and we should not pretend otherwise when we are fighting for fundamental justice.

Further to the issue of supply chains, could the member share his perspective on the government announcement with respect to supply chains in East Turkestan? This was presented as a measure to address the trafficking of Uighurs and slave labour involving Uighurs in the People's Republic of China. Some have considered this measure inadequate.

What is the member's response to it? Could he make any comparisons between those measures and what is called for by Bill S-216?

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, I recognize that the member has done a great deal of work with respect to Uighurs and other human rights issues.

Let me first speak about the economic consequences of Wilberforce's initiatives. I do not think it can be understated. This was a member for 45 years in the House of Commons in Great Britain who, from a position of weakness, literally upended the entire economic underpinnings of the British Empire with the abolition of the slave trade. It had huge consequences. It even had consequences here. When we were a colony of Great Britain and when the British Empire abolished slave trade, we necessarily followed suit. The member is right to point out that this will potentially have economic consequences, particularly in the supply chain.

I want to talk about an incident. I have a good friend who represents a very large fish and seafood products company based in the east coast. They are highly supportive of Bill S-216 because they find themselves competing with shrimp boats that have slaves on them from the South China Sea. Those slave boats, for lack of a better term, can produce fish and seafood products at an extraordinarily low level and they get imported into Canada. The consequence of that is that my friend's company ends up at an economically competitive disadvantage and also—

The Deputy Speaker: We are going to try to get one more question in.

The hon. member for Shefford.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Scarborough—Guildwood. We work together on the All Party Parliamentary Group to End Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking.

We talked about poverty and the consequences of slavery. I would like my colleague to tell us what he would like to see done to better support the victims, the survivors of this tragic reality of human trafficking, a form of modern day slavery.

[*English*]

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her contribution to the APPG. Indeed, there are quite a number of tasks to be done.

I particularly want to recognize that the government initiated the Canada child benefit. In my riding, this is huge for us. It means about \$100 million a year coming in for impoverished families. This has led to the greatest reduction in child poverty in all of Canada. That is a very welcome initiative.

I do not know how that plays through to reduction in human trafficking, but I have to think initiatives like the Canada child benefit and CERB are welcome additions to people who are most marginalized. If people are marginalized, they are more likely to get themselves involved in human trafficking and other such events.

Those two initiatives have been welcome initiatives to the reduction in human trafficking. One cannot draw a straight line between A and Z, but improvement in the socio-economic conditions of the most marginalized is, in my judgment, a welcome initiative and feeds directly into the reduction in human trafficking.

• (1105)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to the motion in my capacity as vice-chair of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

The Standing Committee on the Status of Women examined the problem of human trafficking and recommended that February 22 be recognized as national human trafficking awareness day. We agreed that the committee chair would table the report in the House. I would still like to summarize it, to make sure everyone understands what we are going to be talking about today.

The committee recommends, given the unanimous declaration of the House on Thursday, February 22, 2007, condemning all forms of human trafficking—which is defined as a form of modern-day slavery, generally for sexual purposes, forced labour or slavery—and thus encouraging Canadians to hear from victims and survivors of human trafficking, encouraging Canadians to raise awareness of the magnitude of modern day slavery in Canada and abroad, and taking steps to combat human trafficking. Lastly, the committee recommends that February 22 be recognized as national human trafficking awareness day.

As the critic for status of women, I hear about human trafficking on a regular basis. I hear about it even more often in my role as a co-chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group to End Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking. I want to give a shout-out to my colleagues from Peace River—Westlock and Scarborough—Guildwood, who are also members of this group.

When I was asked to join this multi-party group, I remember being very surprised at first. I wondered whether this was still a current issue, and I was even a bit shocked about being approached to talk about it. That was when I unfortunately realized that this was an ongoing problem that should be better known and highlighted.

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That is why I will be addressing today three aspects of this crucial issue. I will first reiterate the Bloc Qu b cois's position by presenting a few promising solutions. I will then speak about the importance of working with the survivors, especially indigenous women and girls. I will conclude by also dispelling certain myths about human trafficking and modern-day slavery, given that this motion is being introduced in the midst of a pandemic and that the crisis has demonstrably exacerbated the problems of human trafficking and modern-day slavery.

First and foremost, it is important we all agree on the terminology I will be using in my speech, so I want to review in more detail what human trafficking is about.

According to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, human trafficking occurs when criminals recruit, transport, harbour, or control people to exploit them. As I mentioned earlier, criminals, and we are talking about heinous crimes here, generally exploit their unfortunate victims for sexual purposes or forced labour. Human trafficking may occur for the purposes of sexual exploitation, forced labour or even organ harvesting, although the latter is much less common in Canada.

Human trafficking also refers to the exploitation of human beings for financial benefit. Trafficking can come in many forms, and victims are generally forced, coerced, deceived or compelled through the abuse of trust, power or authority, to provide sexual services or labour. In addition, victims of human trafficking experience serious physical, emotional and psychological trauma.

Human trafficking is a violation of basic human rights and a criminal offence. In fact, six separate Criminal Code offences specifically address human trafficking.

In addition, section 118 of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act prohibits knowingly organizing the coming into Canada of one or more persons by means of abduction, fraud, deception or use or threat of force or coercion.

Trafficking for purposes of sexual exploitation means the recruitment, transportation and transfer, inside or outside a country, by legal or illegal means, as well as the harbouring or receipt of persons, primarily women and children, for purposes of sexual exploitation. Phases of human trafficking include recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring and receipt, as well as the means used against the victims, such as the threat or use of force, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of a position of vulnerability, or giving or receiving payments or benefits. Tragically, the ultimate goal is to exploit the trafficked women and children to give johns uninterrupted access to sex for money and to earn trafficker pimps substantial profits.

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● (1110)

It is important to distinguish between modern-day slavery and human trafficking, however. These terms are not synonymous, although they are connected. Human trafficking is an initial stage, which involves transporting, harbouring, recruiting and receiving victims. All of these steps lead to exploitation or modern-day slavery.

The Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline is a confidential service that operates 24-7. It can be reached at 1-833-900-1010. The hotline helps victims and survivors of human trafficking by connecting them with social services, emergency services and law enforcement agencies. It also accepts tips from the public. We must remain vigilant and keep our eyes open.

I will now read an excerpt from Public Safety Canada's 2019-24 national strategy to combat human trafficking. In my opinion, it really sums up the fact that everything is not so simple and that a call to action is not enough to make everything clear.

Human trafficking is a complex crime. It is facilitated by many factors, including the vulnerability of particular populations to exploitation, and the demand for low-cost goods and services. While no individual is immune from falling victim to human trafficking, vulnerable populations, such as Indigenous women and girls, are at higher risk. It is a crime that is highly gendered, with root causes of exploitation, including a lack of education, social supports and employment opportunities, compounded by poverty, sexism, racism, and wage inequality.

For its perpetrators, also referred to as traffickers, it can be a low-risk, highly-profitable endeavour believed to be one of the fastest-growing crimes on a global basis, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

Traffickers use various methods to lure and groom potential victims. These methods often include intimidation, false work pretenses, or a technique in which the trafficker pretends to be romantically interested in their potential victim.

This may seem cute, especially just a few days after Valentine's Day, but there is nothing cute about it in real life.

Traffickers maintain control over their victims through the use of force, sexual or physical assault, threats of violence or blackmail, confinement, abuse of power, or preying on their vulnerabilities.

Victims often suffer physical, sexual, financial, emotional and psychological abuse, and often live and work in horrific conditions. Due to the harm and violence inflicted on victims, human trafficking is associated with substantial trauma, and recovery from its impacts can take a lifetime.

Here are some very intriguing statistics. According to a 2018 Statistics Canada report, police services had reported a little over 1,700 human trafficking incidents since 2009. Of those incidents, 32% were cross-border offences, and 90% were reported by police in major urban centres.

However, the extent of human trafficking in Canada is vastly underestimated. It often involves vulnerable victims and witnesses who are afraid or suspicious of the authorities and who have been threatened by traffickers.

Victims of human trafficking were most often young women. Almost all victims of human trafficking incidents reported by police were women and girls. Nearly three-quarters of victims were under 25. The majority, 92% of trafficking victims, knew the alleged perpetrator. Most often, in 31% of cases, the alleged perpetrator was a friend or acquaintance. In 29% of cases, it was even a current or former husband, common-law spouse or other intimate partner. Eighty-one per cent of alleged perpetrators were men. In addition, 44% of human trafficking incidents involved other offences: 63%

included sex trade-related offences, 39% included assault, and 21% included sexual assault or other sexual violations.

Not all human trafficking cases brought before the courts are treated as such. Human trafficking cases brought to criminal court involved a higher number of charges, took longer to resolve, and were less likely to result in a guilty verdict compared to criminal cases involving other violent offences.

Between 2008 and 2018, that was true for 45% of cases that police reported as human trafficking cases. It was common practice for the courts to treat these cases as non-violent offences where the Criminal Code and other federal laws were concerned. In 52% of cases, we are talking about crimes involving drugs, guns, theft, and so on.

● (1115)

These statistics beg two fundamental questions. First, why are all human trafficking cases not being judged by the courts for what they are: violent crimes? Second, what are the obstacles preventing prosecutions from leading to convictions for human trafficking? I have no answers to these questions today, but by collectively focusing on this issue during a national awareness day, we could reflect on it further. To illustrate my point even better, I will share some examples of human trafficking cases provided by Public Safety Canada.

To begin with, let us look at the case of a 22-year-old woman who entered into a romantic relationship with an individual who would provide drugs to her and her friends. She was transported to an apartment by her alleged boyfriend, locked into the bedroom and forced, by threats, to provide sexual services to other men. The victim fell pregnant, but she was forced to continue working and was given drugs or alcohol to feed her addiction.

Then there was a case involving two women in their early 20s and a 15-year-old woman who were befriended by an individual who promised them high earnings and accommodation in luxury condos in exchange for sexual services. The trafficker began controlling the victims' phone calls, taking most of their earnings and becoming increasingly violent and abusive. He made the women work in various Canadian cities and held one of them at gunpoint to threaten her.

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Here is another case. An 18-year-old woman was in a five-year relationship with an individual who frequently assaulted her and controlled her phone. Under her alleged boyfriend's control, the victim provided sexual services to clients in hotels and handed all of her earnings over to him. The trafficker controlled her by threatening to hurt her.

Another example is the case of a female minor who left her single-parent home because of a conflict and stayed with some acquaintances until she befriended a young couple and decided to live with them. She was given drugs and alcohol, and taken downtown to provide sexual services against her will. The victim was coerced into it using physical abuse and fear.

There are also examples like a 35-year-old foreign national who was offered a position in the hospitality sector in Canada. As soon as he arrived, however, he was forced to work long hours for little or no pay, with the trafficker threatening to harm the victim's family in his home country if he tried to complain to the authorities.

Here is one last example to convince you of the magnitude of the problem. A woman was violently forced to leave southern Ontario to be a sex worker in Winnipeg. The police reported that the victim was held in captivity in a house for four months, suffering severe assaults on numerous occasions, including electric shocks. She was also regularly locked in a freezer when her captor was out. The victim was only allowed to leave the house when she was meeting clients, and that was under strict supervision.

Let us take a look at how Canada's actions compare to those of other countries. July 30 is the United Nations World Day Against Trafficking in Persons. The problem is that the House of Commons did not sit on July 30 last year, even though nearly 14 years ago, on February 22, 2007, the House unanimously voted in favour of a motion to recognize and condemn human trafficking. In spite of this vote to condemn this practice, there are still far too many victims, as I have mentioned, and we need to immediately take further action. February 22 is a sitting day in the House.

We also know that in 2002, Canada ratified the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. The protocol focuses on four pillars: the prevention of human trafficking, the protection of victims, the prosecution of offenders and working in partnership with others both domestically and internationally.

Millions of people affected by the COVID-19 crisis are more vulnerable than ever to human trafficking. According to the "Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2020", which was recently released by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, human traffickers target the most vulnerable, such as migrants or the unemployed. The recession caused by COVID-19 may expose more people to the risk of human trafficking.

In 2018, for every 10 victims detected globally, about five were adult women and two were girls. Approximately 20% of victims were adult men and 15% were boys. Overall, 50% of victims were trafficked for sexual exploitation, 38% for forced labour, 6% for forced criminal activity and 1% for begging. In 2018, most women

and girls were trafficked for sexual exploitation whereas men and boys were mostly trafficked for forced labour.

Let us look to Quebec and its support for victims. This is a crucial issue because compensation for victims of crime is Quebec's jurisdiction and victim services and assistance vary by province.

● (1120)

Recent efforts by Quebec's National Assembly do not specifically address the phenomenon of trafficking of persons but have looked at how to improve support for victims of sexual assault. The multi-party committee on support for victims of sexual assault and domestic violence received the report and recommendations of an expert panel in December.

In short, the report set out the following recommendations: offer victims the ongoing support of a stable social worker, whether or not they choose to report the crime or press charges, including a meeting with that social worker before they report the offence or make any kind of formal statement to the police; integrate services for victims; provide psychosocial and judicial support in line with indigenous cultural values; give victims access to free legal advice as soon as they report the crime; ensure ongoing support and a consistent flow of information for victims at all stages of the legal process; accompany and support victims at the sentencing stage; be proactive and develop a quality service offer for perpetrators of violence; ensure consistency in the rulings of criminal, family and youth protection courts by creating a judicial coordinator position; establish a specialized court for sexual assault and intimate partner violence; develop specialized training on sexual assault and intimate partner violence for medical, psychosocial and legal stakeholders, police, lawyers, prosecutors and judges; take integrated action to address the overall problem; and bolster victims' confidence in the system.

These are great recommendations to ensure proper support for victims of violence, including victims of modern-day slavery and human trafficking.

In conclusion, we would be wrong to think that human trafficking and modern-day slavery only affect people from abroad and that they happen on the fringes and outside the country. In fact, they are much more widespread than we think. One women's organization that our multi-party group recently spoke to reminded us that these individuals could just as easily be our daughters.

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That is why it is high time, as suggested by the Standing Committee on the Status of Women in its report on the disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 on women, that the Canadian government continue its efforts to draw up a national action plan to address the issues raised in “Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls”. This needs to happen as soon as possible.

As International Women's Day approaches, I would like to remind you that this year's theme for the Collectif 8 mars is “Let's listen to women”. As stated on its website, the COVID-19 pandemic is having a negative impact on women and exacerbating existing structural and systemic inequalities caused by the patriarchy, classism, racism and colonialism. The feminist struggle is far from over and we need to talk about it. That is why I believe that a day of awareness could serve this cause very well, providing more space for dialogue and highlighting an issue that we know far too little about and that has a greater impact on women and girls.

Today, we have the opportunity to come together beyond party lines to endorse an essential step in the fight against modern-day slavery and human trafficking. This national awareness day will finally make it possible for us to better understand this heinous crime, strongly speak out against it and fight it more effectively. We must act now.

• (1125)

[*English*]

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it has been a pleasure to work with the hon. member on the all-party group.

Is the member aware of any initiatives in her constituency around combatting human trafficking, and if so, could she highlight those for us?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Peace River—Westlock.

Last summer, I talked about an organization in my riding, a resource and help centre for victims of sexual assault, which we call a CALACS. This CALACS had launched programs to support survivors during the pandemic.

Unfortunately, the federal government provides only project-by-project funding, not long-term funding, so lots of organizations with great ideas are having a hard time. They might have the time to launch their action plans and initiatives, but they do not have the funding they need to make those ideas a reality. Many women's groups and organizations that try to help victims and survivors, such as the Centre de femmes du Haut-Richelieu near me, are very unhappy about this situation.

[*English*]

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member and I sit on the status of women committee together, and I feel like we are doing some really good work there.

I would love to build on a question that a colleague of the member had, in terms of choices for women. When women truly have

choices, it means that they are brought out of poverty, they have affordable housing and they have social programs and structures around them.

Potentially, could the member elaborate on that and talk about what that would mean to a lot of women who are caught in exploitation?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, with whom I am pleased to serve on the Standing Committee for the Status of Women.

Providing victims with choices, and lifting them out of poverty and the cycle of violence, is key and crucial. We heard from witnesses this summer who talked about the impacts of the pandemic on women. They illustrated how some women lost their jobs during the pandemic and some even had to think about changing careers. Many have become caught in a cycle of poverty, and that cycle of poverty often includes a cycle of violence. From speaking with survivors, I learned that it was often difficult to get out of sexual exploitation because they saw no way out. Without money and living on the street, it is hard to get out of that cycle.

I therefore think it is important to really think about how to provide the best kind of support in terms of programs and projects and show victims that they do have options and they can do something else. It is a question of helping them find jobs that will enable them to have the financial means to become independent and get out of that cycle of poverty and violence.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first, I want to commend my colleague for her very clear and heartfelt message.

In the past few weeks at the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, we also made a lot of observations by looking at what is happening with Pornhub, as well as everything to do with slavery and mistreatment of women and minors, among others.

My colleague provided a tremendous amount of information. I hope the victims watching us have taken note of the recommendations, including the one to create an awareness day, in order to move forward and pass legislation to establish offences and help victims. I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about that. Often, as legislators, we have to ensure that laws are enforced.

For victims whose lives have been changed forever, what message would my colleague like to send to the victims watching us with regard to the next steps that are so pressing to them?

The Deputy Speaker: Before we move on, I would ask the hon. member to move the microphone away from her mouth because there is a lot of interference.

The hon. member.

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• (1130)

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Mr. Speaker, I tend to fiddle with my microphone a lot, and that causes interference. I apologize to the interpreters. We are thinking of them and trying to find solutions.

There was a lot in my colleague's question. First, I applaud her efforts at the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics concerning the whole issue of Pornhub. I want her to know that I will be working with her as we move forward. I hope to have the opportunity to advance this file from a much more compassionate, female perspective, because the victims of these adult and child pornography sites are mostly women and underage girls. We are thinking of them. I plan on taking up the torch when my colleague finishes her work on the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics by addressing this issue from a much more compassionate, female perspective.

As for my message to victims, it is vital to recognize that there are still far too many preconceptions associated with the long-term effects of sexual violence on women and their memory. They experience post-traumatic shock. The message we need to send is that they need access to support that reflects all of this and that avoids possible preconceptions about victims. We will certainly need to restore victims' confidence in the legal system by ensuring that the officials they deal with understand the victims' realities, everything they have been through and the trauma they have endured. Above all, I think we need to put victims first, to ensure that they can regain confidence and that they feel heard.

[*English*]

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Mr. Speaker, I always say that human trafficking is happening within 10 miles of where we all are living. This is something I have been raising awareness about constantly over the last five years, and I am thankful for the opportunity to bring this forward today in the House.

I am wondering if my hon. colleague could talk about the efforts of the all-party group to bring this motion to this place today.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Mr. Speaker, it is a consistent and ongoing effort by my colleagues in the All Party Parliamentary Group to End Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking. My colleague from Scarborough—Guildwood also spoke about Bill S-216, which addresses another issue that has more to do with supply chains. We are therefore dealing with different issues.

As I said, we met with a group of women who talked to us about human trafficking and modern-day slavery. In my speech, I talked about the fact that this year's theme is listening. The all-party group is listening to groups that came to tell us about their reality. I want to recognize the work of my colleague from Peace River—Westlock, who has been raising this issue regularly for months now. We have met to discuss these realities. Steps have been taken with lawyers to see how we can better support victims. This group does outstanding work, and I am very pleased to be part of it.

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her inspired speech. I am also happy to see colleagues from other parties responding positively to

her work. I know she is a very dedicated MP who is very sincere in everything she does for vulnerable people, especially women.

I would like to come back to what I was saying earlier about work that MPs in previous Parliaments did. In the news recently, we heard about a blatant case of human trafficking involving an eight-year-old African girl who was brought here to be used as a sex slave by an older man. Nowadays, such things make our blood run cold. I feel an urgent need to do much more to tackle this phenomenon than just declare an awareness day.

As I recall, there was a bill in a previous Parliament that was passed and just needed royal assent. I would like to ask my colleague if she thinks that bill should be reintroduced and what she thinks of its provision reversing the onus of proof and placing it on the accused instead of the victim for very specific horrible crimes, such as human trafficking and sexual assault.

• (1135)

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Drummond for his question, for his hard work. His question shows that he is aware of the plight of women and girls who have experienced sexual violence.

Today we are just taking one step. Designating an awareness day is one thing, but passing legislation on this issue is a whole other thing. I agree with my colleague's suggestion that we must bring back a bill that would address the issue of human trafficking and modern slavery.

However, I think we need to do a lot of work on rehabilitation. It is worth looking at the idea of a reverse onus, but we cannot disregard the key principle of our legal system that people are innocent until proven guilty. We will just have to be cautious and look at how to frame the reverse onus in some specific circumstances in the bill. Now that the awareness day is a done deal, we need a bill that will further address this issue.

There are a lot of concerns. Some laws exist, but we also need measures to protect victims. We need to study the scope of human trafficking, collect better data in Canada and Quebec, and ensure that judges and police officers make use of the provisions of the Criminal Code. We must also provide funding to community groups. In general, we need to define human trafficking as it relates to sexual exploitation and violence offences. All of this can be addressed in bills that would help combat these heinous crimes.

*Routine Proceedings**[English]*

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am sharing my time with my hon. colleague, the member for Winnipeg Centre.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic arrived in Canada, things were already bleak for women fleeing violence and falling victim to human trafficking. Many have tagged women enduring violence as a shadow pandemic or a pandemic within a pandemic, but no matter what name we give it, the fact is that when a woman encounters violence in Canada and is not seen as a person to be respected and treated equally, but only as a commodity, which is every day, we are failing her.

I am pleased to speak about this issue today, but like violence against women, like pay equity and like so many issues that involve equality and dignity for women, we know the solutions required, but we are not making the political choices to do what is necessary.

I support this motion. I was happy to support it at the status of women committee and I am grateful that our committee has spent the last few months studying the impacts of COVID on women. I would like to share what I heard at committee and from my community about human trafficking.

According to the Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking, human trafficking impacts women of all different ages, racial backgrounds and cultural groups. Everyone is at risk. The risks can be exacerbated by things like social isolation and emotional vulnerability. These factors, of course, have been aggravated by the pandemic. For those at higher risk, there is something we have heard repeatedly during this pandemic: People who are already vulnerable, such as women living in poverty, women living with disabilities, immigrant women, indigenous women and children, are disproportionately affected by this form of abuse and violence.

The statistics for human trafficking are alarming. The latest Statistics Canada report states that one person out of every 100,000 is a victim of human trafficking, but it also stated that the true rate is likely far higher, given the high level of victim vulnerability and the fact that such crimes often go unreported. The report suggests that the majority of human trafficking victims in Canada are women and girls younger than 25 years old.

I am so sad to say that these crimes in Canada are increasing, and we are seeing a noted increase in my riding as well. In London, Ontario, the London Abused Women's Centre saw a 37% increase in calls to its organization for support and services related to human trafficking during the pandemic and speculated that the pandemic may aggravate risks of online exploitation. If we think about this, we realize that women and girls, mainly children, are online constantly now. Whether they are at school learning, researching and working online, socializing with their friends online or spending their free time through gaming or entertainment, it is online and it is constant. It is the children who are being treated as the greatest commodity of human trafficking.

Years ago, before I was elected, I was approached by a mom, a woman who was desperate to help her daughter. The daughter had significant mental health issues, and when she was 15 years old, she went online and met a man who promised her love, attention

and a good time. He bought her clothes and drugs. She moved in with him. She became an addict. She was told that she then had to start to earn those drugs and clothes. She disappeared. Her family could not find her for years. Eventually, she found the strength to escape and she came back home. She was almost 18 at that time. She was admitted to the hospital to deal with her addiction and her mental health problems. She went home, but shortly thereafter she returned to the man and to the drugs and he sold her again. She turned 18 and her mother could not do anything about her leaving. She was an adult. No one could help.

There are incredible groups in my community that see this story and so many other heart-wrenching stories every day, and they provide the supports and help that this mom needed so desperately.

Services such as support groups, emergency and long-term shelters, affordable housing, counselling and education about human trafficking are integral to a survivor's recovery, but our committee heard that of the organizations providing these services and accepting referrals, a majority had implemented reduced service hours and changes to service provision due to funding cuts and the pandemic.

In 2007, the same committee for the status of women studied these issues and put forward a report called "Turning Outrage into Action to Address Trafficking for the Purpose of Sexual Exploitation in Canada". This report outlined necessary actions that government could take to address human trafficking. Certainly, within government organizations and legal institutions, people are more aware, educated and active on the fight against human trafficking. However, almost 14 years later, the status of women committee heard witnesses tell us that these problems still exist and that we are not effectively addressing the issue. I believe that our failure to provide adequate and reliable funding is causing this continuance.

● (1140)

During the pandemic, numerous women's organizations spoke of the need for core funding. Operational-based funding is necessary for any organization to be able to shift within an emergency situation. During the Harper government, a great deal of funding to women's organizations was cut, and any funding provided was made available only under specific project-based funding. Under the subsequent Liberal government, some funding has been returned, but not to the levels required and only through that same project-based funding model.

This has left organizations scrambling, unable to move money to where they need it in a crisis. They cannot plan what they know their community needs. They must adhere to what projects have been put forward by governments. In addition, because they do not have adequate funds, they must rely upon constant private fundraising, which, as we know, is down because of the pandemic.

In London, we saw this exact example when organizations lost government funding to fight human trafficking. In the middle of the pandemic, when victims and survivors of trafficking and gender-based violence were at heightened vulnerability, the London Abused Women's Centre also had to deal with closing down their programming or trying to find funds from the community to survive.

Services for women in situations of human trafficking need greater stability and security. It is key for different levels of governments to work collaboratively to implement long-term, sustainable solutions to address human trafficking in Canada. It is still the case that some provinces did not deem women's shelters as essential services during the pandemic, so these shelters had to close their doors.

We are months overdue on an action plan to respond to the calls for justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. The federal government is failing to deliver on its promise to indigenous people and a key commitment of culturally appropriate and geographically accessible services. An organization in London, Atlohsa, has created Okaadenige, the Survivors circle, which brings together those who have lived experience in human trafficking to provide support, access to traditional knowledge and teachings in a safe space.

We need to increase services related to homelessness, sexual health, mental health and addiction, as well as services to respond to violence and trafficking. Youth Opportunities Unlimited in London provides basic needs and housing, access to physical, mental or dental health care, and education and employment services specifically designed to help youth lead positive lives.

We know that when survivors of human trafficking try to report their experiences to authorities, they can be re-traumatized or intimidated by the process, so many do not report them. Although Canada's legal system is heavily reliant on victim testimony, it is not designed to support victims and survivors of sexually based violence, including trafficking. We must provide training and education for those in the legal system. Across southwestern Ontario, Courage for Freedom is raising awareness and teaching, training, and certifying front-line staff and community service providers with proven strategies and prevention tactics to serve vulnerable victims of human trafficking and sexual exploitation. Through actions like #ProjectMapleLeaf, they bring awareness to community agencies and personnel, government agencies, workers and families who serve in positions that may be witnessing human trafficking and do not even know it.

One of the greatest unequalizers of all, of course, is poverty. We continually fail to eradicate poverty in Canada. We could start with a guaranteed livable basic income. That would be a great start. When women have power and independence, they have true choice, and only then can we begin to deal with the violence they face.

There is a great deal more that I cannot cover today in my speech. However, to conclude, we must recommit to ensure that we will no longer put women at the back of the line. No longer will we say that they can wait for these programs and services or that we should study this problem again.

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As was stated in 2007, "When a woman or girl is reduced to a commodity to be bought and sold, raped, beaten, and psychologically devastated, her fundamental human rights and dignity are repeatedly violated", and we have failed.

We must act. I hope this motion and the declaration of February 22 leads to the actions and political courage necessary to put an end to human trafficking.

● (1145)

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, on the issue of human trafficking, I genuinely believe we need to put more emphasis on education and I recognize the value of getting this designation, from an educational perspective. We all have a role to play, whether we are parliamentarians, teachers in a classroom or people in the private or non-profit sectors.

We recognize the importance of human trafficking in other ways, such as through the United Nations on July 30. There are other opportunities for us to raise the profile of the issue. I wonder if the member could provide her thoughts on how important that is.

We have provided historic amounts of money for homelessness and shelters, but there is still more we can do as a government. Can she provide her thoughts on how important it is to raise the sense of public awareness? A lot of people do not recognize this exists today, yet it does in Winnipeg North and communities throughout our country.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: Mr. Speaker, the member said the government provides huge amounts of money. That can be confused with the announcements and reannouncements, talks of task forces and studies upon studies. That means spending a lot of money, but it is certainly not going to long-term funding needed by organizations that provide on-the-ground services. That is why I specifically tried to address the idea of core funding, the operational-based funding, which is what I hear is needed from not only women's organizations, but all kinds of organizations.

There needs to be a recommitment by the federal government regarding affordable housing specifically. It used to be the federal government built that on its own. It did not rely on municipalities, organizations, communities and the provinces to step up. It was complete and there was a commitment to it. I have not seen that in my time here. When the government says it wants to commit to funding, it needs to provide it and not constantly announce something that will eventually come.

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Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is amazing to hear the non-partisan nature of the comments in this debate in the House today. I want to thank all colleagues for their comments to help end human trafficking.

In the last Parliament I had a private member's bill that was basically designed to implement the Palermo protocol for the definition of "human trafficking". I am working with a colleague in the Senate now and hopefully can get it tabled in the House as well.

I am wondering if this is something the member thinks is a good next step. Would she and her party be supportive of that type of bill?

● (1150)

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Mr. Speaker, I am not familiar with the member's bill or what he suggests to bring forward, but I would certainly be happy to study it, take a look at it and read far more about it to see how it could advocate for victims of human trafficking.

What is key here, of course, is the money that goes with it. This is about a commitment by governments to eliminate project-based short-term funding. We need to commit to longer-term operational-based funding that provides organizations with the supports they need to move forward. If the member's bill provides what I was talking about in my speech, I would be happy to take a look at it and move it forward.

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to be here today to speak about this very important matter.

On Sunday, I was honoured to join my fellow Manitobans for the annual Manitoba Women's Memorial March, which began in Vancouver 30 years ago. It is a march against violence, bringing awareness about the crisis of murdered and missing indigenous women and girls and two-spirit people across the country. This march was founded by the Sisters in Spirit and is now happening from coast to coast.

Although I welcome the motion today, I want to be clear: We need more than awareness. Over 4,000 indigenous women and girls have been murdered or are missing, with little or no action. It was noted as a crisis in 2013 by former UN special rapporteur for indigenous rights, James Anaya.

We have had the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, which was completed with 231 calls to justice. Where is the action? We have consistently seen government after government turn a blind eye while more and more women, girls and two-spirit people in this country go missing and murdered with little or no action, even from the current government.

We know that the very root of this violence is poverty. We know that poverty makes women vulnerable. A failure to provide women with accessible, affordable social housing, taking away options to live safely, takes away choice. We have known this for a long time. In fact, in 1970, Canada's Royal Commission on the Status of Women recommended a guaranteed income for single mothers. Where is this income? It is time that we lift up our current income guarantees in this country and expand them.

We know that there is a direct correlation between rates of poverty and economic insecurity and violence. If we want to protect all individuals from exploitation, we need to ensure that they have what they need to make choices. That includes ensuring that all people are afforded basic human rights, which includes things like a guaranteed livable basic income, and the right to housing.

Former commissioner Robinson of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls stated, "It was pretty much everywhere in the country that we heard about how poverty and economic insecurity played a role in the violence." Again, although I certainly welcome this motion today, we know this has been going on. We have known this for a very long time, but consecutive Liberal and Conservative governments have chosen not to act. Even with the release of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, there has still been no action.

It was also noted by the former commissioner that there is a recognition that the creation of poverty is a part of state violence. Commissioner Robinson concluded by saying, "It's not accidental."

● (1155)

It is time that we address this. Poverty is violence. If we are truly going to address violence against women, girls and two-spirit people and ensure that people are not placed in situations where they are sexually exploited, we need to ensure they have what they need. We need to heed call for justice 4.5 of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. It states:

We call upon all governments to establish a guaranteed annual livable income for all Canadians, including Indigenous Peoples, to meet all their social and economic needs. This income must take into account diverse needs, realities, and geographic locations.

What is even more shocking is we know that since the start of the pandemic, the current rates of violence are rapidly increasing and have impacted elements of everybody's lives. However, specifically and more brutally, we know that increasing violence has impacted the lives of some more than others. These are historically marginalized individuals who were already left outside, or falling through the cracks, of our current social safety net, including women, seniors, disabled persons, indigenous peoples, BIPOC, students, LGBTQIA people, refugees and temporary workers. We have heard stories of companies exploiting workers during the pandemic by not providing them with appropriate living quarters and forcing them to eat food rations. This is happening in Canada. We need more than awareness; we need action now.

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We know that income inequality is deeply racialized. This demonstrates a gap between substantive and procedural law. Some codified laws state that all citizens are equal and have equal rights, but in practice it is much more difficult to find secure employment as a member of a BIPOC group. Poverty is racialized in this country and it is legislated, as we see in the Indian Act, which has set up levels of poverty in first nations communities and indigenous communities throughout the country, where we sometimes witness 95% unemployment.

We need to tackle the roots of violence. We need to tackle the roots of human trafficking, sexual exploitation and slavery in this country by ensuring that everybody has what they need for living in dignity. That includes providing people who are falling through the cracks and suffering from addictions with safe places to find help, support, protection and dignity so they can truly have what they need to perhaps live with safety, security and dignity.

I would like to thank my hon. colleague for putting this motion forward. I certainly support it in principle, but I say this very clearly: We must stop talking; now is the time for action.

• (1200)

[*Translation*]

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

The link between violence against women and poverty is clear, and we are going to focus on that aspect.

I think symbolic things like creating a day of awareness are important, but huge and predictable investments are also needed. Housing advocates and organizations that assist women who are victims of domestic violence tell us that they need predictability. Money has been spent during the pandemic, but nothing seems to be happening. We get the sense that the aftermath of the pandemic will be difficult for all of Canada's most vulnerable groups.

I fully agree with what my colleague said, but my question is about another issue. Human trafficking is a global problem. I heard someone say earlier that the UN World Day against Trafficking in Persons is July 30. We want to make ours February 22. I am just wondering whether it would not be more meaningful and effective to make our day of awareness consistent with that of the rest of the world, to make this date the universal day to raise awareness of this important issue across the world.

[*English*]

Ms. Leah Gazan: Mr. Speaker, that is certainly a very good recommendation by my colleague. It is also important to recognize that women, girls and 2S people from Canada are trafficked throughout the world. I do heed his call. It is a fine suggestion.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, of course, we support a national day recognizing the horrors of human trafficking. I do find that one of the things I have learned over the years in Parliament is that Parliament loves symbols and does squat when it comes to helping women who are victims.

We have gone year in and year out without proper funding for sexual assault centres that are on the front lines. There is a lack of

core-based funding and support for the women who are doing the work of literally keeping other women alive. In our first nation communities, there were no rape kits in any of the isolated northern communities, so sexual assault victims could not even get justice. Again, this has happened year in and year out.

What steps do we need to take to move beyond the glowing words and non-partisan talk we hear in Parliament? Everyone is saying that we are going to do something and recognize a problem, as opposed to actually putting the resources in place to protect vulnerable women from the kind of abuse going on across this country.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Madam Speaker, we had the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, with at least 200 calls for justice. That is a start. We actually stopped talking and put in place a national action plan and responded to the 231 calls for justice. That is a start.

We also know that women's organizations are grossly underfunded, which is terribly concerning considering that during the pandemic, rates of violence have rapidly increased up to 400 times in some places. We need to treat this as a crisis and emergency. We need to immediately fund these organizations.

Let me remind members, the government pulled out of a hat billions of dollars to help out its corporate buddies. Where do women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA folks fit into that picture? Their lives matter and our lives matter. We need support and action now.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Madam Speaker, I know that my hon. colleague, being from Winnipeg, is probably familiar with the Joy Smith Foundation and the Canadian Centre for Child Protection.

Are there any other organizations in her riding she would like to highlight that are combatting human trafficking in her area?

• (1205)

Ms. Leah Gazan: Madam Speaker, we have an organization of families of murdered and missing indigenous women and girls that is composed of people with lived experience, family members and organizations.

We do not lack for ideas or solidarity in the city of Winnipeg when it comes to fighting against violence against indigenous women and girls. What we lack is the political will and support to end this crisis. It is no secret that—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I am sorry to interrupt.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Lakeland.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles.

Routine Proceedings

I want to start by thanking the status of women committee for tabling this report, which includes designating February 22 as national human trafficking awareness day, and I am grateful for the opportunity to speak today. I am sure that all of us in Parliament are united to end the scourge of human trafficking in Canada, but a day of awareness is only one step in the right direction. The other recommendations are equally important to encourage Canadians to hear from victims and survivors of human trafficking, and to raise awareness of the prevalence of human trafficking in Canada and, most importantly, to take action to combat it.

Conservatives are advocates for victims' rights and for the rule of law, and it has always been that way. In 2012, Prime Minister Harper's Conservative government brought official focus to the travesty of human trafficking and launched the national action plan to combat human trafficking, which consolidated all federal activities into one plan. Two months ago, I joined my colleagues, Senator Boisvenu and the MP for Oshawa, along with two victims' families, in support of Bill S-219, which would respect, strengthen and protect the rights of victims of crime. More recently, I participated in the ethics committee work on protection and privacy online. We heard gut-wrenching testimony from a brave survivor of online sexual exploitation. She was just 13 years old when videos of her went up on a pornographic website, and she had to fight and plead and beg to get them taken down. Conservatives continue to fight for children and adult victims of online non-consensual sexual exploitation and are calling for action to protect privacy and to empower individual ownership over personal images online.

I want to especially acknowledge our colleague, the member for Peace River—Westlock, for his unrelenting focus on victims and survivors of human trafficking, sexual exploitation and online abuse. Tirelessly and consistently, he has been working without much accolade or recognition, from a perspective of faith and care for the vulnerable, and with an unwavering belief in the equal sanctity and dignity of every human being. I suspect most people do not really know that about our colleague, or might not really have given it much thought at all, but I have gotten to know and appreciate that about him and his heart, since sitting beside him in the very back row where we started in 2015, and from his steadfast internal and external work to bring attention to these issues.

Public Safety Canada says that human trafficking is “recruiting, transporting, transferring, receiving, holding, concealing, harbouring, or exercising control, direction or influence over [a] person, for the purpose of exploitation, generally for sexual exploitation or forced labour.” It is manipulation or coercion of a person to the end of their ultimately being used. It is true that human trafficking is wide-reaching and goes beyond borders, but it is happening right here in Canada right now, and any thought that human trafficking is a foreign problem or beyond our control in Canada is false. In fact, it is bigger and more insidious than what many Canadians might think. Well-known Albertan and country musician Paul Brandt is the founder of #NotInMyCity and a board member of Alberta's human trafficking task force. He says that “Good-willed people would never imagine that this happens. It's just not on a regular, normal, functioning person's radar that there's this trade...happening in Canada to children.”

Alberta also introduced the Protecting Survivors of Human Trafficking Act, which came into force last May. It expands powers to protect victims of human trafficking, enables police to take quicker action and makes it easier for survivors to get protection orders. On a side note, Alberta has already declared February 22 as Human Trafficking Awareness Day.

Knowing the full extent of human trafficking in Canada is important, but also difficult to recognize, because it is easy to conceal. The victims and witnesses are often reluctant to come forward because of threats from their traffickers, and feelings of shame and mistrust of authorities. That is why public awareness is so important. The data available from Stats Canada is only a glimpse of the true scale of human trafficking in Canada, and it is shocking. According to a 2018 report titled “Trafficking in persons in Canada”, between 2009 and 2018 about 1,400 victims of human trafficking were reported by Canadian police, and 97% of them were women and girls. Nearly half of those victims were between the ages of 18 and 24, and almost a third of them were even younger, below the age of 18. They are minors; they are children. That is several hundred kids in Canada, over a span of less than a decade, whose lives were stolen from them, taken away forever, and they are just the ones we know about. There could be hundreds more who never come forward out of fear, shame or simply not understanding that the abuse they suffered has a name.

● (1210)

One of the reasons human trafficking is so elusive and under-reported is that the victims often know their abusers. Of the incidents reported to police, 92% of victims knew the person who was accused, most commonly a friend, acquaintance or intimate partner, and nearly half of the incidents involved other offences related to sexual services, physical assault, sexual assault or other sexual offences. Staff Sergeant Colleen Bowers with the Alberta Law Enforcement Response Teams' human trafficking unit says that “the problem is they are such silent victims...in a really impossible situation. They are very vulnerable and controlled by these people.”

It is happening right now in Canada, in our own backyard. There are some examples that hit very close to home for many of us. Maddison Fraser left her home in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia at 18 and got trapped in the sex trade. She was beaten beyond recognition and in 2015, sadly, lost her life at 21 years old when she was the passenger in a deadly car accident in Alberta. The driver was her suspected trafficker.

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Between April 2016 and March 2017, RCMP officers from Nova Scotia travelled across the country for Operation Hellbender to locate human trafficking victims from Nova Scotia. The officers worked with police forces across Canada and eventually charged two men with human trafficking.

In 2016, Clancy McDaniel was drugged and abducted during a trip to Montreal with her friends. She later learned that the men were involved in organized crime, and she barely escaped with her life. She is now executive director of Students Nova Scotia and an advocate for survivors of human trafficking like her. She says, “I could have very easily been in forced prostitution, I had no choice over that. I would have been addicted to drugs and had my life stripped from me, and at that point, nobody would care what happened to me whatsoever.”

In October 2019, Project Convalesce, headed by five police departments in Canada, identified 12 victims in one of the largest sex trafficking busts in Canadian history. Thirty people were arrested and over 300 charges were laid as a result of that operation. Last November, an Edmonton couple was arrested for running a sex trafficking ring involving untold numbers of teenage girls.

Dawn Fisher was just 13 years old when she was forced into sex trafficking by a Calgary gang. Last month, she helped build a fundraising operation and told her story to raise awareness and help other human trafficking victims seek help without fear. She says, “It’s so scary because who do you go to? Do you put your life and your family’s life at risk?”

Moreover, just last month, a 20-year-old student at St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, Nova Scotia, was charged with human trafficking and procurement and exploitation of a 16-year-old girl in the sex trade. Recently, Calgary and Quebec police teamed up and charged two in Quebec and three men from Calgary with human trafficking. The Calgary men are scheduled for court on February 21, just a day before the proposed national human trafficking awareness day.

There is no shortage of examples, and I believe all of us would like there to never be further cases to cite. Understanding the challenges and stigma that victims and survivors face is an important step in encouraging more victims to come forward, to seek help and to escape before it is too late. That is why Conservatives support dedicating a national human trafficking awareness day, as well as to hear from the victims and survivors of human trafficking, raise awareness of its prevalence in Canada and, of course, taking the most important step of prioritizing resources and law enforcement networks to take concrete action to end it.

I will close with this powerful quote by Cheyenne Jones. She was a victim of sexual exploitation 20 years ago. Today she is an advocate for victims of human trafficking and sexual exploitation, based in Nova Scotia. She says, “Girls that have survived these horrific situations, they should be praised. Our society should be standing up and clapping when they walk into a room because they are the ultimate survivors. They’ve beaten death. They’ve done whatever they could do to survive and I’m proud to walk beside them.”

Every Canadian deserves the right to self-determination and to be in charge of their own destiny, and when criminals try to take

that away, victims should be free from stigma and empowered to reach out, to tell their stories and to seek help. I will, of course, support the report introduced by the Standing Committee on Status of Women, including the three recommendations to support these brave victims of unimaginable criminal torture, psychological, emotional and physical destruction. I hope the report will receive unanimous support from all members.

• (1215)

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I mostly appreciate the hon. member’s contribution at the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, but I want to address one issue that comes up repeatedly, which is the gathering of evidence to secure convictions. Let me do it by way of illustration.

There was a shooting in my riding a few years ago. A couple of people died; there were 200 witnesses and nobody saw anything. It made it very difficult to succeed in laying charges and making prosecutions, though ultimately they were successful. This particular area of crime has a very similar problem. It is difficult to secure prosecutions, even in the presence of witnesses, because they are afraid of what might happen.

I would be interested in the hon. member’s thoughts as to what initiatives could or should be undertaken by Parliament with respect to the gathering of evidence.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Madam Speaker, I, too, appreciate our working relationship on the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. The member might find this funny for me to say, but I sure have learned an awful lot from him and appreciate his ability to have carved out an independence of his own and the ability he has shown throughout his career to work on issues of real passion and concern to him, which I know are all those that are within public safety. I appreciate working with him.

The member has raised a crucial issue. In fact, over the past year, I have been learning about major backlogs in evidence labs. This is an issue that maybe our committee should work on or public safety should turn its attention to urgently. It is one of those things that is a cog in the wheel of justice and in the system. If there are backlogs in evidence labs making it more difficult for law enforcement to get the evidence it needs to lay charges, then his point is well taken and is an urgent issue—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Questions and comments, the hon. member for Longueuil—Saint-Hubert.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Madam Speaker, this is really a very disturbing debate. I have a 17-year-old daughter and everything I am hearing here today is disturbing.

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Earlier, I was listening to the testimony of a young 17-year-old girl who met a man on the Internet. She began going out with him and he bought her clothing. Next came drugs, and she became a sexual slave and worked for him. That is disturbing. My daughter attends CEGEP and spends her day on the Internet. I am often in the next room. Potential “sharks” could start talking to her and lead her down a road that would result in a similar situation.

My question is simple: Is it possible to come up with web monitoring programs to prevent the sexual slavery we are discussing today? I do not have the answer, but I am asking the question because the Internet is a place where potential con artists often lurk these days. In the past, this happened in alleys and at corner stores, but now it is happening on the Internet.

Can we pass legislation and find solutions to prevent these types of meetings on the Internet?

[*English*]

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Madam Speaker, the Liberals seem to be indicating that they are going to bring forward some kind of legislation related to online activities. Like the member, I look forward to seeing that and the details. It will be extremely important to ensure there is targeting and enforcement of criminal activity for exactly the kinds of things about which the member is talking, which I find extremely disturbing as well. However, it is extremely important to empower individuals' ownership over their own images and videos.

In the ethics committee recently, it was so galling to hear from a young woman whose images appeared on a pornographic website from when she was a child and the lengths, pleading and time it took for her to get those images down. I would really like to see an emphasis on empowering individuals' ownership over their images and videos of them.

• (1220)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House to speak to the second report of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. In its report, the committee issues three recommendations for the House: encourage Canadians to hear from victims and survivors of human trafficking; encourage Canadians to raise awareness of the magnitude of modern day slavery in Canada and abroad and to take steps to combat human trafficking; and recognize the 22nd day of February as national human trafficking awareness day. The third recommendation is, in my view, the most important one. Personally, I believe it is the least we can do.

We must remember what the Conservative Party has done on this issue. Let us recall the most recent election campaign, in 2019. Our party made a number of proposals, including renewing the national action plan to combat human trafficking, amending the Criminal Code to reflect the international definition in the Palermo Protocol, ensuring that those responsible for human trafficking serve consecutive sentences for their crime and ending automatic bail for those charged with human trafficking.

As we know, 95% of victims are women, and more than a quarter of them are under 18. Indigenous peoples are disproportionately affected and represent half the victims. This is a subject that concerns

me greatly. It is the reason I moved Motion No. 63 a few days ago in the House. The motion seeks to make changes to the Criminal Code with respect to human trafficking and minors.

The motion reads as follows:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should: (a) recognize the urgent need for concrete legislative measures to (i) combat the scourge of sexual exploitation of minors, (ii) better protect children and other vulnerable persons from sexual exploitation; and (b) amend, as soon as possible, the provisions of the Criminal Code to implement the four important recommendations contained in the unanimous report of the Select Committee on the Sexual Exploitation of Minors established by the National Assembly of Quebec, namely, (i) the implementation of the consecutive sentencing provision for human trafficking, (ii) adding the crime of sexual exploitation to the proceeds of crime forfeiture mechanism, (iii) eliminating the preliminary inquiry in some sexual exploitation and human trafficking cases, (iv) giving law enforcement more effective legal tools to obtain evidence of sexual crimes committed against minors committed in the cyberspace.

The first request made by the Quebec National Assembly's select committee that has implications at the federal level concerns consecutive sentencing. I would like to remind my colleagues that former Bloc Québécois and NDP member Maria Mourani tabled a bill on which the House voted. The bill went through the entire process. It was unanimously adopted by the parties and sent to the Senate. It was supposed to receive royal assent. All this happened a few months before the 2015 election. Unfortunately, after the election, we had a new government. The new government refused to grant Maria Mourani's bill royal assent, and that was that.

This bill addresses consecutive sentences. Based on the unanimous recommendations of the Quebec National Assembly's select committee, whose members cover the entire political spectrum, everyone is asking that the bill be reintroduced and that pimps be given consecutive sentences.

The second element concerns adding crimes of sexual exploitation to the proceeds of crime forfeiture mechanism. The Criminal Code should provide for the forfeiture of proceeds of crime during sentencing. Normally, the Crown must prove that the property in question fits the definition of proceeds of crime. However, the burden of proof is reversed for certain criminal organizations and offences related to drugs and human trafficking. This means that procuring should be included automatically, without needing to prove it.

The third element concerns preliminary inquiries. The Quebec National Assembly's select committee recommends eliminating preliminary inquiries for procuring cases, since it is very hard for victims to testify and describe the torture they endured. This would lead to much quicker trials.

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• (1225)

Fourth, law enforcement agencies want better tools for obtaining evidence in cyberspace, particularly with regard to determining the place of the offence. Take, for example, an online video in which we can see the victim and the aggressor, but we do not know where it was filmed. The definition of place is complex, especially for police investigating crimes. We should therefore pass cybercrime legislation in order to make their job easier.

Motion No. 63, which I tabled in the House, is very important, and I hope it will lead to the introduction of a bill before the next election. We really need to act. The House needs to wake up, and all of us need to recognize, understand and, most importantly, help law enforcement agencies and victims. Victims are often afraid to testify or worried that their pimp will be released too soon.

Criminal organizations have no problem finding young women and girls, including minors. I am referring specifically to minor victims of sexual exploitation, namely girls who are 13, 14, 15 or 16 years old. Earlier, my colleague from the Bloc mentioned his 17-year-old daughter; my own daughter is 15. The exploitation of minors and young women and girls is particularly stressful and worrisome for us.

The Quebec National Assembly's Select Committee on the Sexual Exploitation of Minors has four specific requests related to the Criminal Code, which are not particularly complicated and, in my opinion, should be easy to grant. The government should not even wait to receive the requests and should be proactive in proposing amendments to the Criminal Code to protect our young women and girls as quickly as possible.

Although a minority government, this government still has the power to act, especially if the opposition parties all agree. Everything can be done quickly when we all agree. This is not a partisan subject. Young girls—and young boys—who are the victims of these pimps need to know that Parliament and the Government of Canada are there to protect and help them first and foremost and that pimps will be punished for their actions and their consequences.

If a pimp in Montreal has 10 minors working as prostitutes, why should he get away with a sentence of a mere three or four years, and concurrent at that? Whether he has one girl or ten, he will get the same sentence. We need to give longer sentences to pimps in order to discourage this type of behaviour in our country.

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech. I know that he is concerned with these types of issues. Last year, he did excellent work in the Marylène Levesque file.

I am thinking about other victims of sexual assault that never got the justice they deserve and about the “long-term offender” and “dangerous offender” designations. Would my colleague be open to designating a sexual predator or a criminal convicted of a heinous crime such as human trafficking or the sexual exploitation of minors a dangerous offender after a single offence?

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his excellent question.

Yes, I fully agree with him and I would be prepared to support the proposal. Nothing in life is more precious than our children. These young people and future adults are the ones who will move our country forward. Allowing them to be treated like this by unscrupulous individuals is beneath a country like Canada.

• (1230)

[*English*]

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Madam Speaker, I know this is something that my hon. colleague is very passionate about as well. I want to thank him for bringing up the Palermo protocol, something our government brought in back in 2013, I believe. One of the issues, though, is that Canada is not fully aligned with the Palermo protocol around the issue of fear; that people who have been trafficked must go to the police and say that they are living in fear. I would like to see removed that removed.

Does my hon. colleague have an opinion on that?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his tireless work on the issue of human trafficking. It is an important issue for him, and I thank him for all his efforts.

The Palermo protocol makes it possible for countries to work together. It is a transnational agreement. Any issue involving investigations and charges is complex in our society. Many countries are concerned about the same issue, and for that reason, countries try to find ways to work in an integrated fashion to be able to lay charges in other countries.

The fourth element of the protocol addresses the notion of place, which is important with regard to cyberspace, and also in the case of a young girl taken to another country. We cannot be prevented from bringing charges against the Canadian pimp who sent her to another country or is in charge of her there. There is much to be done, and that is why we must not delay addressing this.

[*English*]

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Madam Speaker, the hon. member was speaking about tabling a motion to update the Criminal Code to address a number of issues relating to human trafficking, specifically around consecutive sentences, criminal investigations regarding minors and having better tools in cyberspace.

I am wondering why the member felt now was the right time to table such an important motion. Why it is important for us to be discussing the motion here today?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

Routine Proceedings

This subject is addressed every year, but no action is ever taken. This motion stems from the very comprehensive report of a select committee of the Quebec National Assembly, which conducted consultations for nearly two years. The committee made four very important recommendations, which are included in Motion No. 63. These recommendations are unanimously supported by four political parties in Quebec. I believe that it is in the federal Parliament's best interest to act now.

Nothing has been happening for far too long. The Government of Quebec came up with these recommendations and the Conservative Party supports them. I do not see why the Liberal government would not take immediate action.

[*English*]

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague for Lethbridge.

In this debate there have been excellent speeches by members across the House who bring different perspectives and different aspects of knowledge and experience to the table, and I have learned a lot by listening to them. I want to particularly recognize the members of the all-party group who have been working on this issue, and especially my friend for Peace River—Westlock, who has been a tireless champion of justice for the oppressed and for victims of human trafficking since he came to this place. I have no doubt he will continue to be that advocate for as long as this terrible scourge remains with us.

This issue has an international dimension and a domestic dimension. It is important for us to be aware of and respond to both, because while the nature of the violence and the victimization may be similar, the nature of our response, and what we can do about it internationally versus domestically, is quite different. I have the honour of serving for our party as the shadow minister for international human rights, so I will focus on the international dimension, although I will make a few comments about the domestic dimension as well.

Members here are increasingly aware of the horrific situation of Uighurs and other Turkic Muslims in China. This is a situation of systemic sexual violence, mass detention in concentration camps, and efforts to reduce or eradicate the population through mechanisms including preventing births within the group by forced abortion, forced insertion of IUDs and forced sterilization.

Another human rights abuse that we see against Uighurs and other Turkic Muslims is slave labour. An Australian think tank released a powerful report called "Uyghurs for sale", which details how people, simply on the basis of their faith and ethnic background, are effectively sold into slavery and are producing products for international markets. They are producing products that recognizable brands are buying and selling to us here in Canada and in parts of the world beyond China. We have a responsibility to become aware of that, respond to it and do all we can to make sure at the very least that we are not complicit in these horrific violations of fundamental human rights: that we are not wearing shirts or eating tomatoes produced by people who were violently enslaved and compelled to work on products that were exported to us. There is so much more that Canada can do.

We have heard testimony at the foreign affairs committee about some of these issues. We heard recently from a representative of the International Justice Mission, an excellent organization working hard to advance justice around the world. We heard that Canada was really behind many other countries in terms of tracking, identifying and responding to the human rights violations that happen within our supply chains.

It is important to know that there are major concerns about production of the personal protective equipment that all of us increasingly rely on in the midst of this pandemic. We have to do more to ensure that the personal protective equipment we may be importing from China is not tainted by the enslavement of people who are forced to produce those products.

Canada has fallen behind, we have heard. We need to do more. Following pressure from our party especially, but also from many individuals in other parties who played key roles in this, the government put forward a policy that, facially at least, addressed the issue of supply chains, specifically in the context of Uighur forced labour. However, in my estimation these measures are far too little and far too late. They do not get to the nub of the issue, which is identification and enforcement. The government said in its release that it was not going to allow products that had been produced by slave labour, but it has still failed to put in place effective mechanisms and tracking to address that.

● (1235)

We had a technical briefing in which these new measures were explained to us, and it was pointed out that many aspects of these measures are still being worked out. The government came out with an announcement saying it was going to do this, but so much has not been done in terms of knowing how to identify a product produced from slave labour. What we have so far is a sense that this process will be complaint-based, and it will be adjudicated by CB-SA.

People who are victims of slavery have no way of ensuring that their rights are going to be protected in a process where someone would have to have evidence and make a complaint to the Canada Border Services Agency.

Other measures have been put forward. I am very supportive of Bill S-216, which was discussed previously in this debate. It is a bill that would go farther toward addressing these issues, in terms of the supply chain. However, more work needs to be done, even on top of that.

Routine Proceedings

In the United States, a bipartisan initiative called the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act created a presumption that products sourced from certain regions involved slave labour. It was a presumption that in a sense created a reverse onus. If somebody was importing products from there, they would have to prove that slave labour was not involved. If a company is sourcing products from East Turkestan or Xinjiang in China, it should not be a mystery to anyone what is going on there. The extreme risk of slave labour being involved in a place where this is systematically done and supported by the government is too high for us to do anything other than presume that products produced in those regions are indeed tainted by slave labour.

In terms of information gathering and enforcement, Canada could do so much more to collaborate with our allies. There is a lot of work to be done in terms of gathering and tracing this information, but we do not have to do it alone. We could look at best practices from other countries. We could partner with our allies.

I am part of the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China, a global network of legislators working to address various issues of human rights, security and other things created by the current direction of the Chinese government. It is such a pleasure, through that group, to work with legislators from all different political traditions in various countries: U.S. Republicans and Democrats, British Conservatives and Labour members, members from Japan and from other parts of the world.

The collaboration that should be happening, not just at the legislator level but at the government level, to address slave labour in our supply chains is so important.

Finally, we need to note and understand that this is not just an international issue or a supply chain issue, but that violence, human trafficking and slavery are happening right here in our country of Canada.

A few days ago a class action lawsuit was filed against MindGeek, the parent company of Pornhub, for posting videos of two underage children being drugged and raped. Two weeks ago, at the ethics committee, we heard witness testimony from Serena, who at 14 found an explicit video of herself posted online without her consent. She fought to get the video taken down. Afterwards, every time it was taken down, it was reposted.

I applaud the committees that are looking into this issue at MindGeek, of sexual violence being filmed and posted online. We hear so many stories about incidents of human trafficking here in Canada. Police services in Canada have reported over 1,700 instances of human trafficking since 2009, and about half of all victims were between the ages of 18 and 24. About a third of the victims were under the age of 18.

This is a form of violence that is affecting children and young people, and people of all ages. Other colleagues have spoken in detail, which I do not have time to go into, about the domestic situation and the domestic response.

When we think about human trafficking, it is important to understand that this is something that happens very far away and it is something that happens right here at home. This awareness day, and these efforts to address human trafficking, are critically important,

both to recognize and note it in awareness, but also to go further and advance the legislative proposals that I and others have talked about for ending human trafficking here and around the world.

• (1240)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his comments.

When we talk about human trafficking in Canada, we probably do not have the exact figures because it is impossible to track everything that is happening in this area. It is important to remember that 90% of victims are women, Canadian women, and that, as the member mentioned, 25% of them are under the age of 18. We must keep in mind that over 61% of these women are victims of sexual assault. There is also the issue of labour, which has been extensively documented by the UN and the ILO.

Members have been talking a lot about justice mechanisms and asking for justice to be done, but how can we address these issues in a preventive manner? What can we do to prevent this or how can we be proactive on sexual assault and labour issues?

• (1245)

[*English*]

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, it is important that we think about prevention, and there are various ways of doing that. One issue that many of my colleagues have spoken about in terms of prevention is making sure that serial perpetrators of human trafficking are behind bars, that there are effective consequences and that there is protection for victims who come forward. That is a key piece of it.

In this House we have debated other legislation about judicial education to ensure that, when people who are victims of sexual violence come forward, they are treated properly within the system and not revictimized by comments made by judges or others.

In general, education is important. We are doing that through this debate, and also through creating this awareness day, making supports known and available, and encouraging people to be aware and on the lookout for this problem. All of these steps are important on the road to prevention.

Mr. Jeremy Patzer (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Madam Speaker, what do we need to do further to ensure that laws are actually enforced? We have heard other members say that we have laws that already exist in Canada, but they are not being enforced. What do we need to do to make sure these laws are actually being enforced, and the people perpetrating these crimes pay the full penalty?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, there are some separate issues here in terms of enforcement of international expectations and enforcement on the domestic side.

Routine Proceedings

When it comes to the enforcement of standards of supply chain integrity, we need to put in place stronger reporting mechanisms. In some cases, as I talked about, we need to have presumptions that slave labour is going on in certain industries in certain regions of the world. In order to ensure the enforcement of our expectations, we need stronger laws in those particular cases.

When it comes to domestic enforcement, there are probably other members who know in more detail what is required in terms of ensuring laws are enforced. However, we can certainly increase our chances of being successful at prosecuting those who are guilty in these cases with greater education; greater awareness, including support and awareness for law enforcement; and support and protection for those who come forward.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, we are debating this very important issue today, and of course, the Greens are in favour. As has been mentioned, individual members of the Green caucus are supporters of the effort to recognize February 22, but also to go way beyond that to take substantive steps in eliminating slavery in our supply chains and dealing with the issues of human trafficking.

This is something we need to conceptualize. Intellectually, they are somewhat different issues, but they both come down to commodifying human beings for money, and therefore, they are about slavery.

Human trafficking happens in our own communities. However, as my hon. friend from Scarborough—Guildwood pointed out, something like having a slave vessel that is scooping fish out of the ocean for fish meal to feed shrimp aquaculture facilities is another category of enslavement.

It is not exactly the same set of issues, so how do we get at both ends of the problem?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, the member is right in that there is, in a sense, a similar philosophical root to this evil and a similar experience for the victim, but two very different policy responses. There is one set of things that we can and have to do domestically in law enforcement and education. There are also the things that we can and must do internationally with our supply chains, but we do not have the power to do the same kind of enforcement as we do on the domestic side. She is right about that—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I am sorry, it is time to resume debate.

The hon. member for Lethbridge.

• (1250)

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, many would consider slavery to be a thing of the past, and many would consider it to be something that does not happen in the western world, but only overseas in developing nations. This is a myth. It happens right here in our own country, on our own land.

Human trafficking is, in fact, modern-day slavery. It is the world's fastest growing crime. It generates a profit of \$150 billion per year, and of this, commercial sexual exploitation of women, girls, boys and young men contributes \$99 billion, the vast majority

of that revenue. In 2017, an estimated 40.3 million victims were trapped in modern-day slavery around the world.

Trafficking is a pervasive transnational and domestic phenomenon that is happening right now in urban and rural communities across Canada, so it is with a heavy heart that I come before the House today to talk about this issue. It is not something we can look at from a distance. It is not something we can only consider based on stats from other countries. It is not something of our past. It is something of our present, and if we do not take action, it will be something of our future. As parliamentarians, it is incumbent upon us to take action to make sure it stops now.

Designating February 22 as national human trafficking awareness day, I believe, is a necessary step in educating those who are unaware that this crisis is taking place across the country. People's lives are being exploited and destroyed altogether. I would say we have an obligation to uncover the horror that is taking place on a daily basis and do something to stop it.

Sometimes that something is as simple as speaking up. Sometimes that something requires legislative measures. Sometimes that something requires the RCMP or local police involvement. Sometimes that something requires border security and safety measures. Sometimes that something requires all of the above.

We know that 93% of Canada's trafficked victims come from within our country. They are here within our borders. The vast majority of these victims of human trafficking are women and girls. Over 70% of the exploitation that takes place is for the purpose of sexual exploitation, and so it there I will focus the majority of my attention today.

I believe a great deal of light has been shed on this topic as of late, and Pornhub comes front of mind. Numerous national articles have been written on the topic of women and girls being exploited online, and of consent not being granted. This is a form of human trafficking. It is severe in nature, and it cannot be ignored.

I believe that prostitution and trafficking are connected, and most researchers would agree with that. Prostitution, in most cases, is not a choice. The trafficked individual is often under age when they begin, and therefore, cannot legally consent. The individual is often a young girl when she starts, often for socio-economic reasons. Again, it is not exactly a choice.

It is out of survival that she enters into the business of selling her body, and sometimes that exchange results in money for her, but other times, most times even, it results in money being given to someone who is exploiting her body. This is, in fact, trafficking. I would like to defy and challenge the myth that trafficking is somehow a choice. It is not her choice.

This is not only happening abroad, and it is not a thing of the past. Human trafficking, and especially sexual exploitation, is happening right here, in our own country, today.

Routine Proceedings

I would like to share a number of stories pertaining particularly to the tech giant Pornhub, which, of course, is an online platform where individuals can post videos. Now, it is not necessarily the individuals who are in the videos who are posting them. In fact, many of the videos are posted by other individuals who took the videos, sometimes in bathroom stalls and sometimes during a sex act. Sometimes they pressured a girlfriend or another girl in their class, for example, to present them with nude shots or videos of various accord.

● (1255)

Pornhub attracts 3.5 billion visits every month. That is more than Netflix, more than Yahoo and more than Amazon. Some have said it is infested with rape videos. It monetizes child rapes, revenge pornography, spy-cam videos of women showering or using the bathroom, again, often underage.

It is footage of women that is then made available online. I should clarify that it is not just women. It is women, girls, young boys and some men, but again, predominantly it is women and girls. These images are uploaded and then made available.

Cali is one victim and will I quote her. She said, “Pornhub became my trafficker.... I'm still getting sold, even though I'm five years out of that life.”

Another individual, Taylor, said, “They made money off my pain and suffering.” A boyfriend who had pressured her into providing a video had then secretly posted it to Pornhub. The students in her class had it available to them within days and, of course, from there we can imagine the type of bullying and conduct that took place at school.

She talks about walking down the hallways and weeping as she went to class. She then talks about trying to take her life several times, but was not effective in doing so. She now lives with the horror of what has happened to her. It is an example of trafficking, an example of sexual exploitation.

Another individual called it soul destroying. Another individual talked about how Pornhub is making money off the worst moment in her life. It is making money off her body. She talked about how two American men paid her when she was 16 for a sexual encounter that they then filmed and posted on Pornhub. Even though she asked repeatedly for Pornhub to remove the video, it refused to do so.

Another individual said that it is an assault that never ends and that the suffering is unimaginable. She went on to say that they are getting so much money from her trauma.

These individuals are just a handful of the many, many women and girls across this country and throughout North America who are consistently exploited. This phenomenon is not just taking place in other countries. This is something that is right here within our borders. This is something that legislators have the opportunity to do something about, but it is also something that we must invite the general public to be a part of, which is where awareness and education come into play.

It is so important that we name a national day because it helps bring it to light. Every single year we would have this day that

would stand as a reminder that these things do occur in our country, but we, as the Canadian people, do have the power to stop this behaviour. We have the ability to stand up for these individuals who are trafficked, and we have the ability to say “no more”.

We have to remember that this is about people. This is about preventing the crime. This is about protecting the victim. This is about prosecution of the offender. This is about working in partnership with various agencies, and this is about empowering victims. That is what this is about. It starts with a day, but my hope is that there would be greater action that would take place from there.

Serena Fleites came to the ethics committee a few weeks ago. When asked what would she tell the people at Pornhub about what they did to her, she said:

I would tell them that they're really selfish. They need to really look at themselves in the mirror because they're prioritizing money and content over actual human beings' lives, because obviously, they don't care that much....

I would tell them to look in the mirror and re-evaluate themselves. They need to figure out where their real priorities are and not be so focused on money and content rather than real humans' lives and what they're doing to them.

● (1300)

We are talking about human beings. We are talking about people. We are talking about their present and their future.

For this reason, because of people, because of their innate value and because they deserve us to stand up for them, we ask for this national day.

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.): Madam Speaker, I have been listening to the debate for the last few hours and would point this out. When a lot of people think of human trafficking, they think about people living outside of Canada who come here and are put into the sex trade in one form or another. That is true; it does exist.

I will give a real case, without providing any names, of a young girl, probably 12 or 13 years at the time, who was enticed to sneak out of the house. That ultimately led to her being trafficked for prostitution. It is absolutely critical that one of the things we do is to ensure there is a very strong educational component in seeing this day being recognized.

Could the member provide her thoughts on just how important it is that we have a strong educational component that reaches into our communities, in particular our school divisions?

Ms. Rachael Harder: Madam Speaker, as I mentioned in my speech, I do believe that education is very important and it must be a very strong component going forward. Those predators, those who seek out young children to then sell them into the sex trade, or to exploit them, or use their bodies and monetize them, work in our schools, our malls and other workplaces. They are throughout Canadian society. We must do all that we can to educate young people to identify who those individuals might be in order to keep themselves safe. We must also help parents identify them. We must help society at large, so together we can protect the vulnerable.

Routine Proceedings

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have been in Parliament for 17 years and I have never been as shocked and moved as I was by the testimony of Serena Fleites, who, at age 13, attempted to get a Canadian company to take down abusive non-consensual child pornography of her. She pretended that she was her own mother because she did not want her family to know. Her life was destroyed. Her testimony was incredibly powerful.

What I found most shocking was that when Pornhub-MindGeek executives came to committee and we asked them about her case, they said that they did not have any recollection. This young woman blew their business model apart, forced them to take down 80% of their videos and caused them massive economic damage, yet they came to a parliamentary committee and said that they could not remember any details of her numerous attempts to beg Pornhub-MindGeek to take the videos down.

I would like to know my hon. colleague's thoughts on this. Is it possible that maybe they were just gaslighting her and trying to diminish her value as a survivor or are we looking at a company that was so indifferent to allegations and issues of child pornography on their site that they did not even bother to go back and track the story of what happened to this young woman?

Ms. Rachael Harder: Madam Speaker, certainly with a business like Pornhub, the parent company MindGeek, which hosts millions and millions of videos, I suppose that it is possible for one's soul to eventually stop functioning and for one's conscience to eventually stop convicting them. I suppose that it is possible for those individuals to forget and that is a shame.

My hope would be that as a Canadian society we are not okay with it and that we would take a stand for these women and girls who find themselves victimized by companies like Pornhub and by those individuals who posted their videos. My hope would be that we would stand up and say that although they may not have a soul or a conscience, we do and we will hold them accountable. We will take a stand for the sake of this great country and our future. Most important, we will take a stand for the sake of those who have been impacted and who could potentially be impacted in the future. Again, this is about people.

• (1305)

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Madam Speaker, the conversation we are having today is so important. It is wonderful to hear the many members who have spoken on the need for a day of recognition on this atrocity going on throughout Canada.

I was fortunate enough to work on the status of women committee. I was not only its chair but also its shadow minister. Since 2015, I have met some incredible women, some survivors, who have shared with me their victimization. I have had the opportunity to work with many organizations across the country as well, but we know more needs to be done.

My riding of Elgin—Middlesex—London is fortunate to have different organizations that are helping young women and girls who are being trafficked.

I would like to talk about Courage for Freedom. It is an organization that focuses on young girls and boys under the age of 18 who are being trafficked. Kelly Talon-Franklin and her husband jump in their truck and hit the roads many weekends, driving six hours to bring a young girl to safety. They will try to find her a home that is safe and has all the necessary supports to help her mental and physical health in an attempt to rebuild that young woman. In some cases, it may be a young boy. We continue to see this. The way we stop this is by working together. That is why having this awareness day is so important.

I am from a small community, Sparta, Ontario, with a population of 300. We do not hear a lot about human trafficking. However, just down the road is Port Stanley, Ontario, which has a population of 2,000 people. We know someone was attempting to traffic three young girls from this small village. It is a tourism village. We think we are safe where we are, but this does not happen just in big cities or communities along the 401 or Highway 69. It happens in all our different communities.

At the beginning of this pandemic, the MAPI, the Measures to Address Prostitution Initiative, funding was being reduced and was going to end in May of 2020. I spoke to many organizations about the issues that were happening with domestic abuse or young women and girls leaving their homes and trying to find safe places to go. During those discussions we also found out a lot about how the MAPI funding was coming to an end. As we discussed some of the issues that were happening with shelters, the government was ending this is a program. It was at that time when we could really see the heart of Parliament come together. I was so fortunate to work with members of the Bloc, Green and New Democratic parties to continue to push the government, saying that we needed to stick up for young women and girls who were being trafficked. I am so proud of this group of people who had come together. Back in May we continued to push and did get a response from the minister on this. Was it exactly the response we wanted, no, but it did push this item forward, and we need to continue to do that.

One thing I really noticed throughout my discussions as the shadow minister was how organizations worked in silos. Some organizations are doing the same things, which may need to be tweaked, but they may also not be aware of what is going on next door.

Routine Proceedings

We have the London Abused Women's Centre in London, Ontario. Many times in the House I have stood to speak about my friend and colleague Megan Walker. She will be retiring soon, so I wish her a well-deserved retirement. I know she will continue her fight for our young women and girls. I thank her for all her efforts. It was from speaking with her and other advocates that I realized that an organization two hours away from the city of London had never heard about the London Abused Women's Centre, or the Joy Smith Foundation or the organization in Vancouver that was working with women as well. I brought some women together in a smaller group, some of the best of the best. On the call were Megan Walker from the London Abused Women's Centre, Trisha Baptie from Vancouver, Kelly Talon-Franklin from Courage for Freedom and Joy Smith, a former parliamentarian, from the Joy Smith Foundation. I will share with members the relationship I have built with Trisha and why I think we need more Trishas in this world to share the awareness of what happens to these young victims.

• (1310)

What we see across Canada is that sometimes we work in silos. We need to bring best practices. Some of this is awareness, such as knowing what is happening in our own communities, people sharing what their organizations are doing. It cannot be just about February 22; it has to be talked about 365 days a year.

I want to share some of the notes I have from this meeting. We as parliamentarians can do a lot of work, but we need to give the tools and resources to organizations across the country that help these young victims get away from their perpetrators or at least on a way to a different path in life.

Megan Walker stated, "We try and help survivors move on with their lives. We need legislation as framework, but we need robust supports such as financing, housing and we need education, so every action we take is consistent with one of those pillars. We are trying to eliminate the silos. What I feel is missing is a group for the equity, Nordic and abolitionist model as the connection between prostitution and trafficking. It's men paying for the use of girls and men pushing the trafficking industry."

This is really important. We saw the great work being done at the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics on Pornhub. We have to understand there is a buyer, so how do we stop that? We put in different measures through the criminal justice system when it comes to dealing with people who have trafficked individuals.

Unfortunately, through Bill C-75, I was quite disgusted to be honest. For me, a person who is willing to victimize a young child should not have a sentence that is concurrent. These should be consecutive sentences. These people have stolen somebody's life. These things are really important to me.

Megan also talks about what we need to do for survivors and that we need to ensure we have policies and solutions. This awareness day would be an opportunity for people to talk more. Perhaps it might be more Zoom conventions or more meetings, but there is also a need for survivors to speak to other survivors. This awareness day would help remove some of the stigma for people who have been victimized and are survivors of this.

We need to ensure people have somebody to lean on, which is why I want to talk about Trisha Baptie. Trisha is a young woman who shared her story with the anti-human trafficking committee. She talked about what it was like for her when she was a preteen and started being solicited by her family members. The members from Calgary and Edmonton talked earlier today about how this is sometimes not about strangers but about intimate members of our family. In some cases, it is about step-parents or other individuals who are ruining a young woman's life. Trisha wants to have a role in the UN and be a spokesperson to talk about what it is like.

We need to ensure we have all the resources so Trisha, this young woman who has left the life of prostitution after being trafficked, can be there to help others. This awareness day and working together would help promote this. One of the biggest challenges is that people feel alone. They are ashamed for some of their previous actions, not recognizing they did not put themselves in that situation in many cases; it was somebody they trusted.

It is really important to ensure we have these types of supports, supports like professional counsellors who can help the victims, but also a peer-to-peer aspect, people who can say that they understand, that they have been in their shoes, that there is a light at the end of the tunnel.

I would like to thank all the members of the all-party anti-human trafficking committee for the work they have done to make this come to fruition today. I believe we have a Parliament that is coming together to end human trafficking.

• (1315)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The question is on the motion.

If a member of a recognized party present in the House wishes to request a recorded division, or that the motion be adopted on division, I would invite them to rise and indicate it to the Chair.

The hon. member for Peace River—Westlock.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Madam Speaker, I would like to request a recorded division.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Pursuant to an order on Monday January 25, the division stands deferred until later this day, at the expiry of the time provided for oral questions.

*Routine Proceedings***PETITIONS**

NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to rise to present a petition. I note the speech earlier today by the member for Scarborough—Guildwood reflecting on William Wilberforce, who first used petitions as a method of advancing a cause: the abolition of slavery.

I rise today with a petition that came in electronically and is signed by nearly 2,000 Canadians calling for the government to acknowledge the newly enacted treaty on the prohibition of nuclear weapons. It came into effect on January 22 this year and has been supported by 122 countries around the world. The petitioners ask that the government both sign and ratify it, so that Canada can join the 122 nations that have declared, in a binding treaty, that nuclear weapons are illegal.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to present three petitions in the House today.

The first petition is with respect to the situation of Uighurs and other Turkic Muslims in China. The petitioners call on the House and the government to follow the statement of the all-party Subcommittee on International Human Rights and recognize that Uighurs are subject to an ongoing genocide in China. The petitioners further call on the House to use Magnitsky sanctions to target and hold accountable those who are involved in these gross violations of human rights.

HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, the second petition is in support of Bill S-204. It is a private member's bill in the Senate that would make it a criminal offence for a person to go abroad and receive an organ that has been taken without the consent of the person whose organ it is, or in a case in which the organ is purchased. This bill has been before the House and the other place in various forms for over 10 years, and it has currently been put forward by Senator Salma Ataullahjan in the Senate.

MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN DYING

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, the third petition is respecting Bill C-7, the government's bill that seeks to dramatically expand euthanasia, or medical assistance in dying, in Canada. Concerns have arisen, especially from the disabled community, about how some people are eligible for suicide prevention, whereas others, as a result of their physical disability, may be subject to suicide facilitation. All disability communities that have spoken about this issue have raised significant concerns about it. Petitioners call on the government to restore important safeguards, which it is proposing to eliminate as part of this bill.

I commend these three petitions to the consideration of the House.

PENSIONS

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am presenting a petition from constituents in my riding.

Nearly half a million pensioners are in receipt of the United Kingdom state pension, which is frozen. Canada has 128,000 pensioners. The petitioners are calling on Parliament to raise the issue of frozen British pensions at the upcoming Commonwealth heads of government meeting in June 2021 and also to ensure that any future trade expansion discussions with the United Kingdom are dependent on the U.K. government first unfreezing the U.K. state pension payments worldwide.

• (1320)

OPIOIDS

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am also presenting a petition on behalf of constituents in my riding who are calling on the Government of Canada to declare the overdose crisis a national public health emergency, to take steps to end overdose deaths and injuries, to immediately collaborate with provinces and territories to develop a comprehensive plan, to ensure that any plan considers reforms and that this emergency be taken seriously.

HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have a number of petitions to present today.

The first petition is signed by Canadians from across Canada who are calling on the government to prevent organ harvesting and for the speedy passage of Bill S-240 from the Senate. Given the circumstances of the Uighurs in China, that would be appropriate.

PROTECTION OF HUMAN LIFE

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Madam Speaker, the second petition is signed by Canadians from across Canada who are calling on the House of Commons to protect all human life, from conception to natural death. They are calling on the Canadian Parliament to support measures to protect human life.

PORNOGRAPHY

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Madam Speaker, the petitioners in the third petition are concerned with the accessibility to and impacts of violent and degrading sexually explicit material online and the impacts on public health, especially on the well-being of women and girls. They recognize that we cannot prevent sexual violence toward women while allowing pornography companies to freely expose their children to violent explicit material every day.

CHARTER OF RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Madam Speaker, the fourth petition is from Canadians across the country who are calling on the government to ensure that physicians are not forced or coerced into performing procedures or acts they are not comfortable with. They are calling on the Canadian government to protect physicians and their consciences as the Charter of Rights and Freedoms allows.

FIREARMS

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Madam Speaker, the final petition calls on the House of Commons to protect the health and safety of Canadian firearms owners. The petitioners recognize the importance of owning firearms and are concerned about the impacts on hearing loss, damage caused by the noise levels of firearms and the need for noise reduction.

The petitioners acknowledge that sound moderators are the only universally recognized health and safety device that is criminally prohibited in Canada. Moreover, the majority of G7 countries have recognized the health and safety benefits of sound moderators and allow them for hunting, sport shooting and reduced noise pollution. The petitioners are calling on the government to allow legal firearms owners to purchase and use sound moderators for all legal hunting and sport shooting activities.

* * *

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.): Madam Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

MEMBERS' PARTICIPATION IN ORAL QUESTIONS

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I take the floor today to present a question of privilege. I will try to be as concise as possible. It is an extremely important issue. I think it is important to every single member of this place, regardless of which party they belong to. Given the time constraints and the difficulty of switching from English to French translation, I would like to apologize in advance to my francophone friends as I will be speaking entirely in English just to save time. I will try to be concise.

The issue I bring is one of privilege, and of course privilege is understood in this place not in its conventional terminology but as our rights as individual members of Parliament: our rights to speak, our rights to debate and our rights to vote. When it is question of privilege and our rights are infringed, there can be no more solemn duty of a Speaker than to protect those rights.

I cite the third edition of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* by Bosc and Gagnon, which states that it is the Speaker's

Privilege

duty to interpret these rules impartially, to maintain order and, I would underline, to defend the rights and privileges of members, including the right to freedom of speech.

The privilege that I allege is being violated is in the matter of participation in question period. It is an essential part of the role of every member of Parliament in a responsible democracy to hold the government to account. One of the main ways that we are allowed to do this, and that we have the right to do in question period, is to put questions forward.

These privileges have been violated by the recent denial of any opportunity for members of Parliament from smaller parties or members who are independents from placing questions on Wednesdays, which happens to be the day that the Prime Minister answers every question.

I want to start by stating clearly the relief we seek, so that it is clear to you, Madam Speaker, is a clear statement by the Speaker to confirm what has always been the case: that asking questions in question period is the right of members of Parliament, whether they are from larger or smaller parties; that the decision of the larger parties to deny smaller parties and independents from asking any questions on Wednesdays is unjustified; and that the Speaker direct the larger parties to meet and confer with us so that we can find a solution that is satisfactory to all, because I believe we can.

I first raised this issue with the Speaker of the House more than a year ago. Following the 2019 election, circumstances changed and suddenly questions on Wednesdays were no longer available. I have had the honour of serving in this place since 2011, and from my first day here, question period was shared fairly among those of us who were in the unrecognized parties. In 2011, there were two such parties, the Bloc Québécois and the Green Party. As luck would have it, there were five of us. There are five days of the week, so the five of us got a question a week.

The way things are now, because of the change, is that my last question was February 4 and my next one will be on March 8. We know what changed. The Prime Minister took it upon himself to change his custom, and to answer every single question, regardless of the hierarchy within his party, of every member in this place on Wednesdays. The bigger parties decided they wanted all of those slots to themselves.

We complained to the Speaker, who instructed me to please speak to all of the other House leaders because it was not his decision. I spoke to the hon. member for Portage—Lisgar, then to the hon. member for La Prairie, then to the hon. member for New Westminster—Burnaby, and, of course, then to the hon. government House leader. Then I went around a few times more. I spoke to the hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent, who took over from the hon. member for Portage—Lisgar. I will not belabour the details, other than to say that all of these conversations, though amicable, were not satisfactory. No progress was made at all. In fact, we were never given any explanation for why it was decided that we should never, ever be allowed to ask the Prime Minister a question on Wednesdays.

Privilege

Things clarified. One might say they “crystallized”, with the recent interview by Ms. Althia Raj of the Huffington Post of the hon. member for Burnaby South. In this interview, which may have been an answer at a press conference as opposed to an actual interview, the hon. member said, “The general idea being that an official party should ask questions makes sense to me.” He went on to say that he thought that having four slots for non-recognized party members and independents was “put in place to reflect the will of the people, and that an official party has certain abilities to reflect people more than independents, and I understand that.” Fortunately, he still closed by saying he would “reflect on it.”

● (1325)

I certainly hope this is not the official position of the New Democratic Party. It was never conveyed to me as such by the hon. member for New Westminster—Burnaby.

The hon. member for Vancouver Granville ran as an independent and was elected as an independent. The idea is that she should never be allowed to ask a question of the Prime Minister or that I should never be allowed to put a question for the Prime Minister as the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands. That this is the will of the people is dubious.

Certainly, our electoral system and the perverse nature of first past the post mean that the Green Party of Canada, having received nearly 1.2 million votes across Canada, which is just about 100,000 fewer than the Bloc Québécois, has only three seats in Parliament and the Bloc has 32 seats. That is not the point of this debate, but surely it is hardly the case that we are not to have rights.

It was forever ago when the House adopted the rule that there would be a difference between parties with more than 12 members and parties with fewer than 12 members. I note parenthetically that we are the only country in the entire Westminster parliamentary system that has taken this approach to differentiate between larger and smaller parties. Ever since 1963 when that law was passed, it has come to the Speaker from time to time with complaints from smaller parties, starting with Speaker Macnaughton. I will go straight to 1979 with a decision of Speaker Jerome, who made it very clear: “participation in the question period is their right”. That is from November 6, 1979, in Hansard.

We can also look at a very detailed decision concerning a complaint from the Bloc Québécois. This was the response from a former Speaker, the hon. John Fraser, on September 24, 1990: “I have some discretion in dealing with the rights of every person in this House who is in a minority position. I think we have a great tradition of protecting the rights of minorities”. He did go on to find that the Bloc lost out on the idea that it should have more money for research, but as he made very clear, “it is important to note that the decision does not mean that members in this group are impeded from full participation in the work of the House.” He also said their rights to participation have to be safeguarded fully in keeping with procedure and our rules.

Finally, I want to draw the House's attention to a decision from 1994. Some of us are old enough to remember the tectonic shift of the 1993 election when, suddenly, unrecognized parties, including the Conservatives, went down to two. It included the New Democrats, who went down to nine. It also included the ascendancy

of parties that benefit from first past the post: those that represent regional splits, or in the case of the Bloc Québécois, a nationalized split.

The Speaker, in this instance Speaker Parent, looked at the complaint from the New Democratic Party and said:

...a member not belonging to a recognized party has participated almost every day during the period reserved for members' statements and...every other day during question period. The House may be assured that I and my deputies pledge to continue to do everything we can to facilitate the fair and active participation of each member in the work of the House.

The member who raised this was the great parliamentarian and a dear friend, the hon. Bill Blaikie, who was then the member for Winnipeg—Transcona and whose son now sits as the member for Elmwood—Transcona.

I want to be clear on what Bill Blaikie was asking, because I am not asking for what he asked for. He asked for two things and won on half of his requests. The first was that the seating arrangements be changed, just as they are to this day, so that unrecognized parties get to sit together and be recognized as members of an official party across Canada, such as the New Democratic Party, the Green Party or the Bloc. In this instance, it was about recognizing that the two members of the Progressive Conservative Party sit together. Bill Blaikie succeeded on this point.

Bill Blaikie also asked that they be treated as an opposition party during question period and that they be recognized at the beginning of question period. This is where he failed. Bill Blaikie complained they were “recognized only very rarely, systematically denied supplementaries and always relegated to the last question.”

● (1330)

I want to make it very clear that I am not disputing that this is our spot in question period. We are relegated to the very last question. However, we must be fairly recognized in a rotation at the last question spot.

In conclusion, I would say this. There are great trends in our parliamentary democracy, and since 1867 the trend in Parliament has been to increase the power of political parties, with the bigger parties increasing their own power vis-à-vis smaller parties and vis-à-vis members within their own caucuses. As was brought forward very bravely by the late Mark Warawa, a friend to many of us, who complained when his S. O. 31 question was removed by his whip, larger parties exert more power over their own members, denying them their rights, and larger parties continue to exert more power over smaller parties.

I also note that these trends are not often in votes that take place in debates. One day's accident becomes the next day's custom, which becomes tradition and then a rule. It is therefore very important to raise the alarm right now, based on what may have been off-hand comments by the hon. member for Burnaby South, that it be very clear in this place that we all have rights.

The theory, going back to the fields of Runnymede 800 years ago, is that all members of Parliament are equal and the prime minister is merely first among equals. That has changed a long way, but it is the case that all of our constituents are equal. The citizens of Saanich—Gulf Islands are equal to the citizens of Papineau. The citizens of Vancouver Granville are equal to the citizens of Burnaby South. All of our citizens deserve to have their members of Parliament fully equipped to ask the questions they want asked of the Prime Minister. The fact that the Prime Minister has chosen Wednesdays means the other parties do not want to let us ask a question. That cannot stand. That is not fair. That violates our rules and traditions.

Of course, we know the direction this will go in terms of tradition. Ultimately, some future prime minister will say that the prime minister only shows up on Wednesdays and everybody knows that; the prime minister only answers questions on Wednesdays and everybody knows that.

We need to draw a line here and say that question period is part of our fundamental rights. It is part of the privileges we have as members of Parliament in defending the interests of our constituents and holding the government to account. This is something on which we cannot be fuzzy. We cannot say it is like this for now or it is just a scheduling issue.

I ask you, Madam Speaker, as well as all the Speakers, deputies and their legal advisers, to state very clearly for the record that independent members of Parliament are equal to any other member of Parliament and members of non-recognized parties, like the Green Party of Canada. What goes around comes around. It may be that the New Democrats will be back in this category someday, and the Conservatives could even be back in this category someday. I ask that they defend our rights now. They will be others' rights in the future.

• (1335)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): As the hon. member may know, this matter will be taken into consideration and addressed in due course.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

ECONOMIC STATEMENT IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2020

The House resumed from February 2 consideration of the motion that Bill C-14, An Act to implement certain provisions of the economic statement tabled in Parliament on November 30, 2020 and other measures, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Elgin—Middlesex—London has five minutes.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to continue in this debate on Bill C-14.

Prior to the break, during which I was able to meet with constituents, I spoke in the chamber about some of the impacts I had

Government Orders

seen within my own community. I spoke in great detail about the travel industry, specifically the travel agents and consultants who are losing their entire livelihoods. I shared the story of Marion Rose, who has been a travel agent for the last 32 years. At one time, she had seven people working with her, and now it is down to one. As we move forward, the government needs to recognize the impacts on these businesses and organizations and what the future is going to hold for them.

Bringing these stories to light so that we can talk about the challenges people are having is important, so I want to talk about another small business, Dark Matter Toys, which is owned by Craig Lawrence, who is an incredible community advocate and spirit. He is out there doing a great job, but he has not been in a normal situation, and I want to read the message he sent me over the weekend.

“Hey Karen, Craig here.”

I am just “Karen” here, and that is what I love about doing my job here in Elgin—Middlesex—London.

“It seems I do not qualify for CEBA due to a prerequisite to have made a certain amount in 2019. Unfortunately, in 2019, I lost 51% income due to the Ross Street construction. Then in 2020, 80% was lost as a direct result of COVID. My accountant and I are looking for help and any answers on how businesses that are forced to close can qualify for this and other compensation.”

I want to bring this up because through no fault on Craig's part, in 2019 there was construction in the city of St. Thomas and people could not get to Craig's store. My children love the kind of stuff at his store and I was able to go around the back and come in the side door, but a lot of people were not even willing to make the trip. Craig was able to move forward and build his business on Amazon, but he did not qualify for the government's COVID relief programs because he did not meet the income criteria. I have referred him most recently to our Elgin Business Resource Centre in the hope that it can help somehow through regional recovery funds.

I am very thankful to the government for making sure that we do have programs on the ground. Places like the Elgin Business Resource Centre sit down with businesses and consult on the challenges they are having, and it has small a pocket of money for them. I think within five weeks all of the money was spent from this organization and was on the ground helping over 28 businesses, and they are doing very well.

When I look at Dark Matter Toys, I know that it is not just this one business but that this same situation is being replicated across the country. There are people who continue to fall through the gaps. We can talk about needing more money on the ground, but I am not always asking for more money; I am asking for money to be spent wisely. Unfortunately, I have not seen that with this government, and I would say since 2015 we have not seen that.

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Under this pandemic spending, we know that we have an incredible debt load that the next generations are going to be taking on. This government needs to be concerned with looking at the Prime Minister's leadership and not continuing to stumble, as we have seen with the vaccine rollout. The government needs to make the economy stronger coming out of this. I am hoping that we can come up with a competent and cohesive plan that will work for all Canadians.

• (1340)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have heard a number of times while discussing this particular piece of legislation that the Conservatives are not looking for more money but at where the money was spent. What we do know is that the Conservatives were there every step of the way, as were all parties, in passing the legislation unanimously to get support for Canadians during this pandemic.

Could the member tell us about some of the programs that she would have preferred not to have seen put in place, such as CERB or whatever it might be, so that it would not have cost Canadians as much?

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Madam Speaker, that almost feels like a lob from my friend from Kingston and the Islands. Honestly, do we want to talk about WE? Do we want to talk about all of the awful things that happened in 2020? I am surprised the member actually gave me the platform for that.

We saw the government come out with programs like WE, like Baylis, all of the different things that Conservatives could have done better. I am saying there are opportunities for us to work with partners and make sure our dollars are being spent wisely. Spending money wisely is exactly what we should be teaching ourselves and the next generation. It is really simple: How do we spread out a dollar? I just wish the government could get a grasp on this concept.

If the member is talking about programs I would not want to see, I would not want to see almost \$1 billion of government money that was going to be wasted, money that at the end of the day did not help anybody. I would like to have seen the government put something out that actually did help students, instead of getting us into the fiasco we have been in for the last year.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to take a few moments to explain what I did last week.

I took the bull by the horns and spent my week in my riding's three regional county municipalities, namely, Antoine-Labelle, Laurentides and Pays-d'en-Haut. I met virtually with 150 business people and community workers, as well as elected officials. I asked them how they were doing right now and what their concerns were for the future.

Three points kept coming back all week long. People in Antoine-Labelle want a 35% increase in health transfer payments immediately, with no conditions. The most vulnerable seniors all agree on an immediate 110% increase in the old age security pension. Finally, everybody wants high-speed Internet and cellular coverage.

I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about that. Is this what she sees in her riding too?

• (1345)

[*English*]

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Madam Speaker, some of those same concerns are being heard in Elgin—Middlesex—London. Of the key things that I am hearing, having spoken to agricultural producers, the chamber of commerce and the youth council, vaccines are the number one issue right now. People are asking when they are going to get their vaccines. The Ontario government has put out a program showing what the criteria are and how it will be done, but vaccines cannot be put in people's arms unless we have the vials of vaccine. As my husband says, once the tires get over the curb, we will know. We know the vaccines will be here when they arrive in Canada. That is the number one issue in my riding.

Line 5 is a huge issue, and I think it is because we are agricultural in southwestern Ontario. We have heard what will possibly happen with the governor of Michigan closing off Line 5 and the impact that it is going to have on our agricultural producers.

There is also high-speed Internet. I think everybody has heard about high-speed Internet, regardless of where we live in this country. Even people living in downtown Toronto could have issues. We have seen that on many of these Zoom calls.

We have seen many issues across the country that we know the government, as well as Conservatives, need to work on, not only to get through this pandemic but to make sure we meet the needs of Canadians in the future.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Seniors, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today to take part in this important discussion on Bill C-14, the economic statement implementation act, 2020.

I would like to begin by acknowledging that the lands on which we are gathered are part of the unceded traditional territory of the Anishinabe Algonquin people.

Bill C-14 is very important to me in my capacity as the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Seniors and the member for Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation.

Over the past year, and especially during the second wave of the pandemic, seniors from across the country have shared their concerns and worries with me. That is why our government has taken extraordinary measures to improve the health and safety and quality of life of seniors. The pandemic has had a profound impact on all of us, but especially on seniors.

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In my riding, we reached out to our seniors. We felt the distress and isolation that many of them were experiencing. This was often the only phone call they received all week long, so we took the time to listen to and speak with them. The situation is even worse for seniors who live alone. Take Paulette for instance, who lives alone and has been isolated for 11 months. She finds this very difficult.

We reacted quickly when the crisis hit. In April, more than four million low-income and middle-income seniors received a special one-time payment through the GST credit. This represented on average \$375 for seniors living alone and \$510 for couples. In July, we gave a one-time non-taxable payment of \$300 to seniors receiving the old age security pension, and \$200 to seniors receiving the guaranteed income supplement. Thanks to these payments, we helped 6.7 million seniors cover the extra costs generated by COVID-19.

More specifically, because of these two measures, low-income senior couples received over \$1,500 in non-taxable direct assistance. To make sure that the most vulnerable seniors continue to receive the benefits they rely on, we temporarily extended payment of the guaranteed income supplement and the Canada seniors benefit for seniors who, for all sorts of reasons, could not provide their income information before the deadline.

Independently of their pension benefit, seniors who lost their jobs because of COVID-19 were also eligible for the CERB. Many seniors still work or are still active in the labour market. They received the same amount as those who applied for the CERB, specifically \$2,000 a month.

To help seniors and others obtain essential goods and services, such as grocery and pharmacy delivery, we invested half a billion dollars through partners such as Centraide United Way Canada, food banks and charitable organizations. The organizations that help and support the community and seniors made a huge difference in my riding.

As part of the new horizons for seniors program, we launched more than 2,000 community projects to reduce isolation, improve seniors' quality of life and help them maintain a social support system during the pandemic.

We did not stop there. On November 30, the government unveiled its fall economic statement 2020, Canada's plan to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, support Canadians, and invest in a recovery that is inclusive and sustainable and creates good jobs for Canadians. It is another major step forward for the middle class and for those working hard to join it, and especially for the health and safety of our seniors, who built this country.

Along with other measures, our government worked in collaboration with the provinces and territories and implemented progressive policies to ensure that seniors can live safely.

I would now like to highlight a few elements from the fall economic statement that are of interest to seniors. Although long-term care is under provincial and territorial jurisdiction, our government has announced numerous measures to protect residents and staff.

• (1350)

Our government set up a new billion-dollar fund to make long-term care safe and to help the provinces and territories protect their seniors receiving long-term care. This will help prevent infection, improve ventilation systems and hire staff.

In addition, our government will provide support for training up to 4,000 personal care workers to provide care at home and in care homes, as well as essential workers to care for seniors. This will involve an accelerated online program and a four-month internship in order to help make up for the severe labour shortages in the sector. Our government will provide new funding for the Canadian Red Cross, which will improve our ability to protect seniors in long-term care homes. Funding will also be made available to extend the Canadian Foundation for Healthcare Improvement's LTC+ program. This program allows participating long-term care and retirement homes in the provinces to strengthen their pandemic preparedness. They must be prepared. They can also become eligible for mentoring and funding to cover their shortfalls.

We eliminated the GST and HST on masks and face shields to make them more affordable. In addition to these measures, our government committed to providing \$150 million to improve ventilation in public buildings and make them safer for workers and businesses and to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

We cannot allow physical distancing to become social distancing. That is why our government committed to providing \$43 million in funding for Wellness Together Canada, an online portal that gives free mental health advice. Thousands of seniors have used it to ask for advice from their home.

In conclusion, our government's bold and progressive measures are making a real difference in seniors' lives. Although there is still much left to do, Canada's seniors can always rely on our government to listen to them, understand their needs, and work hard to meet them. It is important to point out that, since the beginning of the pandemic, \$9 out of every \$10 spent by our government have been dedicated to the fight against COVID-19. Our country is facing colossal risks and challenges. There is no time to lose. We are eager to continue working with our provincial and territorial colleagues, as well as with other partners across the country, to meet the greatest challenge of our times. Seniors have earned our respect and our admiration, and they deserve the best quality of life possible. Our government is aware of the tragedies experienced by seniors during the pandemic. That is why we will continue to improve their lives and to adopt progressive policies that make a real difference for seniors.

Statements by Members

• (1355)

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Madam Speaker, based on my colleague's speech, you would think that seniors are living on another planet. Seniors plead with us at my riding office not to forget them. Seniors have been the most financially vulnerable before and during the pandemic. We cannot forget seniors, which means that we need to provide long-term, ongoing financial assistance. There was nothing in the November economic statement about permanent assistance through old age security and increasing old age pensions for our seniors.

What commitments can the member make?

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her question.

I have also spoken with seniors in my riding, on top of being in contact with seniors and organizations from across Canada. I hear a different story, though. I am hearing that we have helped seniors quite a bit but that we need to help them even more.

In the economic statement, our Prime Minister committed to increasing old age security by 10%, but we were hit by a pandemic that no one saw coming. We did everything we could to help seniors in long-term care homes by providing subsidies for PPE and for long-term care across Canada.

We will continue to support our seniors.

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to comment on what the hon. member said.

I know that in my riding, seniors are telling me that it is not enough to use buzzwords. These buzzwords, written by the government's research bureau it seems, seek to convey that all is well since we have spent nearly \$400 billion and we have achieved some significant results.

In my riding, I am told that it is not enough to spend money and that the important thing is the way it is spent. What results have we achieved from this spending and what was its purpose? According to the analysis of the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, the financial perspectives found on page 6 of Bill C-14, economic statement implementation act, 2020, indicate that in the new detailed measures, new spending of \$86.8 billion is planned with no information on the previous results obtained for seniors in the old budget.

I have a comment for the hon. member. The people in my riding are asking where are the results and why are we trailing all G20 and G7 countries, last among every western country when it comes to vaccine distribution for our seniors?

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question.

For the entire \$400 billion in pandemic spending, everything was done in collaboration with all members of Parliament. Everyone proposed ideas, and we all worked together to meet Canadians' needs and help as many people as possible.

I am sure there are many seniors in the member's riding who received all the benefits we provided, such as the \$300. The first measure we introduced at the beginning was the GST credit, and

many seniors in my colleague's riding got that. The same thing is happening now with vaccine distribution. We have sent doses all over Canada—

• (1400)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I am sorry, but I have to interrupt the hon. member because it is time for statements by members.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

LUNAR NEW YEAR

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Madam Speaker, last Friday, February 12, many East Asian communities in my riding of Richmond Hill and Markham celebrated the lunar new year and the beginning of the symbolic Year of the Ox. The ox is known to symbolize positive traits such as hard work, reliability, persistence and honesty. The new year symbolizes a change and a chance to start fresh and connect with loved ones safely. Many organizations in my riding, such as the New Canadian Community Centre, Canada Confederation of Fujian Associations and RedMaple Sunset Glow Cultural Association, have demonstrated the qualities of the ox in the past year through community service and donations.

I want to thank these organizations for their continued advocacy, service and commitment to their community. I wish everyone celebrating a happy, healthy and prosperous Year of the Ox. *Gung hei fat choy, xin nian kuai le.*

Happy lunar new year.

FITNESS INDUSTRY

Mr. Len Webber (Calgary Confederation, CPC): Madam Speaker, the pandemic has devastated many small businesses throughout the country. Many are struggling to stay open, and for others it is just too late. One of the sectors hardest hit is the fitness industry. A constituent of mine, Emily Slaneff, who owns and operates the CrushCamp in the East Village of Calgary, like all in the fitness industry, is desperate for a strong recovery. She knows very well that the health of Canadians has suffered throughout this pandemic, and Canada needs to get back into shape not only financially and mentally, but physically as well. As she pointed out to me, the Liberal government would do well to consider bringing back the Conservative fitness tax credit or making fitness memberships tax deductible. This would get people back into fitness facilities and back into fitness routines, people who otherwise would not be able to because of the financial hardships this pandemic has caused.

Let us work with people like Emily to ensure our economic recovery is, literally, a healthy one.

* * *

WOLF SOLKIN

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the term “force of nature” does not apply to many people. Wolf Solkin was a force of nature: an extraordinary individual who lived an extraordinary life that intersected with history.

Born in the Soviet Union, a child of the Great Depression, a World War II combat officer with the Algonquin Regiment, a social worker, property developer, and hotel manager, Wolf left us this month just shy of his 98th birthday. Wolf's love of a just cause was unrelenting to the very end. At Ste. Anne's Hospital, he was a tireless advocate for the rights and dignity of his fellow veterans. He launched an internal newspaper called the Veteran's Voice and, armed with his iPad, employed the written word to amplify and defend the interests of his cohort at the hospital.

I ask members of the House to join me in expressing our deepest condolences to Wolf's wife, Louise, and sons David and Andrew.

* * *

[*Translation*]

HOOKED ON SCHOOL DAYS

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Madam Speaker, this week, the Bloc Québécois would like to take a moment to talk about Hooked on School Days, a campaign that is particularly important this year because the pandemic has changed the lives of young people. It might be hard for them to feel motivated when all that is left of regular school is the toughest part of learning, but we are going to get through this challenging time.

I want to tell young people to hang in there, because it is worth it and we are going to get through this pandemic. Sports and recreational activities will resume. We will be able to see other people again and start living again. Young people will be particularly pleased that their ongoing efforts will have prepared them for success and enabled them to live life to the fullest when things get back to normal.

Statements by Members

In closing, I want to sincerely thank all the teachers, workers and staff who have shown determination and imagination in staying the course. Do not give up this winter.

* * *

MERIEM BOUNDAOUI

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week, a horrific crime was committed in my riding. Meriem Boundaoui, a 15-year-old girl, was the victim of a bullet intended for someone else.

This tragedy serves as a reminder of an insidious pandemic that is slowly spreading through our cities and towns. Gun violence is a real and urgent problem that we need to address.

We have taken action to ban military-style weapons and we must continue to act. We need to introduce red flag laws that will enable community stakeholders, police, health care professionals and victims of domestic violence to report individuals who pose a threat. We must continue to invest in the Canada Border Services Agency to prevent weapons from falling into the hands of criminals.

I offer my deepest condolences to Meriem's family, friends and relatives.

* * *

● (1405)

MAURICE LEBLANC

Mr. Chris d'Entremont (West Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was very sad to hear last Saturday that my friend Father Maurice Leblanc had passed away at age 96.

Born in West Pubnico, in the Par-en-Bas region, this great Acadian was very involved in our community throughout his life. He was well loved because he was close to everyone, and I had the privilege of knowing him my entire life. He was a proud Acadian activist who generously shared his deep affection for our culture both at home in Nova Scotia and far beyond our borders.

Father Leblanc was considered a wise man, but to the community he loved so deeply and was so close to, he will always be Father Maurice. Thanks to his many talents as a painter and musician, he shared his passions by conducting marching bands and choirs and teaching art and history as artistic director at Université Sainte-Anne.

Father Maurice cared about preserving and sharing his heritage, and he served as president of the Fédération acadienne de la Nouvelle-Écosse and the Conseil des arts d'Argyle. He remained an active pastor until 2019.

I offer my sincere condolences to Father Maurice's family and loved ones. I would like to thank Father Maurice for everything. May he rest in peace.

*Statements by Members**[English]***JACKIE VAUTOUR**

Mr. Pat Finnigan (Miramichi—Grand Lake, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a week ago, a legend in my riding passed away: Jackie Vautour. To some, he was a national hero. In 1969, with his family and 250 other families, he resisted expropriation from the tiny Acadian community of Claire-Fontaine by the provincial and federal governments for the creation of Kouchibouguac National Park.

In 1976, Jackie and his family, having refused to leave, were forcibly removed from their homes and their houses and properties were bulldozed to the ground. Jackie and some of his family returned to live in the park in scruffy huts and outbuildings where he remained for most of the rest of his life.

[Translation]

Historians have said that the battle waged by Jackie and other former residents against the Kouchibouguac expropriation helped shift Parks Canada policies such that people are no longer forced off their land to make way for national parks.

[English]

Jackie is back home. May he rest in peace.

* * *

*[Translation]***BROME—MISSISQUOI YOUTH COUNCIL**

Mrs. Lyne Bessette (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week, my Brome—Missisquoi youth council held its first meeting of the year. I would like to thank my colleague from Louis-Hébert for joining us and contributing to the discussion.

It was a wonderful opportunity for me to talk with many local young people and hear what was on their minds during the pandemic. The environment and mental health were at the top of the list of topics we discussed, and those two issues are top priorities for me too. I think it is important for young people to take an interest in politics and have a space where they can share their point of view.

I would like to thank the incredible team of young people participating in the council's work this year. I am very much looking forward to working with them and to our conversations about changes our government can make in 2021.

* * *

*[English]***PARKS CANADA**

Ms. Gudie Hutchings (Long Range Mountains, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what encompasses over 330,000 square kilometres; is in each and every province and territory; is very conscious of protecting our environment; showcases stunning vistas of coastlines, mountains and rolling fields; employs thousands of people; recognizes the incredible history of areas and is a huge contributor to our local economies? If colleagues guessed it is Parks Canada, they are correct.

There are 47 national parks and 171 national historic sites from coast to coast to coast. In my riding in the Long Range Mountains,

over 1,800 square kilometres are home to Gros Morne National Park, which is also a UNESCO world heritage site. If it is history someone is looking for, my riding is also blessed to house Port au Choix and L'Anse aux Meadows national historic sites. These treasures of Parks Canada are huge contributors to the region's economy.

When it is safe to travel, members should explore a Parks Canada area. In 2019, over a quarter of a million people travelled to my riding to visit Parks Canada attractions. I cannot wait until I can boast that we have exceeded that number again in a few years.

* * *

● (1410)

AIRLINE INDUSTRY

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have been demanding for a year that the government keep its promise to deliver a sector-specific plan for the airline industry. Its failure to do so has caused the sector irreversible damage. As a result, Canadians are still waiting for refunds for cancelled flights, regional routes are gone and visiting loved ones across Canada is difficult and unaffordable.

Aviation workers are unemployed or displaced to other locations or to lower-paying jobs. Nav Canada does not have the means to provide service at a level of safety and coverage that Canadians expect.

Canada's airlines cannot compete against foreign airlines that have been supported by their governments. Any plan now from the government is too little, too late. Airline workers know it and Canadians know it.

Only a Conservative government can secure both jobs and our economy.

* * *

DEMOCRACY

Hon. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the past several years have been challenging for global democracy. We have seen a rise in polarization and increasingly vitriolic language expressed by hyperpartisans from all sides. Too often this leads to violence. Social media have exacerbated the problem. Sides are chosen and anchored in Twitter bios. Talking points are delivered in echo chambers, amplified by cryptic algorithms.

Six decades ago, President Dwight Eisenhower seemingly anticipated our current need for wisdom, saying, "The middle of the road is all of the usable surface. The extremes, right and left, are in the gutters."

Before our political labels, we are all just human beings. The middle of the road is simply our common ground. Make no mistake: Passionate political debate is foundational to a healthy democracy, but it is most effective when we engage in conversations not only seeking to persuade but open to being persuaded. This will require a significant shift in our current thinking, but in the end, we will all be better off for it.

* * *

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a community without vibrant small businesses is not a community at all.

The tourism, hospitality, arts, restaurant and accommodation sectors all lost an entire season and are now facing the prospect of a grim 2021. I also hear from business owners who, for the entirety of the past 11 months, have had to keep their doors closed, either because of restrictions or because it would be cost-prohibitive for them to open them under current conditions.

Then there are the countless entrepreneurs who were first the victims of circumstance when they opened immediately prior to or during the pandemic, and were then the victims of government red tape when the same programs they thought would help actually excluded them because their businesses were too new.

To secure our economic recovery, we need small businesses to succeed. That means a vaccine rollout that quickly gets Canadians vaccinated, and it means showing respect and support to small businesses.

We need to secure our future.

* * *

COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Canada emergency response benefit was a lifeline to millions of Canadians in the early days of the pandemic. Despite NDP calls for a universal program, the government chose to exclude many people living on the margins and needing help in these difficult times. The people falling through the cracks include many low-income seniors, people living with disabilities, children aging out of care and workers getting by on contract work or cash jobs. Now many of these people are being told to pay back the CERB, even though they do not have the means.

The measures announced by the government just two weeks ago simply do not solve the problem for many Canadians experiencing poverty. This is a group that includes a disproportionately high number of women and racialized Canadians. We want to see Canadians supported all the way through this pandemic and come out in one piece on the other side. We will not get there without offering a CERB repayment amnesty to low-income Canadians still struggling to get by.

The government has wrongly turned a blind eye to corporate abuses of the wage subsidy. The least it can do is show a similar sympathy where it is actually warranted, which is to those Canadians who need help the most.

Statements by Members

• (1415)

[Translation]

RAYMOND LÉVESQUE

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens (Beauport-Côte-de-Beaupré-Île d'Orléans-Charlevoix, BQ): Mr. Speaker, our friend Raymond Lévesque, the man behind the greatest love song of the 20th century, *Quand les hommes vivront d'amour*, passed away yesterday, February 15. The date of his passing is especially significant, given that our national poet, a patriot in the proper sense of the word and a modern pacifist, left us on exactly the same day that our patriots were executed in 1839.

Raymond was a friend to all, an inspiration, an icon, a mentor, and a model of authenticity and commitment to his one and only nation, Quebec. His immense and magnificent body of work was renowned throughout the francophonie, paving the way for local artists. He received many honours and refused only one, the Canadian Governor General's Award and the \$30,000 that came with it, because even though he lived in a precarious situation, he would not put a price on his convictions.

I want to echo Raymond Lévesque's message of love, peace and liberty. As he said in his song *Bozo-les-culottes*, pioneers are meant to be forgotten, but not you; you will not be forgotten, for your songs will live on forever.

When man lives in love at last,

All our sorrow will be over

The golden age shall come to pass

But we, we'll be gone, my brother.

* * *

[English]

HUMAN RIGHTS

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada has long been a world leader in standing up for human rights and dignity, but today Canada is silent. Some 75 years ago, Canada sacrificed blood and treasure to liberate Europe from the tyranny of Nazism. Some 35 years ago, Canada took a principled stand against apartheid in South Africa. Today it is clear that a genocide is taking place against Uighurs and other Turkic Muslims in China.

[Translation]

These acts of genocide include systematic population control, sexual violence and mass detention. A number of reports have come to the same conclusion, as have two U.S. administrations.

[English]

Today we call on the Government of Canada to recognize that a genocide is taking place and to actively seek a relocation of the 2022 Beijing Olympic games.

*Oral Questions***BLACK HISTORY MONTH**

Mr. James Maloney (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my riding of Etobicoke—Lakeshore has a special place in Canadian history. We are the constituency that elected the first Black Canadian to the Ontario legislature and the first Black woman to the House of Commons.

As we celebrate the 25th anniversary of Black History Month, it is thanks to my predecessor, the Hon. Jean Augustine, and her motion, which was unanimously agreed to in the House of Commons. That was no small feat. Jean was the first woman elected to represent this riding in the House, the first Black woman elected to the chamber and the first Black woman appointed to cabinet. Recently, Maclean's magazine presented her with a well-deserved lifetime achievement award.

Leonard Austin Braithwaite was an outstanding Second World War veteran, a gifted lawyer, a school trustee and a city councillor. He served the legislature from 1963 to 1975, was instrumental in revoking racial segregation in schools and advocated for girls to be allowed to serve as pages in the chamber.

It is an honour to follow in the footsteps of these trailblazers.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[*English*]

EMPLOYMENT

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there were 63,000 job losses in December, twice what economists predicted, and 213,000 job losses in January, almost four times more than expected.

As unemployment lines in Canada keep getting longer, when is the government finally going to deliver a plan to get Canadians back to work in every sector and in every region of this country?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since the beginning of this pandemic, we have made a simple promise to Canadians that we would have their backs as we made it through. That is exactly why our focus has been on seeing Canadians supported so we can do the things that keep us all safe, like staying home and closing down businesses temporarily so we can prevent the spread of COVID-19.

We know that the best way to restore our economy rapidly is to control the spread of COVID-19. That is what we are focused on, while at the same time we spend millions and billions of dollars to support small businesses and families to help them get through this.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, job creators are tired of waiting for the government to act, so the Canadian Chamber of Commerce announced an advisory group to help businesses manage in an economy that is quickly turning against them. They specifically mentioned the lack of a national rapid-testing strategy as a major barrier to getting Canadians back to work.

Why is the Prime Minister more focused on keeping his job than on the Canadians who have been losing theirs?

• (1420)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting to hear the Leader of the Opposition calling for a national strategy on rapid testing when he does not want us to have a national strategy on keeping elders safe in long-term care homes. However, I will get back to rapid testing.

We delivered, this fall, close to 19 million rapid tests to the provinces and territories and are working with them to get them rolled out. Indeed, we have seen that a number of provinces and territories have not moved forward as quickly as we would like on rapid testing, which is why we are going to keep working with them to protect all Canadians and get our economies rolling again.

* * *

HEALTH

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the weekend, the United Kingdom announced that it had vaccinated 15 million people in 60 days. The United States has vaccinated over 54 million people, including more people every single day last week than Canada has vaccinated so far. This morning, Chile announced that it had vaccinated two million of its citizens.

While the world is vaccinating by the millions, the government can only deliver a few thousand. Where is the plan to get vaccines into the arms of Canadians?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, back in November, we announced to Canadians our vaccination plan that would see six million vaccinations in the first quarter, by the end of March, and have everyone vaccinated by September. I can say that, with over 400,000 vaccines from Pfizer arriving this week, we are very well on track to getting those six million vaccinations by the end of March and tens of millions of vaccinations through the spring, with everyone in Canada who wants to get vaccinated getting vaccinated by September.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after a major vaccine delivery agreement from Pfizer and Moderna three weeks ago, Health Canada now agrees that there are six doses in every vial, not five.

Can the Prime Minister tell us how many doses we have lost because of his dithering?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I just said, back in November, we announced that we would be receiving at least six million doses of vaccine by the end of March, and that is exactly what is arriving. We will be getting 400,000 doses or more this week and millions more in the weeks to come, putting us on track to not only meet our target by the end of March, but to have tens of millions of vaccinations through the spring. Everyone who wants to be vaccinated in Canada will be vaccinated by the end of September of this year. Our plan is working.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada ranks 38th in the world on vaccine delivery.

We do not know if we are actually going to receive all the doses we were promised. There is still some uncertainty. We will believe it when we see it.

When will the Prime Minister be ready to vaccinate 300,000 Canadians a day?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we were very quick to sign contracts with different vaccine producers.

We were one of the first countries to begin delivering the vaccines, and we will be receiving more than 400,000 Pfizer vaccine doses this week. There will be millions of doses in the weeks to come to meet our targets for the end of March and to ensure that all Canadians will be vaccinated by the end of the summer.

* * *

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Dr. Gary Kobinger, of Université Laval's Infectious Disease Research Centre, developed a viable vaccine that had potential and was tested on animals.

He asked the Canadian government for \$2 million and received nothing. That is one more example, on top of the delays experienced by Medicigo, and the fact that Quebec's colleges and universities also have research centres, that shows we did not do what could and should have been done in Quebec for research.

Did the Prime Minister intentionally exclude Quebec until it was too late?

• (1425)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am quite disappointed by my hon. colleague's suggestion that politics played a part in this.

We have been clear from the very beginning that we would listen to the recommendations from experts and scientists about our vaccination plan. We did everything we could to invest in science and in solutions. We listened to our experts and their recommendations for local investments and for vaccines. We worked with them to ensure that everyone, around the world, would get vaccinated.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we have too much faith in science to believe that his experts recommended excluding Quebec.

Oral Questions

We do not know how much we are paying for the vaccines in the contracts the Prime Minister signed. We do not know when these vaccines will be delivered. We do not know whether these vaccines will be delivered. He talked about his 400-million-dose insurance policy. He bought so many vaccines without guarantees, in the hopes that we would eventually have enough.

Now that the provinces may be blocked from purchasing vaccines themselves, is it time for the Prime Minister to release the full, unredacted contracts?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know that in a previous life my hon. colleague frequently worked with contracts, so he knows very well that many commercial contracts include confidentiality requirements.

We have been transparent with Canadians about the contracts we have signed. We have been transparent about our targets. We are being transparent about deliveries, including this week's delivery of over 400,000 Pfizer doses.

We will continue to demonstrate that our plan is working. We will vaccinate over three million Canadians by the end of March and all Canadians by September.

* * *

HEALTH

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the longer the vaccination delays go on, the more people will get sick and the more people will die.

The Liberal government has failed to vaccinate the people of Canada. The Prime Minister must show leadership.

Will the Prime Minister do whatever it takes to get people vaccinated as quickly as possible?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yes, that is what we have been doing from the beginning.

We are mobilizing all the necessary resources to vaccinate as many Canadians as possible as quickly as possible. That is why I am so relieved to say that we are on track to meet our targets for the end of March, namely six million doses of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines. We will receive tens of millions of doses in the spring, and everyone who wants to be vaccinated will be by the end of September.

[English]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister needs to stop hiding behind jurisdictional excuses and do everything necessary to vaccinate everyone. We live in a country of nearly 38 million people. To vaccinate everyone is going to take a colossal effort.

Oral Questions

Will the Prime Minister start showing leadership by committing today that the federal government will fund federal vaccination sites across this country to vaccinate as many people as quickly as possible?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, unlike the NDP, apparently, we understand Canada's Constitution and respect provincial responsibilities on health care delivery.

We have worked hand in hand with the provinces from the very beginning to deliver vaccines for Canadians. We are moving forward on supporting them as they vaccinate and as we brace for the big lift, the moment at which tens of millions of vaccines will be arriving in Canada. We are going to need to work very quickly to vaccinate everyone.

We will be there for Canadians, as we have been from the beginning.

* * *

• (1430)

THE ECONOMY

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, business investment is the lifeblood of the Canadian economy, yet under the Prime Minister, investment in factories, machinery and new technologies has declined dramatically.

The Financial Post reports that the Prime Minister has presided over the worst business growth of the past five prime ministers. Today, domestic and foreign investment is at an all-time low.

Does the Prime Minister recognize that our country has a serious competitiveness problem?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me start by congratulating the hon. member for Abbotsford on his recent appointment as his party's critic for finance. He and I worked together in our previous roles in trade, and I look forward to working with him in this new role.

Let me take this opportunity to encourage the hon. member and all members of his party to end their delaying tactics on Bill C-14, to wrap debate at this stage and to move this legislation, which is really important in our fight against COVID, to the finance committee so it can do its work.

The Speaker: Before going to the next question, I want to remind all members who are coming in virtually that having the microphone right in front makes it difficult for the interpreters because there is a popping sound. For everyone's enjoyment and for the health of the interpreters, just lower it a touch, about an inch below the mouth or above, and we will not get the popping sound.

The hon. member for Abbotsford.

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister really does not have to ask me. A chorus of business leaders have sounded the alarm. Former Bank of Canada Governor David Dodge has said that under this Prime Minister Canada has doing "things to shoot ourselves in the foot." There's no jobs plan. There's no plan for small businesses and now no plan to salvage Canada's reputation as a great place to invest.

Does the Prime Minister not recognize that his failed policies are chasing away jobs and investment?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me apologize to the translators for that popping sound.

I am grateful for the question because it gives me the opportunity to highlight the report that the IMF released today on Canada's economy. The IMF forecast that our economy will grow by 4.4% this year and found that Canada "took strong and well-coordinated policy actions at the onset of the pandemic that provided crucial support to the economy and the functioning of financial markets, and helped protect lives and livelihoods." I could not agree more.

* * *

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians want to work.

Unfortunately, last month was a bad one for Canadian workers, because 213,000 of them lost their jobs. We are talking about more than just numbers. We are talking about fathers who had to come home and tell their families that they no longer had a job. We are also talking about mothers and about young people who had just entered the labour market and who had to come home and say that, unfortunately, it was a false start. That is the reality of unemployment.

Meanwhile, the government is dragging its feet when it comes to vaccinations and jobs. What is the government's plan for getting Canadians back to work?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to highlight the very positive report we received today from the IMF, which says Canada's economy will grow by 4.4% this year.

With respect to Canadian workers, I agree with my hon. colleague that we have to support them, and we can do that by voting in favour of Bill C-14. We must do so because we need this legislation and this help.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know the Minister of Finance used to be the foreign affairs minister, so she should know that Canada is bringing up the rear compared to the rest of the world.

At nearly 10%, we have the highest unemployment rate of all G7 countries. That is a fact. We are well behind England, whose unemployment rate is barely 5%, and the United States at 6%. Despite that, the minister says that things are going well and that the OECD said things would be fine. Canadians want concrete action. What is the government's plan for getting Canadians back to work?

Oral Questions

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to clarify for my hon. colleague that I quoted the International Monetary Fund, a global organization that had really positive things to say about the actions taken by our government.

Regarding the unemployment rate, I would remind the member that 71% of the jobs lost in Canada during the crisis have already been recovered. We have performed much better in that regard than our partner, the United States, for example.

* * *

• (1435)
[English]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Biden administration's buy American policies are set to disrupt supply chains between Canada and the United States. The government needs to go to the table now with the United States to prevent supply-chain disruptions that would put our businesses at risk. We need to protect jobs that rely on them in cities like Mississauga and Windsor. Many sectors will be affected by these buy American policies. What is the government doing to secure Canadian jobs?

Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to assure the member and Canadians that our government will always stand up for Canadian businesses and our workers. Canada and the United States have agreed to consult closely to avoid any measures that could constrain bilateral trade and economic growth between our two countries.

I want to remind the member that Canada is the largest exporter to the U.S., buying more from the U.S. than China, Japan and the U.K. combined. Canada is its number one customer in more than 32 states. We are going to take a team Canada approach to ensure that Canadian interests and Canadian jobs are absolutely top priority.

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker buy American policies have not come out of left field. They were part of the Biden administration's election platform. The fact is that the language in these policies is much stronger than anything we have ever seen before coming from the United States. Manufacturers have already warned that this could result in their having to move south and take their business there. There are jobs at risk.

Canadian jobs will be affected by these buy American policies. What is the plan?

Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, to Canadian business and workers, I want them to know that our government is actively engaging with our American counterparts at all levels and that we are always going to stand up for the best interests of Canadians. The Prime Minister raised this in his discussion with President Biden and also spoke with Vice-President Harris about strengthening this trade relationship for the benefit of both countries and to avoid any unintended consequences of the buy American policies.

We are always going to take a team Canada approach, working with Canadian businesses, our exporters, our manufacturers and industries, just as we have done the last five years, and we are going to keep doing this in the interest of Canadian jobs.

* * *

[Translation]

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we are falling further and further behind. Canada now ranks 52nd in the world when it comes to vaccination rollout. We learned this morning that instead of waiting for foreign companies, we could have been vaccinated with doses from Quebec. That is right. World-renowned experts at Laval University created a vaccine that seemed to be effective, right from the start of the pandemic. Testing was in its final stage. The government told them it was not interested and refused to fund the \$2 million required. That is unbelievable.

Why did the government turn its back on Quebec science?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for his question. Let me set the record straight: On March 11, the World Health Organization declared a pandemic; on March 23, 12 days later, we announced \$192 million to support the biomanufacturing sector; on April 23, we announced an additional \$600 million. Approximately one month after the pandemic was declared, we were investing more than \$800 million to support biomanufacturing in Canada, including Quebec companies such as Medicago, in which we invested more than \$170 million to provide vaccines to Canadians in the future.

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, let me set the record straight: They invested \$800 million, but they could not provide \$2 million for such an innovative project.

The United Kingdom also did not have massive production capacity. They did not throw in the towel, they did not say it was too difficult. They rolled up their sleeves, had confidence in their people and increased production capacity. The result is that, today, they are rolling out a large-scale vaccination program while Canada is waiting for its turn. Quebec researchers wanted just \$2 million out of the \$800 million. How could the government have missed out on such an opportunity? It is pathetic.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question.

I have a great deal of respect for Quebec researchers and for the lab in question because I have visited it before. To set the record straight, we did not invest \$2 million in Medicago; we invested \$173 million. We also invested in Biodextris in Laval, Glycovax Pharma in Montreal, JN Nova Pharma in Montreal and Laurent Pharmaceuticals in Montreal.

Oral Questions

We made critical investments for the industry and we will continue to invest in the research and development and the marketing of vaccines in Canada.

* * *

• (1440)

[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. James Cumming (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during a disastrous interview this weekend, a representative of Huawei Canada, Morgan Elliott, could not, on behalf of the company, either condemn the treatment by the Chinese government of its detaining of Canadians Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor, nor could he explain why Huawei patent technology was being used in Uighur detention camps.

The writing is all over the walls. It is time to ban Huawei. Why is the government continuing to drag its feet?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we have said many times, we will be guided by national security in our decision when it comes to 5G in Canada. We are not going to be dictated any timetable by the opposition. We have said time and time again that what is going to dictate our decision is national security. We understand that 5G is going to have a tremendous impact for generations to come, and Canadians can rest assured that this government will take the appropriate and best decision in the interests of all Canadians for generations to come.

Mr. James Cumming (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian representative of Huawei said in the interview that Huawei executive Meng Wanzhou “has done nothing wrong”, suggesting that her detention in a \$13-million Vancouver mansion is the exact same as the containment of the two Michaels in China. All the while, the government has partnered with Huawei, to the tune of almost \$5 million in funding for its university research here in Canada.

How can the government claim to take human rights seriously while Huawei equipment is being used by the Chinese government in Uighur detention camps?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, an experienced member like him should know, like members in this House know, that the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council is responsible for the administration of the Alliance grants. Grants have been awarded through an independent process, which is managed at arm's length from the government. Further, last September we did publish a policy statement on research security, which included instructing the federal granting councils to review their security policies so that Canadian researchers can appropriately protect their work.

* * *

HUMAN RIGHTS

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada has long been a world leader in human rights and dignity, but today Canada is silent. Some 75 years ago, Canada lib-

erated Europe from the tyranny of Nazism with blood and treasure. Some 35 years ago, Canada took a principled stand against apartheid in South Africa.

Will the government recognize that a genocide is taking place against the Uighur people and other Turkic Muslims in China?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as my colleague will know, our government has always taken a very principled approach with respect to the violation of human rights. We are gravely preoccupied by the allegations of mistreatment of Uighurs and other ethnic minorities in the Xinjiang area, and we are looking at all of the available evidence. In the meantime, we have urged China to allow experts into the country to examine the situation so that they can see for themselves what is actually being alleged and committed.

[Translation]

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, many reports indicated that a genocide was occurring.

These reports document systematic population control, sexual violence and mass detention.

Will the government keep silent or will it take a clear stand and recognize this genocide? Will it ask the IOC to relocate the 2022 Beijing games?

• (1445)

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said, our government has always placed a great deal of importance on human rights, and we are very concerned about the treatment of Uighurs and other ethnic minorities in China.

We are urging China to allow experts to come to the Xinjiang area and examine the situation in order to determine whether the human rights of Uighurs are being violated.

* * *

[English]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as the pandemic continues, we are learning that for many people the effects of COVID-19 can last over the long term, with debilitating symptoms such as shortness of breath and chronic fatigue. In some cases, these symptoms are lasting for months and making it impossible for affected Canadians to work. Because of the newness of the disease, government and private insurers are too often getting away with letting these Canadians fall through the cracks.

Will the minister commit to extending the EI sickness benefit to 50 weeks and make it retroactive to January, when many COVID long-haulers' EI sickness benefits expired?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, paid sick leave has been a cornerstone of our public health response to COVID-19, both through the CERB, the Canada recovery sickness benefit and indeed EI. Our government is committed to extending EI sickness benefits from 15 weeks to 26 weeks, and we stand firm and committed to doing just that.

* * *

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Tataskweyak Cree Nation has been forced to not only sue the government over the government's failure to provide clean drinking water but to take its complaint to the UN.

A spokesperson for the Minister of Indigenous Services said that the water in TCN continues to meet approved guidelines. Guidelines? The water is making people sick.

Meanwhile, chiefs are expressing fear of reprisals if they stand up to this government. TCN is standing up, and it has my support and the support of northern Manitoba.

Enough with the excuses. When will the government act to fix the problem?

Hon. Marc Miller (Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first off, we absolutely respect the rights of indigenous groups, including Tataskweyak Cree Nation, to seek intervention of the courts, and we absolutely must respect that process.

Our government continues to support Tataskweyak in the repairs and upgrades to its water system as the water quality does indeed continue to meet approved guidelines.

I would point out that since 2016, Indigenous Services Canada has provided over \$23.5 million toward water and waste-water upgrades, which has provided a new lagoon, a lift station, distribution lines and repairs and upgrades to the water treatment plant as well as a detailed source water study, but we will continue to engage with the community and get to the root of this problem.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms. Helena Jaczek (Markham—Stouffville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, York Region, particularly Markham, Richmond Hill and Vaughan, and the city of Toronto, continue to grow each year. That means more cars on the road, more time spent getting around our region and more pollution in the air each day.

Can the minister update the House on our commitment to fund major transit projects and our plans to establish a permanent public transit fund?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Markham—Stouffville for her commitment to public transit.

I understand the pain of sitting in a traffic jam on the Don Valley Parkway. It wastes people's time while polluting our air. Last week, our government announced \$15 billion in new funding for public transit as well as \$3 billion ongoing, as permanent public transit

Oral Questions

money, to support major projects like subways, zero-emission buses and bike paths. This is about public transit that will help Canadians get around in faster, cleaner and more affordable ways.

* * *

HEALTH

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, countries around the world are ramping up their vaccination pace because of the spread of the U.K. and South African variants. These variants are highly contagious, and it is very concerning to see what they could do.

We have seen the results of what the U.K. variant did in a long-term care facility in Barrie, and the South African variant has been discovered in other places in the country.

Is the Prime Minister concerned that our slow pace of vaccinations in Canada has left Canadians vulnerable to a potentially larger third wave due to the variant, and if so, what is he doing about it?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we share the concern of the member opposite about the effect of variants taking hold in any Canadian community. That is why we have worked so diligently with the provinces and territories to support them in all of their efforts to contain the virus, including sending in additional support with the Canadian Red Cross to particular settings, like the one she mentioned, to help ensure we are doing a thorough job of containing those viruses. This government will stop at nothing to protect Canadians and support provinces and territories in their essential work.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the best way to protect Canadians against the variant is with a vaccine that we do not have right now.

Other countries around the world have slowed and stopped their vaccination programs using the AstraZeneca vaccine because of its reported ineffectiveness against variants.

As well, Novavax, one of the candidates the government has signed contracts with to be produced here in Canada, also has severe concerns about its effectiveness against variants.

Oral Questions

We do not really have mRNA capacity in Canada right now. The government is not working with companies that do have it, so we are slow to receive those vaccines.

If Novavax and AstraZeneca do not work against the variants and we do not have mRNA capacity, what is plan B?

• (1450)

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we do have mRNA vaccines, two of them to be precise, and they are 90% effective. In fact, the manufacturers are very confident they are also effective against the variants. Those are the ones that we will be receiving more of each and every week, including this week: 400,000 from Pfizer, and an additional 400,000 the week after, etc.

I am very confident in the work of the Health Canada regulators to make sure that whatever is approved for use in Canada will be safe and effective.

* * *

[Translation]

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the CEO of Solstar Pharma wrote the innovation minister to say, “As far as Canada is concerned, we tried to move things forward, but to no avail. We were unable to secure the funding or key strategic partners in Canada that we needed to gain access to the labs.”

Canadian businesses are willing and able to get the job done. The fact that TriLink Bio Technologies, from San Diego, partnered very rapidly with Solstar is clear proof of that.

Why did the Prime Minister leave Solstar on the sidelines?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by thanking my hon. colleague for his question.

As I said earlier, we have made historic investments. Twelve days after the pandemic was declared, we were already making \$192 million available to the biomanufacturing sector. On April 23, we announced an additional \$600 million. In total, approximately one month after the pandemic began, we had invested close to \$800 million.

I invite my colleague to tell the CEO with whom he spoke to contact me. I will gladly speak to him, just as I speak with anyone who wants to get in touch with us.

Of course we are prepared to support Canadian businesses. We have supported many and will continue to do so.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is another issue that raises some questions.

Dr. Gary Kobinger walked away from the COVID-19 vaccine task force in response to comments by the Liberal government. Let me point out that the Minister of Public Services and Procurement publicly stated that Canada did not have the brainpower or the ex-

perience to develop its own COVID-19 vaccines or to get a plant up and running.

In response, Dr. Kobinger said, “It’s an insult to the last decade.”

The Liberals talk a lot about Canadian know-how, so why are they acting this way?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question.

I can assure him that we have enormous respect for Canada’s researchers and scientists. I believe I have even visited his lab.

Let me set the record straight. We made historic investments in biomanufacturing in Canada. Examples include Medicago in Quebec City, VBI Vaccines Inc. in Ontario, Precision NanoSystems in Vancouver, ImmunoVaccine Technologies in Nova Scotia, Entos Pharmaceuticals in Alberta, Providence Therapeutics in Alberta, Symvivo in British Columbia, Biodextris in Laval and Glycovax Pharma in Montreal.

We will continue to invest—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Beauport—Limoilou.

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it has been 10 years since the federal government awarded Irving the contract to build frigates, but the shipyard has yet to deliver anything. Now we learn that it is going to be another 10 years until the first frigate is built. It will be delivered in 2031, at the earliest.

It is unbelievable. Irving has not produced a single frigate in 20 years. Meanwhile, the Davie shipyard, the best in North America, was shut out.

When will the government finally realize that the only intelligent solution to the 20-year wait and delay is to give Davie its fair share of contracts?

Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Davie shipyard is a strong and reliable partner that is going to great effort to help our government deliver results for Canadians.

While the Davie shipyard was shut out of all major works by the previous government, we have awarded contracts totalling more than \$2.4 billion to that Quebec company.

We support the shipbuilding industry and its workers from coast to coast to coast.

• (1455)

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we call that abandoning Davie because \$2.4 billion in maintenance is a far cry from the \$70 billion it will end up costing to build the frigates instead of \$26 billion as was first thought.

That is a cost overrun the equivalent of Quebec’s entire annual health budget. It is \$1,000 per Canadian. That is what it cost to shut out the best shipyard in Canada.

Oral Questions

When will the government give work to Davie and Quebeckers?

Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is not the case whatsoever. The government has awarded contracts worth \$838 million to Davie shipyard for the acquisition of three medium commercial icebreakers and conversion work.

The first ship began its operations in December 2018. The conversion work on the *Jean Goodwill* is going well and the first Royal Canadian Navy frigate has arrived at Davie shipyard for repairs and maintenance.

* * *

[*English*]

HEALTH

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada had a clear pandemic guidebook pre-COVID, which the Liberal government completely ignored at the peril of Canadians and Canada. Canadians need the Liberals to share the data used to support their public policy decisions, data that has been intentionally hidden or is not available because they failed to collect it. The federal government is failing in everything from travel screening and rapid testing to vaccine procurement, vaccine rollout and lockdowns, all of which continue to plague our country's ability to recover.

Where is the data and what is the plan for recovery, or would the Liberals prefer that Canada remain in a perpetual pandemic?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every step of the way our response has guided by science and evidence. We are so proud of our hard-working public servants, researchers, scientists and public health professionals who have helped Canada in its response.

I will also point the member to the canada.ca/coronavirus website where all of the data that we are collecting is available. In fact, many researchers around the country use that data to provide additional analysis, for which we are also grateful.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, an Oshawa constituent is a nurse working for the federal government in servicing indigenous communities. However, due to logistical complications between the federal and provincial governments, this nurse has been unable to be vaccinated, thus putting the vulnerable communities that they are serving at risk.

Considering that the government has been vaccinating critical federal employees, such as our armed forces, why will it not also vaccinate critical federal health care employees serving vulnerable and remote communities?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, we are lucky in Canada to have the national advisory committee on immunization, which has provided expert advice about how to roll out the variety of vaccines that Canada has received and will receive.

This advice reflects the best scientists who work for the NACI team and provide that advice to the Government of Canada. It also allows for the provinces and territories to build their vaccine strategies, built on NACI's advice. The approach is based on saving lives

first and then protecting people who are working close to folks who are at risk of contracting COVID.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government's total failure to deal with this pandemic is having a devastating impact in my riding of Red Deer—Mountain View.

The government simply cannot get anything right. We are six months behind many other countries in the world when it comes to procurement and to vaccine distribution. Canada now ranks 38th in the world for vaccinations per capita.

Rather than fixing the problems, the Liberal government is distracting from them and continues to fail Canadians with chaotic and disorganized vaccination programs.

When will the Liberal government realize that there is no policy substitute for a transparent vaccine strategy?

• (1500)

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every step of the way, we have been transparent with Canadians, including by giving updates in the press, on a regular basis, from a variety of officials and elected officials, and by working clearly and transparently with provinces and territories so they can plan the vaccine rollout.

We will continue that approach, because Canadians expect no less.

* * *

[*Translation*]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to protecting and supporting our supply-managed producers. The proof is that we recently signed a transitional free trade agreement with the United Kingdom and we made no concessions on supply management.

Last week, the Prime Minister, several ministers, MPs and I met with dairy, poultry and egg producers to discuss the future of supply-managed agriculture. Can the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food inform the House of compensation for supply-managed sectors?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we will be making compensation payments to dairy producers for the agreements signed with the European Union and the trans-Pacific region over the shorter period of four years.

Oral Questions

More than 60% of them have already received their second payment, totalling \$327 million. Programs for poultry and egg producers will follow and then it will be the turn of processors.

Our government is committed to protecting the supply management system and not giving up any more market share.

* * *

[English]

RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise in my new role as critic for rural economic development.

Rural businesses are critically important for Canada's future. That is why I was disappointed to read the Liberal rural economic strategy, which completely leaves out our critical hunting and angling sectors.

Hunting and angling contributes over \$1 billion in annual GDP to Canada. Why are the Liberals ignoring our hunting and angling sectors?

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Rural Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague on his new role. I look forward to working with him to ensure that every rural community is part of Canada's recovery and indeed leading it.

The member referred to our economic development strategy for rural Canada, the first of its kind, focused on three pillars: people, places and partnerships. This includes everybody, including service groups, including hunters and anglers, including businesses, including the charitable sector, especially in the post-pandemic Canada.

We cannot afford to leave anyone behind and we intend to ensure everyone is connected to high-speed Internet.

* * *

TOURISM INDUSTRY

Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, tourism operators in northwestern Ontario rely primarily on American clients to keep their businesses running. Given that we are well into February, they need to know now if they will have international visitors this summer or if they will lose another season. Some level of certainty from the government, one way or another, is crucial for these businesses to plan ahead.

When will tourism operators know if fully vaccinated foreign nationals will be exempt from travel restrictions or not?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I had the chance to have many discussions with tourism operators in northern Ontario along with many of my colleagues. Obviously, we know they are going through difficult times.

We have been there for them since the beginning of the pandemic. We have invested \$10 billion through the wage subsidy, through the regional development agencies and through also the support to a fixed cost. Recently, we even launched the highly impacted sectors support.

It will be a pleasure to work with my colleague to ensure that these tourism operators have access to this very particular new support.

* * *

[Translation]

COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Canada emergency rent subsidy is designed to help business owners who have been hit hard by this pandemic. A young man in my riding who has been running a business for 10 years pays his taxes. He qualified for the subsidy in the spring, but since September he no longer qualifies. Why is that? It is because of a non-arm's length party.

Can the Minister of Finance fix this mistake and support all business owners, including honest young Canadian entrepreneurs?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I agree with my hon. colleague. The Canada emergency rent subsidy is a very important program that provides support for our Canadian businesses through the pandemic.

When the government implements a program like this one, we need to make sure that it helps as many businesses as possible without compromising the integrity of the program. We are always managing that balance. Our goal is to help all of the businesses that are entitled to this program and need this support.

● (1505)

Hon. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since the beginning of the pandemic our government has provided financial support to millions of Canadians, helping them put food on the table and keep a roof over their heads, but this crisis continues to have dire consequences for many Canadians. They need more time and flexibility to pay back the interest on their tax debt.

Can the Minister of National Revenue talk about the recent announcements on this subject?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Ottawa South for his question and his hard work.

I did indeed announce last week that Canadians who received financial support payments related to COVID-19 and earned \$75,000 or less in taxable income would not be required to pay interest on their tax debt before 2022.

This measure will give millions of Canadians the flexibility and peace of mind they need to get through this difficult period until they get back on their feet.

[English]

HEALTH

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, new land border testing requirements and possible testing for essential travellers is causing confusion and concern among Canadians.

In my city of Windsor, which accounts for 40% of trade between our countries, thousands of essential workers cross daily to work in health care, the supply chain and transport. For months I have called for rapid testing and a comprehensive plan for our border crossings that keeps it moving, safe and builds public confidence.

When will the government act on rapid testing, vaccinate CBSA officers and vaccinate essential workers instead of causing confusion in the community? Why does it not just act and protect Canadians?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every step of the way that is exactly what we have been doing, acting with provinces and territories to protect Canadians.

In regard to the member's question about rapid testing, we agree that it is a very important tool. As the member may realize, we have shipped over 21.6 million rapid tests to provinces and territories: 4.1 million to Quebec, 6.7 million to Ontario, 2.3 million to Alberta and even more to other provinces and territories.

We will continue to ensure that provinces and territories have the tools they need as well as the guidance to use it.

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Mr. Speaker, uncoordinated provincial and territorial responses to COVID-19 failed to halt the spread of the virus in Canada. Small and medium-sized businesses are struggling to survive. Millions of Canadians are experiencing financial hardship. Mental health challenges, drug overdoses and domestic violence have increased.

Will the government work with the provinces and territories to create an intergovernmental COVID task force to coordinate a national response to the pandemic so Canada can get to zero and end the lockdowns?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, all Canadians have been working incredibly hard and sacrificing a lot to get through this pandemic. I want to thank all Canadians for their enormous efforts.

We already have an intergovernmental coordinating committee, which is called the special advisory committee, and all medical officers of health from all across the country work together as professionals, as doctors, to guide our country's response. Of course, it is led and chaired by our incredible Dr. Tam to ensure that we have consistency and cohesion for the guidance that we provide to Canadians as well as the efforts that we take in procurement, research and various other aspects of managing COVID. That has served us well, and we will continue to support provinces and territories through that mechanism and many other strategies and tables that meet.

Points of Order

• (1510)

[Translation]

POINTS OF ORDER

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties. I believe that you will find unanimous consent for the following motion:

That the House call upon the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship to grant permanent residency to Mamadi Fara Camara as soon as possible, pursuant to section 25.1(1) of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act.

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

I am hearing no voices. The House has heard the terms of the motion. All those opposed to the motion will please say nay.

There being no dissenting voice, I declare the motion carried.

(Motion agreed to)

[English]

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Kerry Diotte (Edmonton Griesbach, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. When the member for Red Deer—Mountain View was asking a question, I noticed that another member popped up on the screen, inadvertently interrupting the member for Red Deer—Mountain View. I am wondering if the MP for Red Deer—Mountain View wants a chance to re-ask the question.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on that point of order, that happened a number of times today, and it has definitely happened in the past. Rather than this ad hoc way of approaching it, which we seem to have done, perhaps you should come to some conclusion as to how we should proceed when this kind of thing happens. Otherwise, we are going to see this happening every single day. I think you need to make a ruling on what should happen in these events.

The Speaker: What has happened in these events is that the Speaker has been using his or her judgment. Depending on whether it pops up for a while or it is instantaneous, the Speaker makes a decision on that basis. When the hon. member was making his statement, the interruption popped up instantaneously and temporarily. That is why I did not have the member ask his question again.

If it is okay with the chamber, I would leave it to the Speaker, whether it is the Speaker, the Deputy Speaker or an Assistant Deputy Speaker, to use their judgment on that. I think we have been fair. Hopefully that is acceptable.

If there is something that comes up, by all means, bring it to our attention. We are more than happy to work with all members so they do get their fair share.

Business of Supply

Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, there are times when members are speaking in French and we cannot hear the interpreter in English, as the French overrides it. I am wondering if that could be corrected.

The Speaker: Our technical people have heard that and hopefully they will get that straightened out. I thank the member.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE ECONOMIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES

The House resumed from February 4 consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: It being 3:12 p.m., pursuant to order made on Monday, January 25, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion of the hon. member for Kelowna—Lake Country relating to the business of supply.

[*English*]

Call in the members.

• (1600)

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

(*Division No. 49*)

YEAS

Members

Aboultaif	Aitchison
Albas	Alghabra
Alleslev	Allison
Amos	Anand
Anandasangaree	Angus
Arnold	Arseneault
Arya	Bachrach
Badawey	Bagnell
Bains	Baker
Baldinelli	Barlow
Barrett	Barsalou-Duval
Battiste	Beaulieu
Beech	Bendayan
Bennett	Benzen
Bergen	Bergeron
Berthold	Bérubé
Bessette	Bezan
Bibeau	Bittle
Blaikie	Blanchet
Blanchette-Joncas	Blaney (North Island—Powell River)
Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)	Block
Blois	Boudrias
Boulerice	Bragdon
Brassard	Bratina
Brière	Brunelle-Duceppe
Calkins	Cannings
Carr	Carrie
Casey	Chabot
Chagger	Champagne
Champoux	Charbonneau
Chen	Chiu
Chong	Collins
Cooper	Cormier

Cumming	Dabrusin
Dalton	Damoff
Dancho	Davidson
Davies	DeBellefeuille
Deltell	d'Entremont
Desbiens	Desilets
Dhaliwal	Dhillon
Diotte	Doherty
Dong	Dowdall
Dreeshen	Drouin
Dubourg	Duclos
Duguid	Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)
Duvall	Dzerowicz
Easter	Ehsassi
El-Khoury	Ellis
Epp	Erskine-Smith
Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)	Falk (Provencher)
Fast	Fergus
Fillmore	Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock)
Finnigan	Fisher
Fonseca	Fortier
Fortin	Fragiskatos
Fraser	Freeland
Fry	Gallant
Garneau	Garrison
Gaudreau	Gazan
Genuis	Gerretsen
Gill	Gladu
Godin	Gould
Gourde	Gray
Green	Guilbeault
Hajdu	Hallan
Harder	Hardie
Harris	Hoback
Holland	Housefather
Hughes	Hussen
Hutchings	Iacono
Ien	Jaczek
Jansen	Jeneroux
Johns	Joly
Jordan	Jowhari
Julian	Kelloway
Kelly	Kent
Khalid	Khera
Kitchen	Kmiec
Koutrakis	Kram
Kurek	Kusie
Kusmierczyk	Kwan
Lake	Lalonde
Lambropoulos	Lametti
Lamoureux	Larouche
Lattanzio	Lauzon
Lawrence	LeBlanc
Lebouthillier	Lefebvre
Lehoux	Lemire
Lewis (Essex)	Liepert
Lightbound	Lloyd
Lobb	Long
Longfield	Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga)
Lukiwski	MacAulay (Cardigan)
MacGregor	MacKenzie
MacKinnon (Gatineau)	Maguire
Maloney	Marçil
Martel	Martinez Ferrada
Masse	Mathysen
May (Cambridge)	Mazier
McCauley (Edmonton West)	McColeman
McCrimmon	McDonald
McGuinty	McKay
McKenna	McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
McLean	McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)
McLeod (Northwest Territories)	McPherson
Melillo	Mendès

Routine Proceedings

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

STATUS OF WOMEN

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion to concur in the second report of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

• (1645)

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

(Division No. 50)

YEAS

Members

Aitchison	Albas
Alghabra	Alleslev
Allison	Amos
Anand	Anandasangaree
Angus	Arnold
Arseneault	Arya
Atwin	Bachrach
Badawey	Bagnell
Bains	Baker
Baldinelli	Barlow
Barrett	Barsalou-Duval
Battiste	Beaulieu
Beech	Bendayan
Bennett	Benzen
Bergen	Bergeron
Berthold	Bérubé
Besette	Bezan
Bibeau	Bittle
Blaikie	Blanchet
Blanchette-Joncas	Blaney (North Island—Powell River)
Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)	Block
Blois	Boudrias
Boulerice	Bragdon
Brassard	Bratina
Brière	Brunelle-Duceppe
Calkins	Cannings
Carr	Carrie
Casey	Chabot
Chagger	Champagne
Champoux	Charbonneau
Chen	Chiu
Chong	Collins
Cooper	Cormier
Cumming	Dabrusin
Dalton	Damoff
Dancho	Davidson
Davies	DeBellefeuille
Deltell	d'Entremont
Desilets	Dhaliwal
Dhillon	Diotte
Doherty	Dong
Dowdall	Dreeshen
Drouin	Dubourg
Duclos	Duguid
Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)	Duvall
Dzerowicz	Easter
Ehsassi	El-Khoury
Ellis	Epp
Erskine-Smith	Falk (Battledowns—Lloydminster)
Falk (Provencher)	Fast

Mendicino	Michaudo
Miller	Monsef
Moore	Morantz
Morrison	Morrissey
Motz	Murray
Nater	Ng
Normandin	O'Connell
Oliphant	O'Regan
O'Toole	Patzer
Paul-Hus	Pauzé
Perron	Petitpas Taylor
Plamondon	Poilievre
Powlowski	Qaqqaq
Qualtrough	Ratansi
Rayes	Redekopp
Regan	Reid
Rempel Garner	Richards
Robillard	Rodriguez
Rogers	Romanado
Rood	Ruff
Sahota (Calgary Skyview)	Sahota (Brampton North)
Saini	Sajjan
Saks	Samson
Sangha	Sarai
Saroya	Savard-Tremblay
Scarpaleggia	Scheer
Schiefke	Schmale
Schulte	Seeback
Serré	Sgro
Shanahan	Sheehan
Shields	Shin
Shipley	Sidhu (Brampton East)
Sidhu (Brampton South)	Simard
Simms	Singh
Sloan	Sorbara
Soroka	Spengemann
Stanton	Steinley
Ste-Marie	Strahl
Stubbs	Sweet
Tabbara	Tassi
Thériault	Therrien
Tochor	Trudeau
Trudel	Turnbull
Uppal	Van Bynen
van Koeverden	Van Popta
Vandal	Vandenbeld
Vaughan	Vecchio
Vidal	Viersen
Vignola	Virani
Vis	Wagantall
Waugh	Webber
Weiler	Wilkinson
Williamson	Wilson-Raybould
Wong	Yip
Young	Yurdiga
Zahid	Zann
Zimmer	Zuberi — 326

NAYS

Members

Atwin
May (Saanich—Gulf Islands) — 3

Manly

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Routine Proceedings

Fergus	Fillmore	Rodriguez	Rogers
Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock)	Finnigan	Romanado	Rood
Fisher	Fonseca	Ruff	Sahota (Calgary Skyview)
Fortier	Fortin	Sahota (Brampton North)	Saini
Fragiskatos	Fraser	Sajjan	Saks
Freeland	Fry	Samson	Sangha
Gallant	Garneau	Sarai	Saroya
Garrison	Gaudreau	Savard-Tremblay	Scarpaleggia
Gazan	Gentis	Scheer	Schiefke
Gerretsen	Gill	Schmale	Schulte
Gladu	Godin	Seeback	Serré
Gould	Gourde	Sgro	Shanahan
Gray	Green	Sheehan	Shields
Guilbeault	Hajdu	Shin	Shipley
Hallan	Harder	Sidhu (Brampton East)	Sidhu (Brampton South)
Hardie	Harris	Simard	Simms
Hoback	Holland	Singh	Sloan
Housefather	Hughes	Sorbara	Soroka
Hussen	Hutchings	Spengemann	Stanton
Iacono	Ien	Steinley	Ste-Marie
Jaczek	Jansen	Strahl	Stubbs
Johns	Joly	Sweet	Tabbara
Jordan	Jowhari	Tassi	Thériault
Julian	Kelloway	Therrien	Tochor
Kelly	Kent	Trudeau	Trudel
Khalid	Khera	Turnbull	Uppal
Kitchen	Kmiec	Van Bynen	van Koevorden
Koutrakis	Kram	Van Popta	Vandal
Kurek	Kusie	Vandenbeld	Vaughan
Kusmierczyk	Kwan	Vecchio	Vidal
Lake	Lalonde	Viersen	Vignola
Lambropoulos	Lametti	Virani	Vis
Lamoureux	Larouche	Wagantall	Waugh
Lattanzio	Lauzon	Webber	Weiler
Lawrence	Lebouthillier	Wilkinson	Williamson
Lefebvre	Lehoux	Wilson-Raybould	Wong
Lemire	Lewis (Essex)	Yip	Young
Liepert	Lightbound	Yurdiga	Zahid
Lloyd	Lobb	Zann	Zimmer
Long	Longfield	Zuberi — 325	
Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga)	Lukiwski		
MacAulay (Cardigan)	MacGregor		
MacKenzie	MacKinnon (Gatineau)		
Maguire	Maloney		
Manly	Marcil		
Martel	Martinez Ferrada		
Masse	Mathysen		
May (Cambridge)	May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)		
Mazier	McCauley (Edmonton West)		
McColeman	McCrimmon		
McDonald	McGuinty		
McKay	McKenna		
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)	McLean		
McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)	McLeod (Northwest Territories)		
McPherson	Melillo		
Mendès	Mendicino		
Michaud	Miller		
Monsef	Moore		
Morantz	Morrison		
Morrissey	Motz		
Murray	Nater		
Ng	Normandin		
O'Connell	Oliphant		
O'Regan	O'Toole		
Patzer	Paul-Hus		
Pauzé	Perron		
Petitpas Taylor	Plamondon		
Poillievre	Powlowski		
Qaqqaq	Qualtrough		
Ratansi	Rayes		
Redekopp	Regan		
Reid	Rempel Garner		
Richards	Robillard		

NAYS

PAIRED

Nil

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Before we continue, it is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable, Government Appointments; the hon. member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, Ethics; the hon. member for Calgary Midnapore, Airline Industry.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

BROADCASTING ACT

(Bill C-10. On the Order: Government Orders:)

February 5, 2021—Second reading of Bill C-10, An Act to amend the Broadcasting Act and to make related and consequential amendments to other Acts—the Minister of Canadian Heritage.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very happy with the outcome of the two motions adopted earlier. If you seek it, you will find unanimous consent of the House:

That, notwithstanding any standing or special order or usual practice of the House, the amendment to the second reading motion of Bill C-10, An Act to amend the Broadcasting Act and to make related and consequential amendments to other Acts, standing in the name of the member for Regina—Wascana, be withdrawn; and that the motion for second reading of Bill C-10 be deemed adopted on division and that the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

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

I hear none. The House has heard the terms of the motion.

All those opposed to the motion will please say nay.

There being no dissenting voice, I declare the motion carried.

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

* * *

[English]

PRIVILEGE

LANGUAGE INTERPRETATION RESOURCES

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today on a question of privilege concerning the interpretation resources that are available for committee meetings and other parliamentary proceedings.

I am raising this issue after Friday's meeting of the Standing Committee on Health. It was suspended on the claims of its chair, the hon. member for Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, that there were no staff resources, interpreters, clerks and so on, available after 4:30 p.m. and therefore the committee could no longer continue to meet. That meeting was seized with a motion to order the production of the federal government's vaccine contracts, something the Liberal government has been treating as Ottawa's most highly guarded secret.

While I recognize that the usual practice of the House is that a complaint arising in a committee should first be reported from the committee itself, this has been a growing and systemic issue plaguing our hybrid committee structure. The health committee's meeting last week was merely the straw that broke the camel's back, so to speak.

I understand that a recent meeting of the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations was similarly plagued by an abrupt adjournment as well. This past autumn, the Standing Committee on Finance witnessed a whole series of suspensions premised on unavailable resources.

Privilege

At last week's health committee meeting, the hon. member for Beauport—Limoilou struggled to participate in a vote shortly before the suspension, attributing her difficulties to interpretation challenges. What is more, she noted that this was not the first time this caused a problem for her to vote, reflecting on a high-profile vote she cast at the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics back on October 26.

These are just a few examples that come to mind, and I am sure a number of other cases could very easily be cited with just a bit more reflection.

All of this is to say that there is a bigger picture here, a pattern, if we will, to take into consideration. It is this pattern which I respectfully submit meets the threshold of “very serious and special circumstances”, which Speaker Fraser articulated on March 26, 1990, at page 9756 of the Debates, in respect of the Chair intervening in committee matters.

● (1650)

[Translation]

To begin, and before anyone gets the wrong impression, let me clearly say that Conservatives strongly support bilingualism within Parliament. That was a basic premise of Confederation, that great legacy of Sir John A. Macdonald and Sir George-Étienne Cartier, that guaranteed, under section 133 of the British North America Act, that English or French could be used by any person during debates in the chambers of Canada's Parliament and that these two languages should be used in the respective records and journals of those chambers.

It was the government of Richard Bennett, a fellow Albertan, that created the Translation Bureau. Under subsection 4(1) of the Translation Bureau Act, the Translation Bureau shall collaborate with and act for both Houses of Parliament in all matters relating to the making and revising of translations from one language into another of documents, including correspondence, reports, proceedings, debates, bills and Acts, and to interpretation, sign-language interpretation and terminology.

It was John Diefenbaker's government that introduced simultaneous interpretation in the House of Commons and the Senate. It was Brian Mulroney's government that enshrined our simultaneous interpretation system in the Official Languages Act in 1988 in what is now subsection 4(2) of that act. Facilities shall be made available for the simultaneous interpretation of the debates and other proceedings of Parliament from one official language into the other.

Conservatives have been the parents and champions of bilingualism in Parliament.

[English]

Turning specifically to the health committee's meeting, at about 4:25 on Friday the chair stated, according to the blues, “I just want to advise the committee that we have a hard stop at 4:30 eastern time. After 4:30 we have no interpreters, no clerk, no analysts, and no room.”

Privilege

As to the adjournment of committee meetings, allow me to quote from page 1099 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition:

A committee meeting may be adjourned by the adoption of a motion to that effect. However, most meetings are adjourned more informally, when the Chair receives the implied consent of members to adjourn. The committee Chair cannot adjourn the meeting without the consent of a majority of the members, unless the Chair decides that a case of disorder or misconduct is so serious as to prevent the committee from continuing its work.

There is nothing in there about adjourning because inadequate resources have been provided to a committee.

A page earlier, on meeting suspensions, Bosc and Gagnon explain:

Committees frequently suspend their meetings for various reasons, with the intention to resume later in the day.

Some of the examples include:

to change from public to in camera mode, or the reverse; to enable witnesses to be seated or to hear witnesses by video conference; to put an end to disorder; to resolve a problem with the simultaneous interpretation system; or to move from one item on the agenda to the next.

We have all encountered those in our times here and, yes, while problems with interpretation are in fact mentioned and can occasionally be common, that is usually a quick matter of ensuring that all the switches are in the right position and whatnot. Therefore, it is not a matter of staff simply not being scheduled to support parliamentary work. Even if it were, it should have only been for as long as was required for new interpreters to come and take a shift in the booth, not for the 95 or so hours that it had been since the health committee's deliberations were suspended.

Debate on the vaccine contract production motion kicked off shortly before noon that day. It is my understanding that by approximately 2 p.m., first, it was clear to all concerned that a Liberal filibuster was in flight; second, there was an understanding that a majority of committee members would not give expressed or implied consent to adjourn the meeting along the lines expressed on page 1099 of Bosc and Gagnon, which I just quoted; and third, these developments had been communicated to senior House administration officials in order that the necessary arrangements could then be made for the health committee's meeting to continue into the evening.

Our move to hybrid and virtual proceedings, necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has indeed put strains on the technical ability to secure bilingualism in the House's proceedings. Last year, I was a member of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs when that committee looked at whether to incorporate virtual elements into our proceedings during this pandemic.

On May 4, the procedure and House affairs committee heard from the Canadian Association of Professional Employees that there were 70 staff interpreters working in official languages and that 40 of them were at the time unable to work either because of health issues or child care needs when schools were closed. The union also informed the committee:

We are getting close to our worst-case scenario, which is that too many interpreters end up needing rest and healing at the same time. We fear that interpreters are getting dangerously close to being unable to keep up with the demand and having to refuse assignments in too great numbers to find replacements. This would jeopardize the conduct of parliamentary activities. Nobody wants to get to the point

where we no longer have enough available qualified interpreters to support parliamentary work.

In the Conservative dissenting report to the procedure and House affairs committee's fifth report, tabled last May, we wrote that the interpretation situation we had heard about was "Not only is this distressing for our hard-working interpreters, but it places bilingualism in the House at grave risk." I understand that the grave risk has continued to develop and mature instead of being met, addressed and mitigated.

All this is to say that it is not just some bolt out of the blue. We saw it coming in the very first weeks of the pandemic situation when we were only dipping our toes into the world of virtual committee meetings. In the procedure and House affairs committee's fifth report, it was acknowledged by all parties, at page 10, "The Committee notes that increasing the complexity of House proceedings could result in the need for more simultaneous interpreters", yet, here we are, hearing that the situation has been moving in fact in the opposite direction.

• (1655)

In January, The Canadian Press reported on a survey conducted by the Canadian chapter of the International Association of Conference Interpreters. It revealed that 60% of respondents had experienced auditory issues requiring time off work. Our interpreters reported over a nine-month period triple the number of workplace injuries that had been experienced in the preceding 20 months.

These reports prompted the Standing Committee on Official Languages to begin a study looking into the challenges facing our interpreters. The official languages committee heard on February 2 from the conference interpreters association that:

There is already a critical shortage of interpreters qualified to work on the Hill... The shortage of interpreters preceded the pandemic, which merely exacerbated the situation.

According to the association's evidence, there are only about 80 freelance interpreters in all of Canada who meet the Translation Bureau's standards to supplement the work of about 50 staff interpreters.

The association ended its presentation to the official languages committee with this plea:

...please urge the Minister to address the critical shortage of qualified interpreters in Canada on an urgent basis and ensure the very small existing pool of Government accredited interpreters is encouraged to work in the Parliament of Canada and not actively discouraged as they have been.

It goes without saying that our simultaneous interpreters have been the unsung heroes of maintaining parliamentary democracy throughout this pandemic. My deepest thanks go to them for the work they are putting in and for the challenges they are enduring. My remarks today are in no way aimed at them as individuals, but rather at the management and organization.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, as you would know, though I do not believe everyone is as familiar with the unique jurisdictional lines on Parliament Hill, the House of Commons does not actually employ the interpreters who work here among us. Instead, the Translation Bureau, a special operating agency of the federal government, which reports to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, has a statutory mandate, which I quoted earlier, to act for both Houses of Parliament in all matters concerning interpretation.

As the House administration's chief information officer succinctly explained to the official languages committee on February 2:

The Translation Bureau provides the service. As you know, the interpreters work for the Translation Bureau. We provide the technical environment in accordance with the standards established by the Bureau.

While there is a service agreement in place between the House administration and the Translation Bureau, it is important to recall that subsection 12(1) of the Translation Bureau regulations sets out the prime directive for the bureau:

The requirements of both Houses of the Parliament of Canada and of the committees thereof in respect of interpretation services shall be given first priority by the Bureau.

It says “first priority”. It could not be any clearer than that, yet the experience of the health committee on Friday would suggest that it was getting no priority.

The resources were not thinly stretched that day either. Last week was a constituency week, so there were not the usual, multiple pressures of a House sitting and a half-dozen or more simultaneous committee meetings at any given moment. In fact, the only other proceeding on that Friday was a 70-minute subcommittee meeting in the morning.

To put it more plainly, there was nothing else going on at all on Parliament Hill Friday afternoon when the health committee's meeting was suspended, and nothing else that would have been competing with the Translation Bureau's “first priority”.

That brings me to three more statements of the chair of the health committee, the hon. member for Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam. This is what he told the committee on Friday, according to the blues.

First, at around 4:30 p.m., he said, “I am going to just say that the House resources are a matter of House administration to allocate, and the current situation is a matter of agreement between all the House whips and leaders. It's really not up to the chair, it's not up to the government how to allocate House resources.”

Second, around 4:35 p.m., he said, “I just wish to make it clear that this is a matter of House administration. For resources, it makes arrangements for staff or rooms, and has done so with the agreement of the House whips and the leaders.”

Third, a few moments later, he said, “I have ruled that it's really not up to us on the committee. It's not up to me as the chair and it's not up to the staff. It is a matter for the House administration that allocates resources and determines what resources are available in conjunction with conversations with the whips and House leaders.”

• (1700)

By contrast, allow me to quote from the special order adopted by this House on January 25, at pages 427 to 430 of the Journals, gov-

Privilege

erning our virtual and hybrid proceedings this winter and spring. In paragraph (q) it is established that committee meetings are to be held in a hybrid format with virtual participation authorized, “provided that priority use of House resources...shall be established by an agreement of the whips”. Once again, the order says “priority use”—not all use, not any use, but rather priority use.

As I explained earlier, the health committee was practically the only show in town, so to speak, on Friday of last week. After 12:13 p.m., it was the only committee meeting happening. There was no one else seeking the use of House resources at the time, so the priority was self-evident by the simple fact that only one committee was meeting.

Paragraph (q) of the January 25 special order proposed to the House by the Liberal House leader does not afford the Liberal whip a veto over committee meetings any time the temperature gets a little too hot for the Prime Minister and his cabinet.

In short, the member for Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam misinformed the health committee when he tried to lay blame elsewhere for his plan to shut down the debate to force disclosure of the government's vaccine contracts.

I raise this as a question of privilege today because it is really the best and only outlet to remedy a situation that is fast becoming a serious impediment to our House's operations.

At the official languages committee recently, the hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie asked the International Association of Conference Interpreters, “Are we at a breaking point, and is there a risk that we may not have enough interpreters to do the work in the Parliament of Canada?” The reply was yes.

The witness then elaborated by saying, “For lack of the necessary resources, the Translation Bureau already has to refuse to allow interpreters to work at certain meetings of members, such as caucuses, although it's not withholding their services from committee meetings for the moment.”

The evidence is that we are at a breaking point and we are careening toward a critical failure in the ability to conduct parliamentary proceedings. This is also not a new problem sprung on us by the pandemic and regardless, there were very early warning signs that the pandemic would accelerate the problem, yet the government has done nothing. Instead it sits back, folds its arms and takes comfort in the fact that Parliament cannot function fully and hold the government to account.

Privilege

We have seen several committee meetings, which were proving uncomfortable for Liberal interests, suddenly and abruptly halted because of a lack of government-supplied interpreters. I would be remiss if I did not point out that the health committee on Friday was debating a motion to produce the federal government's COVID-19 vaccine contracts negotiated by the Minister of Public Services and Procurement. Then the debate was shut down because there were no interpreters available to support MP's work, and these interpreters are furnished to Parliament by the Minister of Public Services and Procurement.

Turning to the parliamentary privilege, Bosc and Gagnon explain at page 57 that, "It also refers to the powers possessed by the House to protect itself, its Members and its procedures from undue interference so that it can effectively carry out its principal functions which are to legislate, deliberate and hold the government to account. In that sense, parliamentary privilege can be viewed as the independence Parliament and its Members need to function unimpeded."

Continuing at page 59, it states, "The House has the authority to assert privilege where its ability has been obstructed in the execution of its functions or where Members have been obstructed in the performance of their duties."

At page 60 is an elaboration on the concept of contempt, which states, "Any conduct which offends the authority or dignity of the House, even though no breach of any specific privilege may have been committed, is referred to as a contempt of the House. Contempt may be an act or an omission. It does not have to actually obstruct or impede the House or a Member; it merely has to have the tendency to produce such results."

• (1705)

Interpreting or disturbing the proceedings of the House or one of its committees, as we know, is an established type of contempt as identified in the 1999 report of the United Kingdom's Joint Committee on Parliamentary Privilege and recited also at page 82 of Bosc and Gagnon.

• (1710)

[*Translation*]

In the current situation, we have committee meetings that are being interrupted or disrupted because the government has failed to provide enough interpreters to do the work. While I recognize that these are new circumstances for raising a question of privilege, the authorities are clear that precedents are not always necessary.

Bosc and Gagnon, at page 81, reminds us of the following: "Throughout the Commonwealth most procedural authorities hold that contempts, as opposed to privileges, cannot be enumerated or categorized."

[*English*]

Admittedly, we as a House are bound together with the Translation Bureau through the requirements of statute and regulations amplified by a service agreement between the two entities. That does not mean the House is powerless. Indeed, without the House standing up for itself and its own interests, we run the risk of being seen as acquiescent in this treatment by the Translation Bureau and the

Minister of Public Services and Procurement and therefore risking this becoming the new standard. Perhaps, in the final analysis, this partnership is the best possible structure available, but no matter how we cut it improvements in the substance are vital and necessary.

Parliamentary privileges trace their lineage through centuries of struggle between the House of Commons and the King as well as the King's government. As page 62 of Bosc and Gagnon reminds us:

These privileges were found to be necessary to protect the House and its Members, not from the people, but from the power and interference of the King and the House of Lords....The House of Commons in Canada has not had to challenge the Crown, its executive or the Upper House in the same manner as the British House of Commons.

Could it be that we are reverting back to those early days? What I do know is that we seem to be starting down a path and staring down the barrel of a growing problem, and that is the problem of inefficient and effective operations of Parliament being caused by the inaction and atrophied responsibility of the government.

The procedural authorities often speak of contempt in the same breath as punishment. In this case, I am not seeking punishment, although if there should turn out to be any deliberate wrongdoing against the ability of the House to function, then there should absolutely be strong sanctions. What I am trying to do is place front and centre the issue of interpretation resources that are made available to us for the House to deliberate upon.

Should you agree with me, Mr. Speaker, that there is a prima facie case of privilege here, I am prepared to move an appropriate motion to refer the matter to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs for its usual thoughtful analysis. However, I am also open to seeking a different approach here if, while you are deliberating upon my arguments, informal discussions among parties and other interested actors suggest that there might a more efficient, effective and appropriate course of action that could see the issues meaningfully addressed and our parliamentary committees back functioning at full throttle.

Ultimately, the House needs to address this situation seriously and swiftly in order to be assured that the government is meeting its legal requirements, that we are giving the best possible expression to our constitutionally guaranteed bilingualism and our statutorily confirmed simultaneous interpretation system, and that we are ensuring that the House and its committees can function fully and completely without let or hindrance by the very government that we are meant to hold to account.

The Speaker: I want to thank the hon. member for his very well-thought-out argument. I will take it under advisement and return to the House as soon as possible.

I have six more people, five online and one in the chamber, who would like to speak to this.

I will start with the hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is a very serious matter, so I want to present a little more detail about what happened at the Standing Committee on Health on Friday and then provide some additional arguments in support of the arguments that my colleague just put forward.

On Friday the Standing Committee on Health was meeting to discuss a variety of matters that had originally been triggered under Standing Order 106(4), a procedural tactic that parliamentarians can use to force meetings when there are matters of urgency that need to be taken care of. The matter under Standing Order 106(4) that was in question on Friday originally was a motion that essentially requested a briefing on the issue of variants to COVID-19 in Canada and the government's response, and then also to dispose of a motion for which my colleague had given notice, a motion with regard to contractual obligations with certain vaccine companies.

That motion, as my colleague mentioned, was being met with a filibuster by the Liberals. It was very clear that the Liberals at that moment in time were trying to obstruct a vote on the motion because it was clear that the motion was going to pass.

Now, that is the Liberals' right. They have the right to do that. What I and the other members at committee were robbed of on that day, given the circumstance that my colleague outlined, was the ability to see that through. I was good to go, to sit around the clock on this issue, and I know that my colleagues of other political stripes were as well, but I think what the Liberals were banking on, given the chair's comments, was that there would not be resources available at 4:30 p.m., so the filibuster would end and there would not be a vote called on this very impactful motion that many, even in the media, have been calling for. In that, my privilege was breached. The debate should have continued. It would have continued if we had been on a normal sitting schedule. There is no reason why it would not have.

We have all been in filibusters before, but the chair, as my colleague quoted, prefaced all of his comments by saying that we would be ending the meeting due to a lack of resources. Typically in these situations, the committee would look at what happened, but the problem is that we are not in a normal situation. The chair, using the excuse of a lack of resources, suspended the meeting. Not only that, but as my colleague rightly said earlier, there were interpretation issues that my colleague from the Bloc was rightly angry about, issues that she and I were attempting to sort out. The reality is that for whatever reason, a year into the pandemic and after protraction and many months of this situation, all of a sudden resources were not available.

If we cannot figure this out, then I do not think that these virtual committees are working. That is really where we are at. At this point in time, given all the examples that my colleague raised, I strongly believe that we very quickly need to have more resources, because democracy does not fit into neatly aligned little time slots. Sometimes meetings are going to go longer and sometimes there will be meetings that need to be scheduled outside of meeting times. That is my job as a parliamentarian, that is my prerogative as a parliamentarian, and those are my rights under the Standing Orders.

Privilege

Just to re-emphasize, I believe this issue rests firmly within your bailiwick, as we could not sort it out because the chair kept saying, "There are no resources. There are no resources. There are no resources. The translators need to go. The clerk needs to go." In any other circumstance, meaning that if we were not meeting virtually, I would argue that we would not have had that scenario. Things would have kept going.

If this cannot get sorted out, I do not see how virtual Parliament works, quite frankly.

I am confident that you can find a solution to this situation. It could involve hiring more interpreters immediately or working with the clerks of committees or whatever to understand that my ability to use procedure to have the voices of Canadians heard should not be limited by somebody saying that we have to go, because it is 4:30 on a Friday. That is not how democracy works. My colleague, the opposition whip, has given some suggestions for that.

• (1715)

Look, I understand that the Liberal government members might not like what I was doing there, but they were filibustering. Again, that is their prerogative, but the meeting should not have been ended due to "lack of resources". People around the world have figured out how to get resources for translation and for Zoom meetings. To end a meeting because of that, which is not provided for under the Standing Orders, was a breach of my privilege. It was a breach of privilege to the people I represent, who pay my salary to fight the government on issues like this. This was a fairly significant motion that would have essentially compelled the government to provide more details on the contracts related to our vaccine procurement, which is the number one public policy issue today by an order of magnitude. There is no question about that.

This has happened more than once at our committee. In no way, shape or form should it be acceptable for a meeting to be cancelled due to technical difficulties. I have had that happen before too. Mr. Speaker, I implore you: If this cannot be fixed immediately, we probably, as Parliament, need to look at reinstating some sort of physical sittings. That would not be ideal for health and safety issues either, but we cannot just stop democracy. That is where we are at. As my colleague from Banff—Airdrie rightly put it, we also cannot suspend the right to interpretation, the right to have proceedings in both official languages.

Mr. Speaker, what happened at the health committee is a matter for you to deal with. It is something that cannot continue—

• (1720)

The Speaker: I do not mean to interrupt, but I find we are starting to repeat ourselves, so I would ask the hon. member to maybe be concise and tell us exactly what the points are, and then we will go on to others. I do have a long list and I do not want to rush, especially in light of the topic that we are discussing, but I do not want repetition either.

Privilege

I will let the hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill continue.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Mr. Speaker, my specialty is not a filibuster. That would be my Liberal colleagues in the health committee, but I digress.

I come to you asking for a resolution to this issue so that the committee can continue unimpeded.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Salaberry—Suroît, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to add a few words about the question of privilege that was just raised by my counterpart, the whip of the official opposition party.

Members of the Standing Committee on Health are all clearly aware that the committee chair made a ruling on a question of privilege raised by the member for Calgary Nose Hill last Friday, February 12. The decision resulted in the suspension of a fundamental debate to have the government finally disclose its COVID-19 vaccination plan.

I would like to draw the attention of the House to what Bosc and Gagnon state on page 1060 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, namely, that “The Chair of a committee does not have the power to rule on questions of privilege”.

Nevertheless, the chair of the Standing Committee on Health suspended the meeting, which had been duly convened at the request of four members pursuant to Standing Order 106(4), alleging that the technological resources were no longer available even though the debate in progress had not concluded.

As we all know, this March will mark one year that Parliament has been operating in virtual and hybrid mode. Many improvements have been made, but there are still problems, especially with respect to parliamentary committee meetings. The majority of these problems are connected to the technical and technological support team, which is tasked with making it possible for members to work, listen, speak and understand what is going on in the language of their choice, which is also a parliamentary privilege.

During this incident, the members from the governing party were continually obstructing debates. We realize that this is a parliamentary tactic, but the filibuster on February 12 extended the meeting until the limit set by the House technical team.

The improvements we made gave parliamentarians the opportunity to debate while following the rules. I have to point out that the notion of limited technical resources goes beyond the interpreters. This is about all of the parliamentary support staff. I do not want anyone to think that the question of privilege we are debating this afternoon has to do only with the interpretation services. It has to do with all staff responsible for technology and technical support to our committees.

In our opinion, the government members used the lack of technological resources, resources required for the committee to do its work, in their own political interests and in the interests of the government, and the chair of the committee ruled on a question of privilege in contravention of existing parliamentary rules. By so doing, he held hostage the House's technical and technological services

and opposition party members in order to suspend the meeting and interfere with the committee's work.

If the committee was unable to continue its work because of a lack of technical resources, it was not up to the committee chair to use this situation to rule in favour of the government party.

If the Liberal members of the committee want to help the government hide certain information and prevent a study on the vaccine supply contracts from taking place, they cannot go about it by violating the parliamentary privilege of other committee members and limiting debate on the issue of the day, which is the government's vaccination plan, a plan that is compromising the health and safety of Quebecers and Canadians.

This situation raises an extremely important question of privilege, and it is up to the Speaker of the House to rule on it. With all due respect, although it is customary for questions of privilege that arise in committee to be considered when a report is presented by the committee in question, I believe that the current situation completely warrants direct intervention by the Speaker given the special circumstances that Parliament and its members have to deal with in fulfilling their mandate during the pandemic for the good of Quebecers and Canadians.

• (1725)

Material, human and technological limitations should never be used by the government or members to exert pressure on members of other parties or to violate their parliamentary privilege.

Mr. Speaker, you and I are members of the Board of Internal Economy, and you know that I gave several speeches about how important interpretation is for us, and about how important it is for members to be able to speak in their language, to have access to the necessary services to be able to participate in parliamentary work, to understand what is going on and to vote in an informed way.

Mr. Speaker, I therefore invite you to take a stand and rule on whether this is really a question of parliamentary privilege. My colleagues and I are asking you to find a solution because the House will continue to work in hybrid format and virtual mode for a few more months. We cannot allow this situation to continue or to happen again.

[*English*]

The Speaker: We have four more people: three online and one in the chamber. I want to remind the hon. members to be as concise as possible, as is mentioned in Bosch and Gagnon, page 146, with a very concise account of what they believe the argument is.

We will now go to the Parliamentary secretary to the government House leader.

Privilege

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 bring a different perspective to the issue we have before us. As coincidence would have it, I was the member speaking when the issue came up of the chair's desire to suspend the committee meeting. Just so that we have a little background, and I think it would be wonderful to see a decision, I will review other aspects of the discussion that have been taking place.

I want to plant the seed of motivation in members' minds. What is motivating members to bring this forward at this time? I will not comment extensively on the issue of timing. I was surprised that it came up now: I would have thought it would have come up earlier today, when the member had time to raise the issue and chose not to. That is another issue, even though it is somewhat important, when taking into consideration matters of privilege.

I want to spend a bit of time on the issue of motivation. The previous Conservative speaker, for example, said that the Liberals were expecting the chair to do what he did. That is a very serious allegation, if we think about a member of the House accusing members of trying to manipulate the chair to suspend, when I was the one who was speaking at the time. I can assure the House that I was not trying to manipulate the chair to suspend the meeting. I was just getting under way with my comments on the issue when the chairperson raised what I thought was a valid point. If we listen to the sponsor of the motion, the sponsor of the motion talked about the hard workers: those unsung heroes of interpretation services. They do a fabulous job—

• (1730)

The Speaker: I will interrupt. If we can be as concise as possible with whatever issues or facts that the hon. member believes pertain to the argument, it would be appreciated.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I will do my best to do that.

The point is that I was prepared to continue. I was not trying to intimidate the chair or get him to suspend the meeting. My recollection is that the chair stated a concern regarding the interpreters, those unsung heroes, those hard-working individuals, and whether we would be able to continue. As well, he wanted to be able to adjourn at the time adjournment was supposed to take place.

Immediately following that, points of order were raised at the standing committee that stated the chairperson could not do that. I commented at the time that I did not believe we should have a committee proceed if we could not provide bilingual services. I made that very clear.

The chair was fairly clear with the concerns he had and, right away, the opposition started to get excited about the fact that the chair could not do that. The chair has a responsibility. I refer the Speaker to some of the committee meetings under the Harper administration where we saw, for example, a chair who would just suspend a meeting. They have that capability.

A chair can actually say that they have heard enough. They do not even have to listen, and can just make the decision to suspend a meeting for whatever reason. Members can always raise it.

The member who moved the motion said that he hopes to get you to respond, Mr. Speaker, but in the interim he believes there is an opportunity for informal discussions to take place that could resolve the issue. I am suggesting that this probably would have been the most likely happy scenario if members had concerns. In fact, there are House leadership teams and other venues where this could have been talked about.

To try to use the floor of the House of Commons to say that the chair or the government is trying to prevent the work of the health committee is a stretch. I believe the standing committee has the ability to resolve it, as other standing committees have done in the past with adjournments and suspensions.

I will review everything that has been said and possibly get back to you, depending on what follows my comments. I appreciate you taking the time to listen to me.

• (1735)

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in the time I have been privileged to serve the people of Vancouver Kingsway, two very fundamental concepts have been rendered very apparent to me. The first is time is one of the most important currencies in Parliament. The second is that majority rule is the cornerstone of our democracy. I believe the current motion before us on privilege engages both of those very important principles and I stand in support of the question of privilege that has been made.

I had the privilege also of being present throughout the whole health committee meeting in question and I witnessed everything that happened from beginning to end. I am not going to repeat the basic facts, as I think they have been well stated by the member for Banff—Airdrie.

As members know, the meeting started at 11 a.m. eastern time. It is typically a two-hour meeting, but because of the number of motions and the number of members wanting to speak, the meeting was extended beyond that time period.

It was also the case that about halfway through the meeting, the chair let it be known, in advance, that the meeting would end at 4:30 p.m. eastern time because there would be a lack of technical support at that time. When we approached 4:30 p.m. and the chair acted according to the warning he made, there were still a number of speakers who wanted to speak to the motion on the floor and there was no motion to adjourn on the floor. As you deliberate on this matter, I would think it important for you to note that at no time did any member of the committee, including on the Liberal side, make a motion to adjourn, and I can tell you why: It was because it was clear that the majority on that committee wanted the meeting to continue. It would have been a simple matter to adjourn the meeting at any time.

The nub of the matter, to speak to the real essence of what is before you, might require you to resolve what I think is a very pointed claim made by the previous speaker, the hon. parliamentary secretary to the House leader, when he said that a chair can adjourn a meeting at any time the chair wants, for any reason he or she wants. With great respect, I am going to suggest that this is false. I do not believe that is the case at all, and I leave it to your great research to determine what the proper circumstances are.

Privilege

The reason I say that is that as my hon. colleague from Calgary Nose Hill very appropriately stated, because when one is in opposition and members want to speak, using the currency of time in a political sense to continue debate for whatever reason is appropriate. It is equally appropriate for members on the opposite side to filibuster. That is what was going on at this meeting. The opposition and the government members were all acting completely appropriately.

The issue is, when does that end? I would respectfully submit that it ends when a proper motion to suspend or adjourn the meeting is passed by a majority. Until that is done, the meeting continues until there are no speakers who wish to have the floor.

I want to say as well that at the very end, there was a motion to challenge the chair's ruling on privilege. I think this point has been made too, but what is troubling to me and my fellow New Democrat colleagues is that during that very vote, a Bloc Québécois member, a colleague on the committee, was deprived of her right to cast her ballot because she had no translation during the vote. Therefore, the very vote that the chair relied on to end the meeting was flawed because it was interrupted by a lack of translation. If you review the record, which I ask you to do, you will see that this was the case.

I also want to raise a point that has not been made by anybody up to this point. It is with respect to the consequences of suspending a meeting. As we sit here today, days after that meeting, it is not possible to go to ParlVu to see or listen to that meeting. The minutes are not public yet, so right now the public is prevented from seeing the proceedings. That is another detrimental consequence of a chair's unilateral suspension of a meeting without the democratic mandate of the committee to do so. Not only is it a breach of our privilege as members, but I believe the Canadian public has been unable to see what happened at that meeting because of that as well.

• (1740)

The point has already been made, so I will not dwell on the fact that this was a Friday afternoon. It was not the case of another committee needing to use the room. I appreciate and understand that given these virtual meetings, there are some atypical considerations that may go into a committee's engaging in debate after the time of expiry. However, that contingency can be safely eliminated in this case, because on the Friday afternoon there was no other committee that needed that room and it would have been a simple matter for us to adjourn for a few minutes to get other interpreters and further tech support.

I would also point out that the chair never explained what the technical support problems were, so we were left wondering what technical support issues prevented us from continuing the meeting. In my mind, those could have been easily remedied with perhaps a five-, 10- or 15-minute adjournment.

In my respectful submission, the way that political conflict is resolved in our system is by a democratic vote that happens in the House and at committee. I believe the chair of the health committee was well-intentioned but mistaken when he chose to unilaterally end that meeting and deprive the member for Calgary Nose Hill—

The Speaker: There is a problem with the translation.

It is now working. I would ask the member for Vancouver Kingsway to wrap up.

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Speaker, I believe that the hon. chair of the committee was well intentioned but simply mistaken when he thought it was his duty to arbitrarily end the meeting at 4:30 when it was the clear will of the majority of the members of that committee to continue.

It is uncomfortable sometimes in those situations because some people want to end the meetings and some do not, but the idea of a filibuster and the use by different parties of that currency of time as political pressure is valuable, and I hope the Speaker would support not only the question of privilege, but also the time-honoured parliamentary traditions of using time and majority support to resolve differences, not unilateral, autocratic action by a chair.

Mr. Ron McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am, of course, the chair of the Standing Committee on Health, and I was presiding during the meeting of February 12.

Much has been made in this discussion about an arbitrary ending of the meeting and cutting off debate unfairly. The member for Vancouver Kingsway spoke equivalently regarding adjournments and suspensions, but I would like to emphasize to you, Mr. Speaker, that this meeting was not in fact adjourned erroneously or otherwise; it was suspended. It was suspended, and the debate has not been terminated. The debate will resume when the committee next meets. The meeting is not over; it is only suspended, which is perhaps why the minutes are not available at this time.

Much of what has been said focuses on the problem of the lack of interpreters. This overemphasizes the matter of the interpreters. The problem on this particular occasion was that I was informed that there were no facilities available after a certain time, that staff, the technical staff and interpreters were only going to be available until 4:30 eastern time. It was my duty, as I see it, to respect the committee staff and workers and honour their circumstances.

The member of the Bloc Québécois at the meeting did express the problems she was having with translation during the meeting. I advised her at that time, as I advise everyone all the time and the committee as well, that if there is ever any problem with translation, they should proactively and instantly inform the chair so that we can take appropriate action.

In the case of the matter raised in this particular discussion today by the Bloc Québécois member, she alleges that I ruled on a question of privilege. In fact, I informed the committee that the chair of a committee does not have the power to rule on questions of privilege and I declined to do so. I did rule on whether the question raised by the member for Calgary Nose Hill related to parliamentary privilege. In my opinion, it did not. This was the decision that was under appeal by the committee, and it was on that particular decision that the member from the Bloc was unable to vote. However, once I was informed of that fact, I made an effort to make sure that she was able to give her vote and that the tally of the vote kept by the clerk was updated accordingly.

I forget which member it was, but either the member for Vancouver Kingsway or perhaps the member from the Bloc suggested that I had used this decision on whether a question of privilege was relevant in this case as a pretext to end the meeting. It had absolutely nothing to do with what was, in fact, not the end of the meeting but a suspension of it. The meeting was suspended strictly and only because it was my understanding that the facilities of the House were not available and that we were actually overstaying our access to them.

In terms of explaining why we could no longer carry on, I did explain that it was because of the availability and—

• (1745)

The Speaker: I will just interrupt the hon. member. It sounds like we are starting to repeat ourselves. If I can ask him to be concise and maybe just wrap up, that would be appreciated.

Mr. Ron McKinnon: Mr. Speaker, that is good timing, and I appreciate the notice. I am, in fact, done.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have another point I would like to raise on this issue.

I am a member of the health committee, and I was there when this filibuster did take place on Friday afternoon, no doubt about that, and I will just raise a couple of points.

The deputy government House leader commented that the chair could suspend a meeting whenever, which is not true. My colleague from Banff—Airdrie, our party whip, certainly pointed that out in his remarks about why you need to look into this, Mr. Speaker. Very clearly, my colleague for Calgary Nose Hill tried to raise a point of order, and the chair did shut down the meeting. She was cut off, her privileges were revoked in that area, and so you still need to deal with this, Mr. Speaker.

The job of the chair is to make sure that there are resources available. My party whip also announced that there were no other meetings taking place on Parliament Hill at all that day at that point. I think a decision needs to be made, as my colleague for Calgary Nose Hill pointed out earlier, about the type of meetings that we are going to continue to have. If the government cannot provide resources for the meetings that are going to take place, particularly when those members know they are going to filibuster, then I think there is a great question and concern here about not just the integrity of the whole process but also the process itself.

It is up to the chair, and he was told the other day that if there are resources, he should be able to get those resources and make them available. The meeting was certainly not over, not anywhere near that, and all of the opposition parties were still there debating these issues. I do not think that the chair had the right to end the meeting for that particular reason. I heard him say that the resources would not be available, as my colleague from the NDP mentioned, part way through the meeting. It was quite disturbing to note that we got to a time that someone chose to end the meeting, and it was suspended because we did not have enough resources, which is against members' privileges of the House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I just want to make sure that is taken into consideration.

Private Members' Business

• (1750)

The Speaker: I want to thank the hon. member.

I will take all the comments under advisement and return to the House with a ruling.

* * *

[*Translation*]

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

The Speaker: I have the honour to inform the House that a message has been received from the Senate informing this House that the Senate has passed the following bill, to which the concurrence of the House is desired: Bill S-3, An Act to amend the Offshore Health and Safety Act.

[*English*]

It being 6:52 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business, as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*Translation*]

EXPROPRIATION ACT

The House resumed from November 17, 2020, consideration of the motion that Bill C-222, An Act to amend the Expropriation Act (protection of private property), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I salute you and thank all the staff, especially the interpreters, for continuing to serve us so well.

I am pleased to take part in today's debate on Bill C-222, an act to amend the Expropriation Act. The member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke tabled this bill, apparently with the goal of promoting the protection of Canadians' private property. The member stated that her intention with this bill was to “remove some uncertainty from the existing legislation as to whether owners can be compensated” and “protect the private property rights of average Canadians” in the event of federal expropriation.

However, the amendments proposed in Bill C-222 do nothing to protect private property. They only result in the uneven application of key legislation and restrict the government's ability to act in the interests of Canadians in certain emergency situations. Consequently, this is a deeply flawed bill for several important reasons that I will explain in the next few minutes.

• (1755)

[*English*]

At the heart of this debate is the issue of expropriation, a rare occurrence indeed, driven by urgent need that takes place only if and when a negotiated process is not feasible.

*Private Members' Business**[Translation]*

Although rarely used, expropriation can play a critical role in dealing with emergencies or incidents in areas such as defence, transportation and the environment.

In its current form, the Expropriation Act is an important piece of legislation that details the process the Government of Canada is required to follow when private property must be expropriated to serve the public interest. Under this process, a public hearing must be held if there is an objection to a notice of expropriation.

[English]

As it stands, the act contains provisions so that in an emergency, when a delay would be prejudicial to the public interest, the Minister of Public Services and Procurement may step in and set aside certain requirements. As an example, the minister is permitted, in the case of an emergency, to waive the holding of a public hearing to allow the government to move more quickly to expropriate a crucial piece of land or property.

[Translation]

This exemption applies exclusively to pressing cases in which emergency measures are necessary. It could have to do with the urgent need to acquire material or a good, including to ensure the protection of essential transportation infrastructure, or with national security.

The government is cautious and uses due diligence in every aspect of the expropriation process. Nonetheless, the need to act quickly, especially in emergencies, can be a determining factor in the process. If the proposed changes were made to this legislation, it would not be possible to speed up the expropriation process in a pressing manner in case of an emergency.

[English]

Having flexibility in the expropriation process is potentially critical to dealing with emergencies when timelines are paramount. We simply cannot accept amendments that hinder the government's ability to act quickly in the interests of Canadians when faced with defence, transportation or environmental emergencies.

[Translation]

Bill C-222 proposes to amend the Expropriation Act to limit the power to exercise the right under subsection 10(11) to forgo a public hearing before registering the notice of intention to expropriate lands. It also seeks to limit the power provided for under subsection 19(2) to substitute a period lesser than the waiting period for taking material possession of land or the immovable real right.

However, the hon. member's bill seeks to impose these limits only in specific cases. More specifically, the bill states that subsections 10(11) and 19(2) would not apply in cases where the purpose of expropriation is for "restoring historical natural habitats or addressing, directly or indirectly, climate variability". Ultimately, these changes create a two-tier system by retaining certain factors, but setting others aside.

[English]

When deemed necessary, our government believes all expropriations are deserving of equal treatment regardless of their purpose, whether it is environmental protection or accommodation for public infrastructure. It is counterproductive to establish a tiered system by creating exceptions limiting the minister's ability to act swiftly in cases of real environmental emergencies over others. It just does not make sense.

[Translation]

The government is firmly committed to defending the private property rights of Canadians. We recognize the importance of protecting private property rights by ensuring that the regular procedure is followed pursuant to the existing Expropriation Act, which sets out the rigorous hearing process that must precede any planned expropriation.

- (1800)

[English]

Currently, the act allows the minister to waive holding a public hearing if, by reason of special circumstances, the physical possession or use by the Crown is

urgently required and that to order that a public hearing be conducted with respect to it would occasion a delay prejudicial to the public interest

[Translation]

I will now indicate how often a hearing has been waived.

In reality, there has never been an accelerated process where the minister had to use the provisions under the subsections in question of the current act. However, these are important provisions to have if they were required. The member did not provide any compelling argument that would justify curtailing the minister's powers in this manner, and only in certain situations.

[English]

It would seem that the only thing the bill and its amendments would truly achieve is to apply new impediments to the Government of Canada's ability to respond to emergency situations and, again, only in certain circumstances. Putting aside those emergency provisions, the Expropriation Act already ensures that property owners are treated fairly and compensated appropriately in situations where expropriation is considered necessary.

[Translation]

The act also clearly indicates how the market value must be determined and paid. I want to point out that Public Services and Procurement Canada has completed just 12 expropriations in the past 30 years. In these cases, the government abided by the act and ensured that property owners were treated fairly and were offered appropriate compensation. There has never been a situation, under the current Expropriation Act, in which the government has waived public hearings related to a proposed expropriation of property for any reason whatsoever.

Bill C-222 is essentially an ineffective solution to a non-existent problem. Simply put, this bill is unnecessary, and Canadians have nothing to gain from it. Expropriation is rare. I repeat that Public Services and Procurement Canada has completed approximately 12 expropriations in the past 30 years, and there has never been a situation, under the current Expropriation Act, in which the government has waived public hearings related to a proposed expropriation of property.

[English]

Frankly, our position is that expropriations deemed necessary deserve equal treatment, regardless of their purpose, whether it is environmental protection or accommodation for public infrastructure.

[Translation]

Nevertheless, the bill, as introduced, would simply undermine the government's ability to act in emergencies and provides no added benefit for property owners.

For all of the reasons stated above, our government does not support this bill, and I urge my colleagues to reject it.

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke for introducing this bill. I know that it is an extremely rewarding experience since I recently introduced a private member's bill myself. I thank her and commend her for her work.

I want to begin by indicating where the Bloc Québécois stands on this bill on expropriation. I must say that it is a very unusual bill. Unfortunately, the Bloc Québécois will be voting against Bill C-222, and I will explain why.

Contrary to what is being proposed, Bill C-222 is not a way to protect owners from arbitrary and abusive expropriation. In reality, all it seems to do is deny the fact that climate change can lead to disasters that require emergency action. In some cases, that unfortunately may require expropriation. I say unfortunately because expropriation is always a loss for those whose property is being expropriated, even if such action is justified.

Section 11 of the current Expropriation Act states that the government has the authority to carry out rapid expropriation when urgently required under certain special circumstances. If Bill C-222 passes, the government will never be able to categorize an expropriation as urgent if its purpose is to restore historical natural habitats or address, directly or indirectly, climate variability. As we all know, climate change affects natural phenomena. Climate change has caused, is causing and will cause disasters.

The spring floods we used to get every 100 years are happening more and more often. These floods have become more sudden and severe and require more and more urgent intervention. Last December in Gaspé, the Rivière Matane flow was recorded at over 300 cubic metres per second, which is almost 10 times its average annual flow.

Laval University researchers studied the effects of climate change on floods caused by ice jams. They found that damage could increase by 30% on average because of climate change.

Private Members' Business

My riding in the Lower St. Lawrence has two rivers. Over the next 50 years, flood damage could increase by 50% along the Rivière Matane and by 75% along the Rivière Matapédia. That is not only cause for concern, it is a fact we need to consider when discussing the topic of expropriation.

Many people will never forget the spring of 2019 in Sainte-Marthe-sur-le-Lac, a municipality in the Lower Laurentians built largely in a flood zone and protected by a dike. The dike, which was poorly adapted to the high volume of flood waters in the context of climate change, collapsed and the municipality was flooded by the icy waters of the Lake of Two Mountains. A third of the municipality, in other words 6,000 people, were under emergency evacuation orders. Some 800 houses were flooded. We heard the testimonies of desperate residents who, in some cases, lost everything. The Quebec government had to act quickly, in just a few months, to raise and reinforce the dike to prevent this tragedy from happening again the following year. This operation involved encroaching on certain private properties and probably decreased the value of several waterfront homes by obstructing their view of the lake. The matter is currently before the courts to determine the amount of compensation to which the shoreline residents are entitled.

I mention all of this to highlight the fact that, if the provisions of Bill C-222 had been incorporated into Quebec law at the time, local residents could have prevented the Quebec government from taking action to avoid losing parcels of land or losing their views. By doing so, they would have put the entire municipality at risk of another flood.

Expropriation for the common good is nothing new. It can be found in the Old Testament, ancient Greece, Roman law. It was born out of the necessity to create major public works for the good of all. Even in societies that recognize and protect private property, it is legitimate for the public interest to give way when required by public utility or general interest.

However, the current Expropriation Act allows for objections to expropriation. The property owner can object to the expropriation within 30 days of receiving the expropriation notice. The government appoints a hearing officer, who will hold a public hearing at which the owner will present the reasons why they believe that the expropriation is not justified or illegal. The owner in question can then argue that the reason why the government wishes to expropriate has nothing to do with the public interest or that the expropriation notice does not comply with the law. The hearing officer submits a report to the government, which can amend the notice, abandon the expropriation or simply ignore the officer's opinion. We can see that the process for objecting to the expropriation is more symbolic than real, because the government can unilaterally reject the owner's arguments. We can also see that this objection process ends up delaying the expropriation.

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● (1805)

Subsection 10(11) of the current Expropriation Act allows the government to skip the appointment of a hearing officer and a public hearing if it is of the opinion that the expropriation is, by reason of special circumstances, urgently required and that to order a public hearing would occasion delay prejudicial to the public interest.

However, the bill before us this evening, Bill C-222, adds a paragraph stating that subsection 10(11) “does not apply if the interest or right...is intended to be expropriated by the Crown for the purpose of restoring historical natural habitats”, as I was saying earlier, “or addressing, directly or indirectly, climate variability”.

This addition would prevent the government from categorizing an expropriation as urgent if it is related to environmental protection or climate change. In a way, this bill is saying that climate change cannot cause disasters requiring an urgent response, such as expropriation or even partial expropriation.

If Bill C-222 is adopted, the people affected will have the luxury of objecting to an emergency measure related to climate change that affects the value of their property, which will limit the government's ability to deal with it. The Bloc Québécois cannot abide by the government being limited to that extent in dealing with climate disasters. That is why we will not support Bill C-222.

Let us not forget that the Expropriation Act is essentially procedural legislation. It determines the procedures the government must take when it proceeds with an expropriation, the deadlines it must respect and the recourse the individual whose property is being expropriated has in the case of an objection. Under the Expropriation Act, a person who is the subject of the expropriation has two rights. They can challenge the amount of compensation or they can challenge the expropriation itself.

Last February, when she introduced her bill, the hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke issued a press release to explain the scope of the bill. On reading the bill, we saw a few discrepancies with her explanations, which is rather unusual.

First, Bill C-222 was explained in such a way as to suggest that expanding environmental regulations were tantamount to disguised expropriations. To the hon. member, the protection of private property is compromised by this trend, which would justify the bill. With all due respect, I tend to disagree.

Public authorities do pass regulations that prevent a landowner from enjoying or disposing of private property as they wish. For example, when a municipality that passes a by-law preventing the construction of buildings on a flood plain for environmental reasons, it is considered an indirect or disguised expropriation. The owner can then turn to the courts to be compensated for the loss of the asset.

However, the proceedings do not stem from the Expropriation Act but from Quebec's Civil Code or, if the owner lives in English Canada, from common law. It is not covered by the Expropriation Act or by Bill C-222. That is why we wonder about the real reason behind the tabling of this bill.

The member also said that her bill would give Canadian property owners the same rights that foreign investors are afforded under

NAFTA. I am referring to the investor's right to oppose environmental regulations that diminish the value of their investments. My colleague may have missed the fact that the Expropriation Act deals only with the expropriation of property by the state. It has nothing to do with environmental regulations.

I also remind members that the chapter of NAFTA that allowed an American investor to sue the government when an act or regulation diminished the value of their investment does not exist in the new agreement, CUSMA.

Lastly, the member said that, because the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms does not protect property rights, these rights are covered by the Expropriation Act. However, private property is protected by the Civil Code, not federal legislation. Section 92.13 of the Constitution states that property rights are a provincial jurisdiction. The Expropriation Act does not protect private property. Rather, it stipulates how the government must proceed for any expropriations of property.

Bill C-222, which would amend the existing Expropriation Act, will not protect private property and will only prevent the government from dealing with climate-related emergencies. Climate change is exacerbating the natural phenomena that pose a danger to the health and safety of Canadians and Quebeckers, so the Bloc Québécois cannot agree with restricting the government's ability to deal with environmental disasters.

● (1810)

[English]

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am honoured to rise today in response to private member's bill, Bill C-222, an act to amend the Expropriation Act, which is a protection of private property, and was prepared and presented by the hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke. Contained within and for the purpose of restating the bill's intention, it adds specific exemptions to the Expropriation Act under sections 10(11) and 19(3) and reads that the Expropriations Act:

—does not apply if the interest or right to which the notice of intention relates is intended to be expropriated by the Crown for the purpose of restoring historical natural habitats or addressing, directly or indirectly, climate variability, regardless of whether or not that purpose is referred to in the notice or described in the notice as the primary purpose of the intended expropriation.

The members of the House may recall that in moving the bill to the second reading in November, the hon. member began her intervention with a land acknowledgement that Parliament was on Algonquin Anishinabe territory, which is subject to an ongoing land claim process. The hon. member then proceeded to suggest that the current movement to protect private property landowners' rights in Ontario started in her riding of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke.

If the landowners association in her constituency is upset about the expropriation of private property in response to catastrophic climate change, wait until it finds out about the ongoing and generational dispossession of indigenous lands by the Crown. Wait until they learn about Oka, Ipperwash, Unist'ot'en, 1492 and Wet'suwet'en.

It would appear, based on the private member's last intervention, that she would seek to elevate the property rights to a constitutional consideration on parity with our charter rights. That is a reference to the fifth amendment of the United States that she would seek to enshrine the rights of private property above all societal considerations and specifically as they relate to what appears to be a form of the denial of climate change.

I would suggest that before we could in good faith consider this request that we have a moral and indeed a legal obligation to first address the unceded territorial claims of indigenous first nations, Métis and Inuit.

The hon. member's underlying intention in the bill seems, at least to us, to force the federal government to recognize that the plan in 2014 is in fact responsible for the flooding of the Ottawa Valley in 2017 and 2019, which is denying the real reason for flooding, which is climate change, and to hold public consultations under the Expropriation Act. In addition, it would appear as though the hon. member wants the federal government to compensate residents affected by the flooding. Therefore, Bill C-222 contains no provisions of compensation.

I want to acknowledge the very real and devastating impacts on those members in her riding who may have been owners of one of the 900 buildings affected by the flooding. However, how can we even begin to further enshrine settler rights in response to these 900 buildings impacted by climate change when there are currently 900 unsettled first nation land claims that are historically based on the racist doctrine of discovery and the British colonial legal fiction called Terra Nullius, which effectively erased a millennia of indigenous inhabitations of these lands pre-European contract?

While I am no expert in the Robinson-Huron Treaty for incidents of clear and intentional treaties by the Crown, such as the Haldimand Treaty of October 25, 1784, for the purpose of this debate, I would like to remind members of the House who may not know or may have forgotten the text of this treaty, which states:

● (1815)

Whereas His Majesty having been pleased to direct that in consideration of the early attachment to his cause manifested by the Mohawk Indians and of the loss of their settlement which they thereby sustained—that a convenient tract of land under his protection should be chosen as a safe and comfortable retreat for them and others of the Six Nations, who have either lost their settlements within the Territory of the American States, or wish to retire from them to the British—I have at the earnest desire of many of these His Majesty's faithful Allies purchased a tract of land from the Indians situated between the Lakes Ontario, Erie and Huron, and I do hereby in His Majesty's name authorize and permit the said Mohawk Nation and such others of the Six Nation Indians as wish to settle in that quarter to take possession of and settle upon the Banks of the River commonly called Ouse or Grand River, running into Lake Erie, allotting to them for that purpose six miles deep from each side of the river beginning at Lake Erie and extending in that proportion to the head of the said river, which them and their posterity are to enjoy for ever.

Given under my hand and seal at arms at the Castle of St. Lewis at Quebec this twenty-fifth day of October one thousand seven hundred and eighty-four and in the twenty-fifth year of the reign of our Sovereign Lord George The Third by the Grace

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of God of Great Britain, France, and Ireland King Defender of the Faith and so forth.

Frederick Haldimand

By His Excellency's Command

More specifically, given the act of reclamation of unceded Haudenosaunee Confederacy territories, and to underscore the importance of the point, I shall add to this debate, for the good and welfare of the House, that an excerpt from the document entitled, "Land Rights of the Six Nations of the Grand River", submitted by the Six Nations Elected Council, states that the promising of their tract consisted of 950,000 acres within their Beaver Hunting Grounds along the Grand River to the "Mohawk Nation and such others of the Six Nations Indians as wish to settle in that Quarter".

In the application of their allegiance to the King, and for the loss of their settlements to the American States, they were to take possession and settle upon the banks of the river commonly called the Grand River, running from Lake Erie and allotting for that purpose six miles on either side of the Grand.

Therefore, although the Haldimand Treaty was unequivocally promised to the Six Nations, this tract, approximately 275,000 acres of land up to the source of the Grand River, remains outstanding to the present date as treaty land entitlement to the Six Nations people.

In contrast to the private property rights of settlers, as expressed in Bill C-222, Six Nations of the Grand River's experiences of Canada's specific and comprehensive land claims policies, which have been unsuccessful as existing policy, cannot provide proper restitution or compensation for Six Nations' validated claims and others yet to be determined. Previous negotiations have proved unsuccessful, as the extinguishment requirement is unacceptable and non-negotiable. Six Nations of the Grand River has previously lobbied MPs from all parties, and is looking for justice in its land rights issues. As the group realizes, Canada does not have enough money to bring historic land issues to resolution under existing policies.

Six Nations has also taken its land rights issues to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and to the Canadian courts commencing in 1995. This juxtaposition of the Crown's legislative protections for those deemed to be holding private property versus the original inhabitants of these lands is a grave admission to the ongoing colonialism of Canada with respect to first nations, Métis and Inuit.

Perhaps it would be more appropriate and timely, given the current government's new-found commitment to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, that prior to further entrenching private property rights for Canadian citizens we first acknowledge the problematic nature of the failure to adequately address the first nations' land claims with negotiated cash settlements, and instead recognize their legitimate calls for land back.

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Allow me to conclude in the same spirit in which we began this debate around Bill C-222, with a reminder that Parliament is on Algonquin Anishinabe territory, which is subject to an ongoing land claim process. If we are to have any newly introduced legislation around property rights, let us begin there.

• (1820)

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is my privilege today to speak to Bill C-222, a private member's bill by the member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, an area that I know very well from my multiple years in Petawawa during my time in the military.

As previous speakers have highlighted, Canada does not have an inherent constitutional protection for private property. It is only done through the Expropriation Act at the federal level.

I fully acknowledge, as a former member of the Canadian Armed Forces and having served on bases in Galetown and even having Meaford in my riding, that there are unique circumstances where expropriation is necessary. However, at all times, we need to pay fair market compensation to those owners. In my view, this bill simply does that. It intends to provide some clarity and protection for private property owners.

I am sure that my riding of Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound is very similar to a lot of rural ridings across Canada, where constituents have been living on some properties and farms held through generations. Unfortunately in some cases, these properties are the only things of substantial value, both personally and financially, for these Canadians. They are some of the most hard-working, honest and proud Canadians our nation produces. I have personally met many of them since deciding to get involved in federal politics. They have lots of concerns, and not just at the federal level but at all levels of government, with having their private property appropriately protected. It is really all they have.

That consistent message that I keep hearing from them, time and time again, is one of anxiety, concern and a lack of trust in governments. When their way of living is solely based on their property, whether it is farming or running a small business, it seems that every year there are more regulations, regardless of the level of government bringing them in and constantly challenging or limiting their way of making a living. In my view, in these circumstances, it is very easy to understand why these private property owners are frustrated.

Why is providing some level of clarity and certainty to these private property owners a bad thing? I know that previous speakers on this who may not be supporting this bill have noted the inadequate protection, and also that in some provinces there may be protection under either civil or common law. As well, they were asking for specific examples of where the bill may be appropriate.

I do not have a specific example, but I can mention some very similar situations. To go back to a previous speaker in the first hour of debate in November, the member for Red Deer—Mountain View said that we are seeing a “disturbing trend in Canada toward what is referred to as regulatory, de facto or constructive taking of private property.”

This happens when governments use those statutory powers to regulate or restrict the property rights of an owner without acquiring the title to the land that is being adversely affected. The landowner feels the impact of these regulations as if the land had been expropriated. Put another way, the government can strictly regulate the land, and limit its value and what a landowner can do with it, without triggering procedures in the legislation.

Let us go to specific examples in my riding where a comparison could be made. In one case I have a farmer whose land has not been expropriated yet, but who has been restricted in what he is allowed to do on his family farm due to its proximity to the watershed. There has been no history or circumstances where that farming operation has ever interfered with the watershed. There has been no run-off or problems historically.

The farmer accepted that. He had no problem and accepted that they had to change their way of doing business. However, when they then tried to utilize or take the private property and use it for a different business endeavour that would not compromise the environment or have any environmental concerns, they were informed that they could not do that either because the farm was agricultural land.

Again, it is the issue of the lack of certainty and clarity that private property owners are looking for because, again, what they can do to make a living and get by has been restricted by these regulatory changes. As such, these de facto or regulatory takings of property mean that the property owners are not entitled to compensation.

I know that one of the previous speakers indicated there is another method where they could raise this through a lower court at the provincial level. However, what this bill does is it just provides a little greater clarity.

• (1825)

One of the previous speakers this evening spoke about the requirement that a government, especially at the federal level, may be required to talk about defence, public safety and climate emergencies, and not hindering the government's ability for expropriation and cutting back the need for due process.

At the same time, that speaker indicated there has not been an example in the last 30 years where this has actually occurred. To counter that, my question is, if this has never actually occurred in an emergency, why are we worrying about it? Putting in the extra level of clarity and due process that Bill C-222 asks for is a good thing.

I admit that, as with any piece of legislation, this bill has room for improvement. All members of the House can support this bill and let it go to committee where those amendments could make this bill better and adequately protect the rights of our private property owners.

In my view, this bill is simple. It seeks to remove the uncertainty from the existing legislation by allowing due process to be followed. Private property owners should not be forced to give up their land without notice, without hearing and without fair compensation. Canadians deserve clarity, certainty and fair compensation. Bill C-222 would help achieve this.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Madam Speaker, introducing legislation is an important step in the life of a member of Parliament. I want to recognize the member for her work, but I have to say that the Bloc Québécois will not be supporting Bill C-222 because we are in a climate crisis, because it threatens diversity and because the destruction of natural environments causes flooding. What we should be talking about today is the climate commitment that is needed.

We are debating Bill C-222 today. The member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke has introduced a bill that reflects an ideology involving climate change denial. In our view, the bill is somewhat out of touch with reality. It seeks to eliminate any potential expropriation, even if reality and environmental emergencies were to require it.

This is an attempt to deny reality. Climate change is having geographic repercussions on populated areas. In these circumstances, this bill aims to eliminate the flexibility of the current legislation when it comes to acting in cases of emergency.

The appropriation phenomenon is legally guided by the federal and provincial governments. Not only would Bill C-222 undermine Quebec's civil law, but it would also put the private good above the common good. What is worse, it denies the existence of climate-related disasters. I will not repeat the examples that were given at first reading and that my colleague from Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia also raised earlier today regarding the people of Sainte-Marthe-sur-le-Lac and Rigaud, Quebec. Obviously, some properties were built on flood plains and they will flood again in the coming years.

Let us look at the facts. A study by Nature Communications projects that rising sea levels will threaten the homes of over 300 million people in the next 30 years. Quebec and Canada will be no exception, like it or not.

How can we deliberately turn a blind eye to the common good when action must be taken to protect the population or because of a climate or environmental emergency?

In passing, I want to speak out against something that a Conservative member said at first reading, when he went so far as compare the ability to take action under extraordinary circumstances related to environmental protection and climate change to 20th-century Communism. It is rather unbelievable to hear that sort of thing in the House.

Although the right to property is not enshrined in the Canadian Constitution as it is in the United States, it is in no way compromised, inadequately protected, weakened or challenged, as Bill C-222 suggested. Whether it is the Civil Code of Quebec or the common law tradition in force in the provinces, expropriation takes place in accordance with the level of jurisdiction. In Quebec, the

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right to property is clearly enshrined in the Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms and in section 147 of the Quebec Civil Code.

Preventing the government from categorizing a situation as urgent and ordering an expropriation related to environmental protection or climate change is incomprehensible in this day and age. A balance must be struck between individual rights and the protection of citizens and the common good because there must be protection for both the public interest and the people.

In this vast country, could our geographic reality be any different? Let us consider that. If we were experiencing more tsunamis, if cliffs were crumbling, if landslides were burying homes and creating climate refugees, would Bill C-222 have been introduced in the House? Simply put, this bill suggests that climate change cannot cause disasters that justify an urgent response. We have to be clear about what we mean by “urgent”.

I urge some members of the official opposition to take a closer look at the work of experts who have been documenting the coastal risks associated with climate disturbances for decades.

● (1830)

Will they keep up that rhetoric when the residents of the Pacific coast and the Atlantic coast are experiencing serious consequences? We oppose the bill not out of any desire to please environmentalists, as some have suggested, but rather because we recognize the climate reality that has been rigorously documented by scientists around the world.

Lastly, I would like to add my voice to that of my colleague and really emphasize that when it comes to possible disguised expropriations and claims related to a trade agreement, the Expropriation Act deals only with the acquisition of property by the state and has nothing to do with environmental regulations. In CUSMA, or NAFTA 2.0 as it is sometimes called, the chapter that would have allowed an American investor to sue the government no longer exists.

In closing, I would like to ask the following questions: How is removing climate-related elements from the special circumstances category in the Expropriation Act an act of modernization? How is denying scientific discoveries an act of modernization? How is creating a conflict between property owners and the federal government on the issue of expropriation in the event of an environmental emergency an act of modernization?

The Bloc Québécois works to defend the interests of Quebeckers, our areas of jurisdiction and the robustness of our legislation. We will always work to protect our own.

The day when the Pacific and Atlantic coastal regions suffer the geographic and meteorological impacts of climate change, the public will be happy and reassured to have government help. Will they have federal representatives to look after them? I hope so.

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• (1835)

[*English*]

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Madam Speaker, first of all, I would like to thank the members of Parliament who have participated in the debate on Bill C-222. Property rights are important to Canadians. Home ownership and property rights go hand in hand. One needs look no further than the recent surge in home ownership since the start of the pandemic to see that owning property is a priority for average Canadians.

In Canada, real estate transactions are up over the previous year. There is a record high demand and short supply. For 2020 as a whole, over half a million homes traded hands over the Canadian multiple listing service systems, which is a new annual record. Home ownership remains a goal for a great many Canadians. Buying a home will be the single largest purchase many will make in their lifetimes. Property rights protect their investment.

There has been a disturbing trend in Canada toward what is referred to as regulatory or constructive taking of property. This happens when a government uses its statutory powers to regulate or restrict the property rights of an owner without acquiring the title to the land being adversely affected. The ownership of private property is not constitutionally protected in Canada. The Crown can take private land, either an entire parcel, an estate or interest in a parcel, such as an easement, for the public good. This is called expropriation.

It is a general principle of expropriation law that the Crown must compensate landowners when it takes their land, although, in reality, this does not always occur. While the act provides some procedural protections for private landowners during the expropriation process, they are not absolute. In particular, the government can shorten the 90-day notice period alerting landowners to the Crown's intention to expropriate, dispense with the requirement for a public hearing into objections raised by landowners and take physical possession of the land before an offer of compensation is offered.

To do so, the government must believe that the land is urgently required due to special circumstances. The act does not explain what is meant by urgent or special circumstances, so Bill C-222 would clarify that restoring natural habitat and addressing the consequences of climate variability do not constitute those special circumstances. Bill C-222 recognizes that expropriation may be desired for these purposes, but that due process must be followed. Private landowners should not be forced to give up their land without at least a 90-day notice, a public hearing if they object to the expropriation and an offer of compensation.

Since I introduced Bill C-222, I have been made aware of too many examples of individuals being mistreated when it came to property rights. Long-time property rights activist, Ontario turkey farmer David Core, has been involved in private property rights for years, having been the president of the Canadian Association of Energy and Pipeline Landowner Associations. He recently made this observation in the Pipeline Observer, "I began to see that a healthy respect for property rights was the missing link — the real key to securing personal liberty, economic prosperity and environmental protection for all Canadians."

Nobel Prize-winning economist Friedrich Hayek once said that the power a multi-millionaire might have over an individual and their property, whether they are a neighbour or an employer, is very much less than what is held by the smallest government bureaucrat or agent, who wields coercive power of the state, and upon whose discretion it depends whether and how one is able to live, work or make decisions.

With this legislation, my goal is to protect the private property rights of average Canadians. Climate change is not the subject of this amendment to the Expropriation Act. In fact, this legislation has the effect of recognizing climate change. This bill in no way inhibits the federal government from responding to a climate emergency. What it would do is provide legal recourse for private property owners who are adversely affected by any such actions.

I ask members to please support property rights and send Bill C-222 to committee for further study.

• (1840)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The question is on the motion.

If a member of a recognized party present in the House wishes to request a recorded division or that the motion be adopted on division, I invite them to rise and indicate it to the Chair.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Madam Speaker, I would like to have a recorded division.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Pursuant to order made on Monday, January 25, the division stands deferred until Wednesday, February 17, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[*Translation*]

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise this evening to come back to a situation that concerns many Canadians, namely the whole saga of the resignation of the Governor General, Julie Payette.

On January 27, I had the opportunity to ask the Prime Minister some questions about his decision to appoint Julie Payette to the position of Governor General without using the process introduced by the previous government for viceregal appointments like that of Governor General.

At the time, the Prime Minister chose to go it alone and likely did not take the time to do all the necessary vetting, and proceeded to appoint a star that fit the glamorous image he likes to convey.

It was in order to avoid the type of fiasco that we recently saw with Ms. Payette's resignation and everything that goes with it, including some allegations, that the previous government brought in the advisory committee on viceregal appointments.

The Prime Minister chose instead to indulge in theatrics and to put on a show. By acting unilaterally on this appointment, he managed to end up with a governor general who resigned, as well as all sorts of allegations about a toxic work environment, no background checks and an inadequate effort to find the right person for this very important position for Canada.

We subsequently learned that despite resigning, the former governor general would be able to collect significant sums, including expense reimbursements and a \$150,000 annual pension for life, even though she held the position for less than three years, which is a very short time.

As a result, hundreds of thousands of dollars will go from Canadians' pockets to the pockets of the former governor general, all because the Prime Minister made the mistake of not using the committee that, I will repeat, was established by the former government to make important appointments, such as that of the governor general.

On January 27, the Prime Minister said that he would look at the existing processes, which he had already announced he would do. Will the Prime Minister commit right now to do the right thing and strip the former governor general, who resigned from her position, of her pension for life? Will the Prime Minister acknowledge that it was a mistake to proceed unilaterally, without consultation or vetting, and fix this mistake—

• (1845)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Order. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House.

• (1850)

[*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.): Madam Speaker, it is important to give a bit of a wider perspective of the situation. The office of the Governor General is considered one of the oldest public offices in Canada and is absolutely fundamental to our democracy, our institution. Her Majesty's representative fulfills essential functions in our system of government and is rightly held to a high standard.

All Canadians deserve a safe and healthy workplace. We have recognized that and stated it. I have personally stated that in responses to opposition members in the past. The government takes the issue of a safe and healthy workplace very seriously, and we have demonstrated a commitment to achieving that goal by strengthening legislation and regulations that protect employees.

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As soon as we were made aware of the allegations in this particular situation in the Office of the Secretary to the Governor General, we launched a rigorous and independent process to review the workplace conditions at Rideau Hall. The review provided an opportunity for those who work there or who work closely with Rideau Hall to share their concerns in a confidential manner. Upon the completion of the report, the Governor General informed the Prime Minister of her decision to resign.

We appreciate the dedication of the employees of the Office of the Secretary to the Governor General. We acknowledge the impact the state of workplace health has had on all the employees there. This has been a very difficult time and we are committed to restoring a healthy workplace.

In addition to the workplace review, a highly experienced and well-respected senior public servant, Ian McCowan, was appointed Secretary to the Governor General. He has already begun to engage employees to chart a new course toward a better environment at Rideau Hall, foster a culture of respect and ensure a healthy workplace.

The chief justice is currently filling in as administrator of the Government of Canada until a new Governor General is appointed. I know I speak for everyone in the House when I say it is comforting to have someone of his wisdom and experience in the role at this time. Many exceptional men and women have occupied this important office. They are Canadians of incredible integrity and talent. Let me assure the House that this tradition will continue.

In this context, the Prime Minister has committed to strengthening and improving processes whereby potential candidates are vetted. We will ensure that Rideau Hall is a safe and healthy work environment, as all Canadians deserve, and that those who serve Canadians do so with dignity.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, with all due respect to my colleagues, that was not the question. The question was about the retirement annuity that the former Governor General will receive for the rest of her life.

[*Translation*]

The typical worker who resigns from his job is not even entitled to employment insurance for 52 weeks. The former governor general will receive a \$150,000 annual pension for life because the Prime Minister made a mistake, did not choose the right person and ignored the procedures in place. The former governor general, who resigned, will receive royal treatment, whereas a Canadian who resigns is entitled to nothing. That is the issue.

Will the Prime Minister take action to prevent the former governor general from receiving these huge amounts of money from Canadian taxpayers' pockets, yes or no?

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I wanted the answer to give the member and those others who may be following the debate a little bit of a background in terms of the role of the Governor General and so forth.

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With regard to the question that the member asked, the former Governor General's annuity will be dealt with in accordance with the Governor General's Act, which is the legislation or the law that is currently there. The reimbursement of expenditures to the former Governor General is the responsibility of the Office of the Secretary to the Governor General. There is new leadership at Rideau Hall, and they will be able to address the serious concerns that were raised in respect to that issue.

Hopefully that helps my colleague a little more in getting a better understanding of what it is he would actually be required to do to go forward.

• (1855)

ETHICS

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Madam Speaker, since day one, the Liberal government has made it abundantly clear it will always put its friends before everyday Canadians. If someone wants to get their hands on a lucrative fishing contract, they had better be related to the fisheries minister. If someone gets in trouble, commits fraud or tries to bribe their way into a government contract, they can just make a few calls to their friends in the PMO, which will do its best to try to take care of it for them. If someone needs a bailout for their charity that is in shambles, the PMO can help with that, too, but first they are going to make sure there is a cozy arrangement whereby members of the Prime Minister's family are handsomely paid by that organization to get that help.

When the Liberals dropped the ball on personal protective equipment procurement, it was Liberal insiders who had the inside track. They had a direct line to ministers, and it was theirs as long as they were friends of those ministers and those in the inner circle of the Prime Minister's Office. Instead of getting the vaccine rollout squared away, the Liberals were more concerned with making sure that their friends had an easy payday. Instead of having a government that puts the elite and its friends before everyday Canadians, we know that Canadians deserve a government that will put them first, that will secure their future and that deals in hope.

My question for the parliamentary secretary is this. When will the current government put everyday Canadians first?

First, however, it is important that we have some background and context. This is the same government that when issues came up and with WE Charity and we found out about them, the first thing we heard from the Prime Minister's Office was that no members of the Prime Minister's family had ever been paid by the WE organization. We heard the same thing from the WE organization. Then, suddenly, we learned that nearly half a million dollars had been paid by that organization to members of the Prime Minister's family.

When that organization found itself in dire financial straits in the spring of 2020, it put the picture of the Prime Minister's wife and his mother into some documents and heavily lobbied some friends, like the former finance minister Bill Morneau and other members of cabinet. Those documents were sent to cabinet for consideration of a program that would see the WE organization benefit by over \$40 million for administering a half-billion dollars.

How is who these people know relevant to their competence in being able to administer this massive program? In any other government, who someone knows is not the most important criterion, but what they are able to deliver for Canadians. However, with these Liberals, it is not what they know or what they can do, but who they know in the PMO.

When will the Liberals start putting everyday Canadians first?

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.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the question. I always enjoy having the late shows with my colleague from across the way. It would be nice if one of these days we had unlimited time so that we could do a comparison between today's administration and other administrations, possibly the Harper administration. What a debate that would be.

Suffice it to say that the underlying question the member is asking is when we are going to serve Canadians first. I want to make a bit of a contrast.

Since 2015, the Prime Minister has made it very clear that, from day one, we have been putting Canadians first. We have put in a phenomenal effort to make Canada's middle class our first priority and we have demonstrated that. Let us do a comparison.

When we say we are going to reduce taxes for Canada's middle class, where are the Conservatives? They are looking under rocks for corruption. We have talked about increasing taxes on Canada's wealthiest 1% and where are the Conservatives? They are looking under more rocks for more corruption. When we say we are going to increase the Canada child benefit program, they are still looking for more corruption.

Whether it was back in 2015, last year during the pandemic or even today, we continue to work for Canadians every day, seven days a week. We are working with civil servants, other levels of government and other stakeholders to ensure that we get things right and work to put Canadians first. The Conservatives are preoccupied with looking for scandals and corruption. If they get a whiff of anything, they start waving and jumping on the pedestal telling us what they have found. Do members believe that Conservative companies have not received contracts? I do not. Do members believe that Conservatives have not been appointed at all? I do not.

The member needs to realize that it is the Conservative Party, the official opposition, that is preoccupied with trying to look for nothing more than corruption and ways to make the Prime Minister look bad. The Conservatives were doing that before he was even the Prime Minister, when we were sitting in the third party inside the House of Commons. If members read their S.O. 31s, they were all personal attacks against the leader, the Prime Minister. Nothing has changed.

We have been putting Canadians first from day one. When the pandemic came we made sure Canadians knew that we as a government would have their backs. We developed programs from ground zero to be there in a real and tangible way for the unemployed who did not have income so they would have a disposable income. We were there for small businesses, the backbone of our economy, by providing the wage subsidy, emergency rent subsidy, the credit availability program and so much more, because we understand how important it is to remain focused no matter what the preoccupation of the Conservative opposition happens to be, which is usually scouring for rocks to look under. To a certain degree, if the Conservatives get a whiff of anything, the first thing they do is send it to the Ethics Commissioner and try to make the media and Conservative spin as big as they can.

I would love to have a more appropriate debate with my colleague from across the way so we could give some real, solid—

• (1900)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Madam Speaker, while the parliamentary secretary hearkens back to a time when the Liberals were the third-place party, we can look forward to that again in the future.

He mentioned that the Conservatives have talked about the Prime Minister's record. We do not need to help him look bad; he does that all on his own.

I want to cite a few reports that have been tabled in the House. The first is “The Trudeau Report”. The second is the “Trudeau II Report”. These are documents from our non-partisan independent Ethics Commissioner, who found that the Prime Minister broke the laws of this place. That is what is important to note. Right now, the WE Charity scandal is under review by the Ethics Commissioner and we will see the third report very soon.

We need the government to put Canadians first. It has seen over this past year that when it is doing the right things for Canadians, we are in lockstep with those efforts.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, the member opposite tries to amplify the fact that we have the Ethics Commissioner, an independent body, in which I have far more confidence than I do the Conservative Party, and for good reason, and I have provided comment on that extensively in the House.

However, people need to realize that it was actually Stephen Harper, the former prime minister, who brought in that office, and I suspect that if we were to apply the same rules that we have today to the years of Brian Mulroney or other administrations, we would not have a problem holding up the behaviour of this government, the Prime Minister and ministers, and to a certain extent all members of the House, as I believe that over time we see a higher sense of accountability. When we talk about this particular Prime Minister, the member made reference to the third party; yes, go back to the third party, because when the Prime Minister was the leader of the third party, we brought in proactive disclosure.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We have to move on.

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The hon. member for Calgary Midnapore.

AIRLINE INDUSTRY

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Madam Speaker, last month I asked the incoming Minister of Transport why the Canadian aviation sector had already lost significant market share as a result of this government's incompetence and inaction while foreign carriers had received billions of dollars in sector-specific aid, and when the Prime Minister would put Canadian jobs first and deliver a plan for the airline sector.

Well, there has been lots of positive talk from this government. On March 10, 2020, shortly after the pandemic hit, the Minister of Economic Development said:

What we're looking at is how we can mitigate the impacts while making sure that we can have, still, a strong summer season and also that we can really bounce back.

Shortly after that, on March 19, 2020, the former finance minister, Mr. Bill Morneau, said, “Well, we are working hard with the airline sector. We're not taking anything off the table. We're going to see some businesses in extreme pressure and we're going to have to listen to them and we're going to have to work fast.”

It did not end there. On May 4, 2020, the Prime Minister hinted that support was coming for the airline industry, although he did not say how much money would be sent and when. He said, “We need to continue to have a strong airline sector, once this is all done. We are looking very carefully at how to support industries like that, that are so important to Canada and to Canadians.”

Finally, on May 16, 2020, the Prime Minister said that the federal government was committed to help for airlines after Air Canada announced plans to slash its workforce by at least half, but it was unclear what that support might look like.

We know from the timelines the things that happened. On March 21, Porter Airlines suspended its operations. We have yet to see it come back. Who is getting that business? Why, it is going to American airlines. On March 23, 2020, Sunwing Airlines suspended its operations for eight months. For the benefit of whom? It was American and European airlines. On April 18, Air Transat suspended flights for three months, and who was to benefit from that? Once again, it was foreign airlines.

Again, we hoped that the government would take an interest and support the airline sector, and again we were met with just words and not actions. The intergovernmental affairs minister said that:

I know my colleagues, [the transport minister and the finance minister], are looking at a whole series of options of what government support might look like for the sector. So we haven't made any decisions in that level of detail yet, but they're very much discussing that.

On November 3, the member for Central Nova said:

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I know the government has been working with the aviation sector to continue to figure out specifically how we can support the long-term survival of air travel in Canada, because the full picture of this pandemic will not reveal itself until long after the public health emergency has ended. We plan to be there to ensure the air sector has the support it needs.

Certainly we have seen support in other nations. In Australia, the airline sector received \$1 billion. Brazil gave \$660 million U.S. France gave \$22.7 billion Canadian. Germany gave six billion euros. In Italy, the European Commission approved 200 million euros for its airline sector. Our friends to the south gave a total of \$88 billion. However, there is still nothing from this government. When will this government have a plan for the airline sector?

• (1905)

Mr. Chris Bittle (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, a strong and competitive air transport industry is vital for Canada's economy and the well-being of Canadians. The Government of Canada understands the increasingly difficult financial situation that all members of the air transport industry are facing and that due to the interdependent nature of the air sector what affects one participant affects them all.

With passenger volumes down more than 90% from pre-pandemic levels and travel restrictions in place to protect Canadians, the impact on the air sector has been particularly severe and its recovery is expected to take relatively longer than other parts of the economy.

Airlines are important partners in our effort to manage the pandemic. In that context, I would like to particularly acknowledge the government's appreciation of the recent decision of the airlines to suspend services to sun destinations.

We have implemented several broad-based measures, some of which have directly benefited the air sector. For example, the air transportation sector has benefited from the Canadian emergency wage subsidy. Also, support for Sunwing through the large employer emergency financing facility was recently announced.

In March 2020, the government announced that it was waiving the rent payments for airport authorities owed to the government for the duration of the year. We have also announced over \$190 million in funding to support air services to remote communities.

The 2020 fall economic statement included further specific airport sector supports. This includes more rent relief for airport authorities, temporary enhancement of the airports capital assistance program, new critical infrastructure funding for larger airports, targeted funding to assist airport operators and funding to support regional air transportation.

These new measures amount to over \$1 billion in support. Government officials are well-advanced in their work to deliver them and continue to engage with industry members.

The fall economic statement also reaffirmed the government's engagement with major airlines regarding financial assistance. This work is ongoing. We have been clear that any support to air carriers will be dependent on securing real outcomes for Canadians, including the provisions of refunds in place of vouchers, maintaining regional connectivity and remaining good customers of the Canadian aerospace industry.

The government is working with airlines expeditiously. It is fully expected that this process will come to a successful conclusion in the near term.

• (1910)

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Madam Speaker, it was the parliamentary secretary himself who said, on October 5, 2020, "We are going to work with our airlines...We are going to work across the board to find solutions." Yet, none have arrived.

The new transport minister indicated on January 25, "We are very much supportive of our airline industry and sector. Discussions are ongoing with the airline sector to prepare a support package."

On February 2, the new transport minister said, "Mr. Speaker, the jobs in the airline sector are incredibly important for our country's safety and the economy. We are currently working with the airline sector on providing a support package for it."

The parliamentary secretary also mentioned the travel restrictions. Who benefits from that? It is American carriers that can still travel to sun destinations. Let us hope yesterday's news in *The Globe and Mail* is correct, that a plan is coming, because right now Canadian workers are losing and the Canadian economy is losing.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Madam Speaker, we have warned as a government, and the medical advice is, not to travel for non-essential reasons, especially to sun destinations.

Our government understands the significant impacts of COVID-19 on the air sector. As I have said, we are committed to addressing these challenges in a manner that respects the taxpayers and supports reasonable air transport services at a reasonable cost for Canadians.

The government is working to ensure that Canadians have reliable and affordable air services to support equity, jobs and economic development as we recognize that connectivity is important to Canadians. That is why the Government of Canada has focused its earliest efforts on supporting access to remote communities.

We will continue to engage with key players to respond to the pandemic, while protecting public health, facilitating the essential movement of people and goods and preparing for a safe restart of the economy.

Adjournment Proceedings

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):
The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

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

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