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Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, February 26, 2021

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1000)

[*English*]

CRIMINAL CODE

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.) moved that Bill C-21, An Act to amend certain Acts and to make certain consequential amendments (firearms), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Madam Speaker, I am very honoured today to have the opportunity and privilege to take part in this debate and introduce to the House Bill C-21 at second reading. Bill C-21, an act to amend certain acts and to make certain consequential amendments, is a historic and important step forward for Canada in creating a safer country. This legislation proposes to introduce some of the strongest gun control measures in our country's history.

It represents the culmination of many years of work and strong advocacy from the victims of gun crimes in this country. We have listened to those victims. We have listened to police chiefs across the country, who have urged successive governments to bring in stronger measures, recognizing that gun control is a factor of community safety and a necessary legislative requirement for keeping our communities safe. As Dr. Najma Ahmed, co-chair of Canadian Doctors for Protection from Guns, has said about the bill, "This is a comprehensive bill that, if enacted, will save lives."

Canada is generally a very safe country and Canadians take great pride in that, but they are legitimately concerned about the threats posed by firearm-related crime in their communities. It is therefore important to begin with the recognition and acknowledgement that gun ownership in Canada is not a right; it is a privilege. It is a privilege earned by gun owners who obey our laws and who purchase their guns legally, use them responsibly and store them securely. It is through the strict adherence to our laws, regulations and restrictions that Canadians earn the privilege of firearm ownership. I want to acknowledge that the overwhelming majority of those firearm owners are, in fact, responsible and abide by our laws. However, we also know that far too often, firearms can fall into the wrong hands or be present in dangerous circumstances.

As a former police officer and police chief, I have far too many times been required to go to the scene of firearm tragedies where young people and innocent citizens have been gunned down in the streets, and where firearm violence impacts not only the victims, but their families and their communities. Last summer, I went to a community in Toronto that had already experienced 22 violent gun incidents just in the month of July. What that meant in the community is that every child knew someone who had been the victim of a gun crime. That generational trauma demands an appropriate response from all Canadians. I have also had the unfortunate duty to attend funerals for police officers and for citizens who had been killed with these guns. Those are the things that should deepen all of our resolve to take action.

We have listened to the strong advocacy of the victims from École Polytechnique, from Nova Scotia, at the mosque in Quebec and at tragedies throughout the country. We have also witnessed with horror the use of some of these weapons in mass shootings around the world, and we have taken action.

As members will recall, last May 1, our government, by order in council, prohibited over 1,500 weapons. With Bill C-21 introduced today, we are taking actions to complete that prohibition. We have, through the legislation, established the conditions necessary to secure and set controls for the newly prohibited firearms.

Under this legislation, all of those in possession of such newly prohibited firearms will be required to acquire a licence to possess the weapon. The firearm will have to be registered as a prohibited weapon. There will be no grandfathering, as previously done. Rather, we are imposing through this legislation strict prohibitions on the sale, transfer and transport of these weapons, and we are imposing complete prohibitions on their use. The use of these newly prohibited weapons will be a criminal offence. We are also imposing strict conditions on the storage of these weapons, rendering these newly prohibited firearms legally unusable as a firearm.

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We have relied on the advice of law enforcement and our various officials across the country to determine the best way to safely manage these weapons, which are prevalent in our society. However, I want to be clear: There is nothing in this legislation that speaks of a buyback program. We believe that Canadians who legally purchased the guns we want to prohibit need to be treated fairly, and we are imposing appropriate and necessarily prohibitions on their sale and use, and restrictions on their storage. We also intend to offer the people who purchased these guns legally an opportunity to surrender them and be fairly compensated for them.

• (1005)

The bill does much more than just complete the prohibition. We have also looked very carefully in this legislation at all of the ways that criminals gain access to guns. We have seen a very concerning increase in gun violence in cities and communities right across this country. This manifests itself in different ways, but we know that in almost every circumstance criminals get their guns one of three ways: They are smuggled across our borders from the United States, stolen from lawful gun owners or retailers, or criminally diverted from those who purchase them legally and then sell them illegally.

In consultation with law enforcement, we have looked at all of the ways that criminals gain access to guns, and we have taken strong action in Bill C-21 to close off that supply. For example, with respect to concerns over guns coming in from across the border, we have heard many concerns from not only law enforcement but communities across the country about the proliferation of firearms, particularly handguns, that are smuggled in from the United States.

I recently had a conversation with my counterparts in the United States, and we are committed to establishing a bilateral task force on both sides of our countries for law enforcement to work collaboratively together to help prevent the importation of these firearms. In Bill C-21, we are also taking strong action to increase the penalty for gun smuggling and provide law enforcement and our border services officers with the resources and access to the data they need to be effective in identifying the source of these guns, for cutting off that supply and to deal more effectively to deter, detect and prosecute the individuals and organizations responsible for smuggling these guns into our country.

Let us also be clear that smuggling is not the only way. Quite often, we hear from gun retailers and the gun lobby in this country that we should only look at somebody else's guns, not theirs. Unfortunately, the reality is that in many parts of the country, crime guns are not just smuggled across the border.

I think it is important to listen to some of the police chiefs. For example, the chief in Saskatoon has recently said that crime guns in his community are not being smuggled across the border but are being stolen from legal gun owners. We also heard from the chief in Regina, who very clearly said that the guns in his community are not coming across the border but are legally owned, obtained through theft or straw purchase. The chief in Edmonton also opined that only 5% to 10% of the crime guns in his community, in the city of Edmonton, are actually smuggled across the border and the rest come from legal gun owners through theft and straw purchasing.

It is therefore important that in this legislation we address those sources of supply as well. That is why we are introducing in this legislation strict new restrictions on the storage of handguns in this country. They would require all handgun owners to store their weapons more securely, in a safe or vault that will be prescribed and described in the regulations of this legislation. They would also require gun retailers to store their weapons, when on display and in storage, more securely to prevent their theft.

I will highlight an example. A couple of years ago, two young girls and nine Torontonians were injured in a terrible and tragic gun incident. The firearm in that case was stolen some three months before from a gun shop in Saskatoon. Over three months, it made its way into Toronto and was used in a horrific crime. Therefore, keeping those guns out of our communities is an important element of Bill C-21.

Finally, we also deal with the source of supply through criminal diversion. We have seen a number of examples where individuals have purchased a large number of handguns and made an attempt to disguise their origin by filing off the serial numbers and then selling them for an enormous profit to the criminal market and to the gangs that commit violent acts in our communities. For those crimes to be detected and deterred, we need to ensure that law enforcement has access to the resources and data its members need to properly trace those weapons. That is why in this legislation we have provided law enforcement with that access.

We are also making significant investments. Yesterday, I advised the House that through our investments in British Columbia, for example, we just opened up a brand new forensic firearms laboratory. It will assist law enforcement in determining the origin of these weapons so we can hold individuals who purchase them legally and sell them illegally to account.

• (1010)

We also know that, in addition to guns that get into the hands of criminals, there are circumstances when the presence of a firearm that may have been legally obtained can lead to tragedy in certain potentially dangerous situations. We see it in incidents of domestic violence and intimate partner violence, when a legally acquired firearm may be in a home. When the circumstances in that home change so that it becomes a place of violence and threat and coercion, the presence of a firearm in those circumstances can lead to deadly consequences.

Although the police currently have some limited authority to remove firearms in those circumstances, in many cases of domestic and intimate partner violence the police are not aware of the presence of a firearm, even when the crime is reported to them.

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Through this legislation, we are empowering others: empowering victims, those who support them, legal aid clinics and other people in our society to take effective action through what are called extreme risk laws to remove firearms from potentially dangerous situations. Similarly, in situations where an individual may become suicidal or is emotionally disturbed, the presence of a firearm could lead to a deadly outcome.

We are empowering doctors, family members, clergy and elders in communities to take effective action to remove firearms by using the provisions of this legislation to remove firearms from those potentially dangerous and deadly situations.

Finally, this legislation also applies to those who engage in acts of hatred and extremism online. We have seen, in a number of tragic incidents in this country, that individuals have given an indication of their deadly intent online. When that information is available, we are now empowering those who become aware of it to take action, to remove firearms from those deadly situations and help keep people safe.

I want to advise the House that in the United States, 19 states have implemented extreme risk laws, also referred to as red flag laws, in every jurisdiction. In those states, we have seen strong evidence that these measures save lives. That is our intent with this legislation.

This legislation is not intended, in any way, to infringe upon the legitimate use of firearms for hunting or sport shooting purposes. It is, first and foremost, a public safety bill. It aims to keep firearms out of the hands of those who would commit violent crimes with them, and to remove firearms from situations that could become dangerous and be made deadly by the presence of a firearm. That is the intent of this legislation.

We are taking some additional measures within this legislation. For example, we have listened to law enforcement, which for over 30 years has been urging the Government of Canada to take action to prohibit what are often referred to as replica firearms. These devices appear absolutely indistinguishable from dangerous firearms. The police have urged governments to take action because these devices are often used in crime. They have been used to hurt people. They present an overwhelming, impossible challenge for law enforcement officers when they are confronted by individuals using these devices. This has, in many circumstances, led to tragic consequences.

After listening to law enforcement, this legislation includes prohibiting those devices. If I may be clear, these are not BB guns, paint guns or pellet guns that people use recreationally. These are devices designed as exact replicas of dangerous firearms. That exact appearance really creates the danger around these devices, so we are taking action.

We are also taking action to strengthen our provisions with respect to large-capacity magazines. I have been to far too many shootings in my city of Toronto. Years ago, when someone discharged a revolver, there would be two or three shots fired. Now, dangerous semi-automatic handguns and large-capacity magazines can lead to literally dozens and dozens of rounds being discharged, putting far more innocent people at risk.

We have seen that those devices are often modified to allow for the higher capacity, and we are taking action to prevent that. We are closing a loophole with respect to the importation of information, and we are making other consequential amendments to this legislation, all intended to keep communities safe.

● (1015)

As a companion to this important legislation, we have also made significant investments, first of all, in law enforcement. Several years ago a previous government cut enormous amounts of funding from the police, eliminating RCMP officers and border services officers, weakening our controls at the border and compromising our ability to deal effectively with organized crime. We have been reinvesting in policing and border services to restore Canada's capacity to secure our borders and keep our communities safe.

For example, we have made over \$214 million available to municipal and indigenous police services because we know that they do important work in dealing with guns and gangs in their communities and reducing gun violence. Those investments in policing are important; however, they are not the only investments necessary to keep our communities safe. That is why we are also investing in communities. Through our fall economic statement, over the next five years we are making \$250 million available to community organizations that do extraordinary work with young people and help to change the social conditions that give rise to crime and violence.

This is a comprehensive approach to gun safety in this country. It is always extraordinary to me that some people are afraid to talk about guns when we are talking about gun violence, but in my experience, countries with strong and appropriate gun control are safer countries. We have also seen that those countries with weak gun laws, as have been opposed by some in the House, experience the tragedy of gun violence far too often.

If I may repeat, in this country firearm ownership is a privilege, not a right. That makes us fundamentally different from countries like the United States, where the right to bear arms is protected constitutionally. It is not in Canada. Canada, like many other very sensible countries, has taken the appropriate step of banning firearms that have no place in our society. They are not designed for hunting and they are not designed for sport: they are designed for soldiers to hunt other soldiers and kill people, and tragically that is what they have been used for. That is why we have prohibited them and through the actions of this bill, we are taking strong measures to ensure that these firearms cannot ever be legally used in this country.

We believe that these provisions are appropriate, they are necessary, they are effective and they are fair, because we acknowledge as well that those who purchased the now-prohibited firearms did so legally. Now that we have prohibited them, we want to ensure that they can never be used to commit a violent crime at any time in this country.

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We have drawn a bright line in this legislation. We are not a country where people arm themselves to defend themselves against each other. We do not carry guns in this country for self-protection. We rely on the rule of law. Peace, order and good government are strongly held Canadian values, and we do not arm our citizens as they do in some other countries for self-defence.

Firearms in this country are only appropriate for hunting and sport shooting purposes, and there is nothing in this legislation that in any way infringes upon those activities. Some will try to make the case notwithstanding, but frankly it is a false case based on the false assumption that all firearms in this country represent a danger. They are offensive weapons by their very definition; therefore, we regulate them very strictly in Canada. Some of those firearms, such as handguns, are very dangerous, so we have appropriately added restrictions on them.

Finally, some weapons frankly have no place in a society for which firearms can only be used for hunting and sport purposes. These are firearms that were designed for combat: tactical weapons, which used to be marketed as assault weapons before those weapons began to be prohibited by countries like New Zealand, Australia and the United Kingdom. These weapons were even prohibited in the United States for a decade.

We are doing the right thing and taking the appropriate action to keep Canadians safe. This bill builds upon the effective measures that we brought forward in Bill C-71, which we are in the process of fully implementing over the next few months. We believe that, coupled with our investments, both pieces of legislation will help fulfill our promise to Canadians to do everything necessary to strengthen gun control in this country and keep Canadians safe.

• (1020)

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have a very simple question for the minister. It is the same question I have been asking the minister for almost a year now, here in the House and in written questions. It is about data and substantiation of how the prohibition of any of these firearms, or the measures taken through Bill C-21, would reduce gun violence in this country. It is a simple question about the data: Where is the evidence?

The minister mentioned he saw 22 tragic gun violence crimes in the Toronto area last year alone. I would like him to provide the statistics. Out of those 22 gun crimes, how many were done with legal firearms?

As well, I would like the minister to clarify and confirm that he just acknowledged he is bringing back a long-gun registry for those firearms that the Liberals have now prohibited. He mentioned the airsoft and replica firearms that he would now prohibit as well. Would he acknowledge that replica firearms have been prohibited in this country for a number of years now?

Finally, the minister again mentioned that the 1,500-plus firearms that were prohibited last year were designed by the military or for military use. I asked him last year to name just one of them that had been prohibited that had ever been, or is still, in use by the Canadian Armed Forces.

• (1025)

Hon. Bill Blair: Madam Speaker, it is always a bit of a mystery to me that, in a party that eliminated a registry and the collection of data that pertain to firearms, and did everything it could to undermine even Statistics Canada's efforts to collect data on this issue, members now complain that there is no data. One of the reasons there is insufficient data is the actions of the previous government.

Let me be very clear on something. We are not introducing a new registry. That is another gun lobby talking point. In Canadian law, and during the entire period of the Conservative government, prohibited weapons in this country had to be both licensed and registered. We are just following the law as it exists. There is no new registry here, but these newly prohibited weapons are now, in law, prohibited weapons; therefore, everyone in possession of them will have to have a licence in order to possess that prohibited weapon and, because they are now prohibited weapons, they will also have to be registered, as all prohibited weapons always had to be.

Let me talk a bit about the use of guns. I cited a couple of examples, and I do not disagree with the member that a lot of the guns that are used, for example, in gun crime in Toronto are smuggled guns. Over 10 years, I traced the origin of every crime gun in Canada, so I have really good data on that. In my experience, about 70% were smuggled across the border and about 30% were either legally owned or were stolen or criminally diverted. We have good data in that city, but it is not consistently collected across the country. We are changing that by investing in appropriate data collection around this issue.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Madam Speaker, New Democrats have long been in support of banning assault rifles, making our cities safer, opposing smuggling and getting the government to actually do something about it.

However, we have a problem with the minister when he says that recreational use of firearms is okay. Whereas handguns are treated one way under this legislation, in allowing their use to continue except where restricted by municipalities, airsoft rifles, which are used recreationally across the country by many organizations and groups and which cause no harm, are being treated the same as assault weapons.

Will the minister recognize that this is a totally different category, and try to find some way of allowing this to continue in recreational use? The banning of airsoft rifles is putting them in the same category as prohibited weapons, and that is wrong.

Hon. Bill Blair: Madam Speaker, that is a very important question.

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First of all, handguns represent a very significant danger. It is why we restrict them. Just to be very clear, in this legislation we are imposing very strict national restrictions on handguns: on their storage, sale and use. Those restrictions would apply in every place. We have also listened to municipalities where people have said that they would like to do more. We are prepared to work with communities that want to do more to keep their citizens safe. It is a responsibility we all have.

With respect to the airsoft rifles that the member references, there is no problem with those devices, except when they are designed to exactly replicate dangerous firearms so that they are indistinguishable from those firearms. We have listened to the law enforcement community, which has passed a number of resolutions. By the way, I consulted with the law enforcement community about why it wanted this done, and the representatives said that these devices have been used in crime.

In Winnipeg, for example, Chief Danny Smyth identified that 215 replica firearms were used to commit crimes in his city just last year. In his response to Bill C-21 he said, “We think you're on to something”.

I also spoke to the president of the CACP, who strongly supported it and expressed appreciation that the government finally listened to law enforcement to take effective action to remove devices that exactly replicate dangerous firearms. There really is no place for them in our society. They represent an unacceptable risk.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. minister for his explanation about his Bill C-21. I would like to ask him a question.

I had a chance to meet with members of a group called PolySeSouvient, who told me that they felt the bill was flawed. Lots of people are not happy about this.

My colleague said that some cities are prepared to deal with handguns. Other municipalities, however, do not want them at all.

A resolution was tabled in the National Assembly, and Quebec is ready to take charge of this issue. On the other hand, we are concerned about the whole firearms issue.

Given how dissatisfied people are with this bill, is the minister ready to go back to the drawing board and collaborate in committee with opposition parties to redraft this bill and see how it can be improved?

• (1030)

[English]

Hon. Bill Blair: Madam Speaker, I will be very clear. A substantial amount in the bill deals with handguns. As I said it, it would impose additional restrictions and would give access to law enforcement to do a better job of keeping guns, which are being smuggled across the border, out of our country, to prevent their theft through stronger storage requirements and to assist law enforcement to detect and therefore deter and prosecute those who, through straw purchase, have purchased them legally and sell them illegally.

There are very strong measures in the bill that deal with handguns.

This government listened to the strong advocacy. It was deeply motivated by the tragedy of the École Polytechnique, when 14 women were gunned down because they were women. In that terrible crime, the killer used a Ruger Mini-14. In May, we prohibited that weapon. PolySeSouvient advocated for over nearly 30 years to have that weapon prohibited. We listened and we took action on that. We are now completing that prohibition to ensure those weapons can never be legally used in Canada again.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the hon. minister pointing out that we do not have rights to bear arms in this country. I also note that under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, we do not have rights to property at all. Much of the rhetoric I hear against controls on firearms, such as from a group called the Canadian Coalition for Firearm Rights, shows that it does not understand Canadian law.

However, I did have initially a very strong sense of disappointment that the buyback program was not mandatory. The hon. minister will know that in briefing me and the Green caucus, he and the Minister of Justice said that they decided that the New Zealand mandatory firearm buyback had not worked because it was mandatory.

I have been digging into it since the minister told me that. Everything I can see suggests that there were probably about 170,000 semi-automatic weapons that the New Zealand Prime Minister wanted removed after the Christchurch massacre. Of the 170,000, only 56,000 were brought back in the mandatory buyback program.

I wonder if there are any other countries on which we have modelled the current approach, which, as he has said, is not in legislation but is running parallel along with it.

Hon. Bill Blair: Madam Speaker, we have had discussions on this. I want to be really clear on a buyback of these weapons.

First, Canadians who bought these weapons did so legally. We have since prohibited them. Therefore, we are taking steps to remove those firearms, but it is not intended as a confiscation program. That would be a very challenging thing to do. We did look very carefully at buyback programs that had been initiated in Australia and the United Kingdom. They were a little more distant. One of the things we learned from all those circumstances was that governments had to do the important work of getting control of all these firearms first. Bill C-21 would do that. It would enable us to impose—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We have to resume debate.

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The hon. member for Lakeland.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Conservatives have and will always support common-sense firearms regulations that keep Canadians and communities safe and respect their rights.

In Bill C-21, there are some things that the Conservatives have been calling for and can support. However, many things completely target the wrong people and the wrong groups, if the aim really is to improve and protect public safety. Also, crucial areas of concern are not addressed in the bill at all.

The Conservatives have always urged the Liberals to focus on and to target Canada's legislation and enforcement resources toward the primary source of most gun crime in Canada: illegally smuggled firearms in the hands of gangs and criminals. That is why we support certain measures, like increasing the penalty for gun smuggling, something the Conservatives have advocated for years; authorizing disclosure to Canadian law enforcement agencies when there are reasonable grounds to suspect a firearms licence is used for straw purchasing; improving the ability of the CBSA to manage inadmissibility to Canada when foreign nationals commit offences upon entry into Canada, including firearms-related offences; and transferring the responsibility for transborder criminality from the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

The Conservatives are committed to actually strengthening and securing public safety through real action to tackle gun crime head-on. The Conservatives have always said that we would increase funding and coordination for border security to clamp down on illegal firearms smuggling, restore mandatory minimum sentences to keep violent gang members off the street and focus on gangs and criminals instead of making life more difficult for law-abiding firearms owners and retailers by ending automatic bail, revoking parole for gang members and new and tougher sentences for ordering or involvement in violent gang crime.

The Liberals do the opposite. They are big on rhetoric but short on real action. In fact, the day after the Liberals announced Bill C-21, they announced Bill C-22, which, incredibly, would eliminate mandatory minimums for unauthorized possession of a firearm, possession of a prohibited firearm, possession of a weapon obtained by crime, weapons trafficking, reckless discharge of a firearm, discharge of a firearm with intent to wound or endanger a person and robbery with a firearm; so reductions for all of those sentences. Bill C-22 would reduce sentences for a number of other horrible offences, including sexual assault, kidnapping, human trafficking, abduction of people under 14, motor vehicle theft and arson.

The Conservatives focus on outcomes and whether laws will achieve objectives. What Bill C-21 proves is that the Liberals, as always, are more concerned with appearances. They play fast and loose with the facts, make up words to scare and ignore the actual problem. With Bill C-21, they would effectively trade on Canadians' fear and safety for short-term political gain. The reality is that taking firearms away from law-abiding citizens does nothing to stop dangerous criminals and gangs who obtain their guns illegally and already do not follow laws, do not get licences and do not care about firearms classifications. This just continues the Liberal gov-

ernment's ongoing preoccupation with taking firearms off of regulated ranges, while leaving illegal guns on the streets in the hands of those gangs and criminals who will never comply.

In June 2019, the former Toronto police chief was asked about banning handguns in Canada. He said:

I believe that would be potentially a very expensive proposition but just as importantly, it would not in my opinion be perhaps the most effective measure in restricting the access that criminals would have to such weapons, because we'd still have a problem with them being smuggled across the border.

Of course, the former Toronto police chief to whom I am referring is the current Minister of Public Safety.

Bill C-21 would create conditions on federal firearms licences to restrict handgun storage or transport within municipalities that have passed such bylaws. Again, the bylaws would be conditions on licences. Therefore, this proposed measure literally, specifically and only targets lawful Canadians who already have the paperwork and comply with the rules. This section would lead to yet another layer of confusing, overlapping regulations and a patchwork of rules for already law-abiding Canadians within and between communities, while violations could result in two years' imprisonment or permanent licence revocations and would do nothing to crack down on illegal gun smuggling and trading and gang crimes with guns.

Many law enforcement officials have already said that this measure would not be effective, including the current RCMP commissioner, the former OPP commissioner, the police chief of Vancouver, the former president of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, representatives of the Winnipeg and Halifax police services and police chiefs of Regina and Saskatoon. Provinces are already speaking out against Bill C-21: Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Quebec and Manitoba, whose premier said, "It's just not going to work."

● (1035)

In 2019, the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police did not support calls for a ban on handguns and the former president, Vancouver police chief, Adam Palmer said:

In every single case there are already offences for that. They're already breaking the law and the criminal law in Canada addresses all of those circumstances...The firearms laws in Canada are actually very good right now. They're very strict.

Former OPP commissioner Chris Lewis says:

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This municipal handgun ban is ridiculous...It would only impact legal owners. The gangbangers are already possessing/carrying them in defiance of the Criminal Code and don't fear police whose hands are tied and weak judicial systems.

Toronto Police Services president Mike McCormack says:

There's no way in my world or any world I know that this would have an impact on somebody who's going to go out and buy an illegal gun and use it to kill another person or shoot another person...

This is a classic Liberal smokescreen. There is absolutely no impact on the illicit use of illegal firearms in crime. Of course criminals and gangs do not carry licences or register their illegally obtained firearms and will not be deterred by municipal bylaws. They do not even care about the Criminal Code.

The fact that at least 80% of guns used in Canadian gun crimes are illegally smuggled in from the states shows that enabling towns and cities to demand handguns from licenced owners will have little to no impact on actual public safety.

In 2016, a father of four for two years, whose children were only six and five along with one-year-old twins, was enjoying a night out with friends in Toronto when he was shot and killed by a stray bullet. Now a mother of three, carrying the lifetime grief from the loss of her child, his mom, Evelyn Fox, advocates to support at-risk youth and prevent youth involvement in gang activity. She believes that banning handguns in Canada is “nonsense” because “street level wise, they'll get access to the handguns anyways.” She says, “I also would like to know how it is that penalizing law-abiding gun owners with a gun ban is going to deter gun violence on our streets when 80%, if not more, is coming across the border?” She is right.

In Toronto, despite the new Liberal order in council prohibition of thousands of firearms, there were 462 shootings in 2020, an increase over 2018 when there was no prohibition order. The year 2019 was a record year.

Since 2014, shootings in Toronto have increased 161%. Obviously residents and family are worried about this reality, causing sleepless nights, untold heartbreak, and anxiety about security and whether kids can grow up carefree in peaceful neighbourhoods. How galling that Bill C-21 would do nothing to make it more safe, while the Liberals claim otherwise.

In 2019, Toronto's police chief, Mark Saunders, reported that most guns used in crime were illegally smuggled in. He said, “When it comes to the handguns, I believe, 82 per cent...of the ‘crime guns’ in the city are coming from the United States.”

Peel Police Association President Adrian Woolley says, “There are a lot of guns out there and they are not legal ones from target shooters but illegal ones smuggled in from the United States.”

For the 2017-18 year, CBSA seized 751 illegal firearms at the U.S.-Canada border, 696 the next year and 753 for the year after that. The CBSA has already seized 166 firearms for the first quarter of this fiscal year. Canada's border agents should be commended for that good work and lawmakers should support their efforts to improve public safety by getting tougher on gun criminals and gun smugglers when they are caught. That is exactly what our Conservative colleague from Markham—Unionville tried to do when he proposed Bill C-238, which would have cracked down on gun smuggling, knowingly possessing illegally smuggled guns by in-

creasing sentences and making it harder for gun runners to get out on bail. However, the Liberals and the NDP voted against that public safety legislation a week before the announcement of Bill C-21.

When asked why the government is not getting tougher on criminals, the Liberal default is to say that they implemented a prohibition on “military-style” assault rifles. First, the term “military-style” assault rifle is of course invented with no legal definition, but it does sound scary. The reality is that fully automatic rifles have been prohibited for use outside of the military since the 1970s. The Prime Minister said that he made a law so people could not purchase firearms without purchasing a licence, but that is false.

Along the spirit of making things up, just last Saturday the member for York South—Weston told a crowd of gun crime victims and families that his Liberal government's gun grab included “AR-135” submachine guns, except they absolutely do not even exist.

Unfortunately, it is easy to see why lawful, well-intentioned urban and rural firearms owners, collectors, hunters, sport shooters, enthusiasts and retailers, people who enjoy this Canadian heritage, are skeptical of the Liberals, to say nothing of the radical shift in Bill C-21. It would create a one-sided guilty-until-proven innocent-ask questions later regime, focused on Canadians who already did a filing and have the licences under Canada's stringent regulations and vigorous vetting processes for prohibition orders and warrantless search and seizures.

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• (1040)

That is ripe for abuse and conflicts while bogging down already backlogged courts and law enforcement resources when right now there are multiple overlapping systems to ensure that law enforcement can respond to urgent situations involving threats to personal and public safety, as they must. The new approach actually may even take longer and could easily have unintended consequences and deliver the opposite outcomes. This pattern of saying one thing and doing another, of literally making things up, of not having the evidence to support the legislation to show it will achieve stated outcomes should make every Canadian question and challenge the Liberals to prove that their laws will actually make a difference for public safety and combat gun crimes, too.

That brings me to the framework for the voluntary confiscation program. A 2018 Public Safety Canada paper entitled “Reducing Violent Crime: A Dialogue on Handguns and Assault Weapons” explained why confiscating firearms from lawful licensed owners would be ineffective at reducing gun crime in Canada. The report states:

The vast majority of owners of handguns and of other firearms in Canada lawfully abide by requirements, and most gun crimes are not committed with legally-owned firearms....

In most cases, individuals own handguns either in the context of sport shooting activities or because those handguns form a part of a collection....

Any ban...would primarily affect legal firearms owners,...

The public safety minister recently said that the government does not know how many firearms will fall under the confiscation program, but claims it is in the range of 200,000 and says that at an average price of \$1,300 per firearm, it will cost taxpayers in the range of \$250 million to \$260 million. Of course, experts say that the Liberals are way off and that this confiscation program could cost as much as \$5 billion when all is said and done. The fact is that the Liberals do not have any structure in place because no private sector proponents have agreed to run the program after two public requests for bids. It really does say something when highly reputable major firms look at the government's purported analysis and cost assumptions and decide they will not touch it with a 10-foot pole.

The Liberals still have not been clear on how they will address retailers left holding the bag with inventory they cannot sell or return to manufacturers either. Phil Harnois, the owner of P&d Enterprises in Alberta, says that 40% of his annual sales were of firearms that are now banned and that thousands of dollars of inventory became worthless overnight. The president of the National Police Federation, Brian Sauvé, says that “the evidence is that illegal gun trafficking leads to criminals owning guns, which leads to crimes with firearms.... [W]e need to look at the source of the problem.” The vast majority of gun crime committed in Canada is by gangs and criminals using already illegal guns, most often illegally smuggled in. That needs to be reiterated because Bill C-21 clearly misses the mark.

Sylvia Jones, spokesperson for Ontario's solicitor general, agrees. She says that “As law enforcement experts routinely highlight, it has not been demonstrated that banning legal firearms and targeting law-abiding citizens would meaningfully address the problem of gun violence.” The Liberals have shown, of course,

though, that they do not really believe that their list of banned firearms in the hands of licensed law-abiding firearms owners are a real threat either. Otherwise, why is there this confusing step of banning them, but allowing Canadians to keep them in their homes so long as the guns are registered with the government? It is very confounding.

However, what is clear is that Bill C-21 finds a way to create a boondoggle that will result in the creation of another long-gun registry because some of the now-prohibited firearms are long guns and it will cost taxpayers billions of dollars while delivering no concrete results to improve the public safety of Canadians suffering at the hands of gangs and criminals carrying out the vast majority of gun violence and crime in Canada.

Another measure that is glaring in its obvious irrelevance to improving public safety in Canada while also imposing major consequences on everyday people is the prohibition of the importation, exportation and sale of all non-regulated air guns that look like modern firearms. Here is the deal. The Liberals are actually imposing a ban on airsoft and a partial ban on paintball. Any rational, common sense person can see that toy guns are not responsible for the shootings are causing death in Canadian cities. Criminals and gangs with illegal guns are tragically ending the lives of Canadians. This provision in Bill C-21 would end hundreds of livelihoods, legacies and jobs and outlaw an entirely harmless hobby enjoyed by more than 60,000 Canadians.

Airsoft in Canada says the Canadian airsoft market is worth \$100 million and over 260 businesses in Canada are linked to the paintball or airsoft community. The Quebec Airsoft Federation estimates that the industry brings in over \$10 million per year in Quebec alone. Distributors and retailers are uncertain about what to do with the current stock and stock on order because all of it would be rendered worthless immediately, with no option to offset losses because the bill would prohibit sales. It will not only impact businesses that directly sell hobby and competition practice guns, but also the retailers of protective equipment and accessories, as well as the clubs and owners of sports facilities that have focused their businesses largely or solely around these activities.

• (1045)

This whole industry would be devastated. Matt Wasilewicz, who owns Canadian Airsoft Imports, says that the ban “confirms our worst fears.” Frank Chong, who owns Toronto Airsoft, Canada’s largest airsoft retailer, says “It looks like it’s doomsday for us at this point.” Ziming Wan of BlackBlitz Airsoft in Waterloo says that “We’re basically all going to have to shut down.... It’s the death of the sport, as we know it”. Joe Kimpson of Flag Raiders in Kitchener says “You’ll see the demise of airsoft in Canada.”

Seventy-four per cent of these businesses expect to lose over half their revenue because of Bill C-21 and 47% of them expect to be out of business for good. There are approximately 3,000 employees working in those affected businesses. It is unconscionable that half of them would lose their jobs and not a single life be saved for it.

It is hard to see how the Liberals are materially protecting the well-being and safety of Canadians by banning toy guns, shuttering more businesses and killing 1,500 jobs while Canada’s unemployment rate is already the highest in the G7.

Mark from Motium Manufacturing in Lakeland says, “I was given no notice, no warning, no consultation. The hard work I’ve put in for over 8 years has been erased and my customers wrongfully criminalized. Why aren’t criminals being as negatively impacted as my small business?”

A petition called “Stop Bill C-21” is circulating in the hobby community and 30,000 Canadians have already signed it. That is because Canadians know what experts have been saying all along, which is also what the Conservatives have been saying. What is missing from these Liberals is any meaningful emphasis or major legal framework targeting the main source of gun crime in Canada.

It is good to see some measures to help the CBSA and a small increase in penalties for gun smuggling, but those aspects of Bill C-21 appear more like a footnote in what seems to be a broader strategy primarily concerned with targeting already law-abiding members of Canadian society. One would read this bill and assume that the main goal is to be a nuisance to the legal firearms community. It is not at all obvious that the aim of Bill C-21 is to improve public safety.

The tragedy is that for all the big words and tough talk from the Liberals, it is the very real victims of growing gun violence and Canadian citizens and their families who are forced to bear the brunt of these failed Liberal policies and experiments. What is worse is that the evidence is available for all of us to see. Experts, law enforcement and policy-makers all agree that concrete strategies and legislation must be directed at criminals and gangs and supports for at-risk youth.

Conservatives will always support a common sense approach to firearms legislation with concrete outcomes that protect personal and public safety. Bill C-21 does not get to the bottom of addressing the major cause of gun crime in Canada and all MPs really owe it to the victims of violent crime in Canada, past and future, to get serious about gun smuggling, gangs and criminals.

As Evelyn Fox says, “I see the homicides happen and it’s almost like a retrigger for me to think that another mother has to go

Government Orders

through this and another mother has to deal with the fact that they aren’t going to see their children again.” Because Bill C-21 will not actually make any difference to that, Conservatives will strongly oppose it, and if it passes, repeal Bill C-21.

• (1050)

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am a little confused by the member’s comments because when she was a member of the previous government, she was actually responsible for cutting enormous amounts of funding and staffing from the police and our border services officers, and when our government brought forward measures to refund and restaff those important functions, she voted against them.

I just want to clarify something. We listened very carefully to law enforcement and the victims of gun violence and we are taking strong action in response to their urgent appeals to strengthen gun control in this country. We know that the Conservative leader has promised the gun lobby he will weaken gun control. For example, the gun lobby tells us he promised them that he will make assault rifles legal again, remove restrictions on handguns, eliminate all controls over large-capacity magazines, eliminate stronger background checks and allow people to carry concealed weapons. The gun lobby has said very clearly that it has told the Conservative leader what he is to do and he has agreed to do it.

Can the member confirm that it is the intention of the Conservative leader and party to weaken gun controls in the way they have been ordered to do by the gun lobby?

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Madam Speaker, what on earth is this minister talking about? What a deeply concerning and troubling and, frankly, frigging ridiculous response by the one person who has the most power and the most ability to make a real difference—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We have a point of order from the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, on a point of order, as you know, and I am sure this member knows, members cannot say indirectly what they cannot say directly. When members use a word like “frigging”, it is pretty clear what they are actually trying to say. I would encourage the Speaker to encourage this member to use proper language and decorum.

Statements by Members

• (1055)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Yes, we try to keep our vocabulary as respectful as possible.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Madam Speaker, I will put it this way. What a mind-boggling, irrelevant, political, partisan, ridiculous and superficial approach by the man charged with the chief responsibility to protect the public safety and security of every single Canadian.

What a slap in the face to people in Toronto, to families, to people who live in neighbourhoods and cities right across the country, where criminals and gangs are terrorizing their streets, killing their children and making people wonder if they can sleep peacefully at night, and who are seeing their communities change all around them and want the Canadian government to take action to crack down on the criminals and gangs and the violence that puts them at risk.

How can that possibly be the first question and comment by the Minister of Public Safety in this debate? That, right there, just shows exactly what the problem is.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, to the comment by the hon. member for Lakeland that protections in Canada would somehow be weakened if we got rid of mandatory minimums, I want to ask the member if she is familiar with the fact that all of the literature around mandatory minimum sentences makes it very clear that they do not reduce crime, but increase the costs of prisons borne by provincial governments and lead to overcrowding.

There is not any evidence that mandatory minimums are anything other than a waste of public funds, and actually endanger Canadians more. Does the member have any literature to the contrary?

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Madam Speaker, actually there have been several recent convictions for which mandatory minimum sentences were upheld, and thank goodness they were. They ensured that dangerous criminals, dangerous offenders who had committed violent acts against Canadians, stayed in jail.

I think that every single Canadian would value that measure, when they know that it is a real action to make sure that we will all be kept safe.

Here again we know what this is all about, namely, ideological objections. What is really behind the discussion and rationale for this is an out-of-touch attack on law-abiding, lawful, peaceful Canadians while politicians are trying to look like they are doing something about public safety and cracking down on crime.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Madam Speaker, there are many social determinants that create the crime that we are seeing in our cities. During this pandemic, of course, things have become extremely exacerbated. Homelessness is on the rise. In my city of London, housing is out of reach. It is not affordable anymore. We are seeing that across the board.

When New Democrats talk about investments in those social programs and trying to provide cost-saving measures with pharmacare, or shifting how we tax the rich and introducing wealth taxes

to make those different choices, the Conservative Party, of which the member is part, does not support them.

When we consider the increases in poverty and increases in crime, could the member talk about why her party does not support those social programs?

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Madam Speaker, what a bizarre thing to say. In fact, throughout the whole speech, I think I twice talked about the important initiatives that would help prevent youth ending up in gangs. Certainly my Conservative colleagues have been on the front lines talking about dealing with the addiction crises that are driving criminal activity in many communities.

The member does raise an important point about the kind of work that needs to be done, with a framework, for example, like what our Conservative colleague I hope is just about to bring forward successfully with the support of all parties, focusing on establishing a national framework of non-profit, local, community, faith-based, private organizations that would work together right across the country to reduce recidivism and repeat offences. That is an example of a real measure that would deal with some of the things the member is talking about to prevent crime.

• (1100)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member will have three and a half minutes for questions and answers when we return to the discussion of this bill.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

RESIDENTS OF BEACHES—EAST YORK

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Madam Speaker, in this pandemic, strong public health measures have helped to save lives, but they have also isolated us, including many of our seniors. To combat that isolation, our local constituency office and I sent a big thanks to Marietta and Hanna from my team and worked with 26 teachers from 14 local schools and Community Centre 55 to deliver over 700 letters of love written by elementary students to local seniors, both at home and in nursing homes. The idea was simply to help our seniors feel more connected and give students a platform to express empathy and to share life as we know it through their eyes.

Ben, a grade 6 student at Adam Beck school wrote, “Even if it feels lonely, just remember, you are not alone.” Declan, a grade 6 student at Cosburn Middle School wrote, “I want you to know that you're a very special person and you are loved... All through life you've made others happy and now it's my turn to make you happy.”

This has been an impossibly difficult year for too many seniors across our country. I want to recognize the efforts of our local teachers and especially of these young students in bringing some joy to these otherwise difficult times.

CARBON PRICING

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): Madam Speaker, Canadians from all walks of life are suffering from the government's carbon tax. Seniors are seeing their meagre savings and pension monies being depleted by this tax on everything they buy. People who think this is only a tax on the fossil fuels they directly consume are sadly mistaken. Almost everything consumable has a carbon tax component.

Our industries are bearing this burden and at the same time are competing with industries from other countries that have no carbon tax. Farmers are being terribly affected by this punishing tax, compounded with a tax on a tax.

This is an example of just one farm bill in Oxford: Farmer Ed's cost of fuel for December to dry his grains for selling was \$3,876. The carbon tax was \$1,201 and the HST another \$660. His January billing for fuel was \$12,700. The carbon tax was \$5,500 and the HST was—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour.

* * *

OUTSTANDING SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Mr. Darren Fisher (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Madam Speaker, this year marks the 25th official celebration of Black History Month in Canada and the 75th anniversary of Nova Scotia's Viola Desmond standing up against racial segregation. Today I honour another incredible and impactful Black Nova Scotian, Auburn Drive High School principal Karen Hudson.

Beloved and known for making every student feel supported and cared for, Principal Hudson was named one of Canada's outstanding principals in 2019 for co-creating an Afrocentric education program for Black students at Auburn Drive. Bringing Afrocentric student content into academic courses such as higher-level math and English has increased enrolment and achievement for her students. After working hard together since grade 9, the first cohort of this program will graduate from high school this June.

I ask all members to join me in commending Dartmouth—Cole Harbour principal Karen Hudson for her efforts and achievements. I thank her for all that she does.

* * *

OPIOIDS

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Madam Speaker, last year Gord Portman saved two people in a house fire in Penticton. When he saw his picture in the local newspaper, he realized he needed help. Gord was addicted to opioids, so he turned to Discovery House, a local organization that helps men battle their addictions. Now he thanks Discovery House for saving his life.

There are 1,300 British Columbians who have died from COVID-19, but over the same period 1,700 have died because of the opioid crisis. These people were sons and fathers, daughters and mothers. They had a medical problem, not a criminal problem. Thousands are being poisoned by drugs laced with fentanyl. We

Statements by Members

must decriminalize these drugs and provide a safe supply so we can help people like Gord and go after the real criminals who are selling the poisoned drugs.

Gord was recently honoured with a bravery award by the Royal Canadian Humane Association. I thank him and the people at Discovery House who saved his life.

* * *

[Translation]

FRANCOPHONE COMMUNITY CENTRE IN OTTAWA

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Madam Speaker, in 2010, 11 years ago now, I sat down with leaders from the francophone community who wanted to create the Maison de la francophonie d'Ottawa, a place to promote services in French and French-language development for francophones and francophiles.

The Maison de la francophonie, a non-profit organization, is now up and running in my riding, Ottawa West—Nepean. Bilingualism defines us as a country. The Maison de la francophonie offers health services, sports programs, second language classes and many cultural activities.

I would like to thank everyone involved in the Maison de la francophonie for creating this welcoming and inclusive space where diversity is celebrated.

* * *

● (1105)

[English]

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Supreme Court of Canada has declined to hear an appeal by the big telecom companies of a CRTC order that could significantly lower wholesale Internet rates. This means that the Supreme Court now joins the Federal Court in rejecting these appeals. All eyes are now on the last remaining appeal, which is in front of the CRTC. This issue is, of course, vitally important for almost all Canadians, as wholesale rates effectively determine what everyone pays for Internet access, regardless of provider.

In my riding of Chatham-Kent—Leamington, affordable and reliable Internet is critical to our future. This has only been accelerated by remote working and learning and our need to access government programs. For remote communities such as Pelee Island, it can be their only lifeline. Internet users in my riding demand the immediate implementation of federal measures to deliver affordable Internet and wireless services.

*Statements by Members***AMEDEO NARDONE**

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise today with a very heavy heart. Our community in Humber River—Black Creek has lost an important and influential individual, Father Amedeo Nardone, the beloved pastor of St. Jane Frances Church.

Father Nardone had a passion for life and a love for telling famous jokes to get a laugh. He will be remembered for the beautiful memories he has left behind, as well as his dedication, devout faith, hard work and goodwill in our community. He will never be forgotten.

I send condolences to his family and loved ones from me and from my husband, Sam. Father Nardone's wishes were, in lieu of flowers, for donations to St. Jane Frances Church roof repair fund. I know we will be successful in getting that roof repaired in honour of our dear friend who, even after his passing, is still looking out for his church.

* * *

SRI LANKA

Ms. Helena Jaczek (Markham—Stouffville, Lib.): Madam Speaker, a new UN report on Sri Lanka expresses concern about clear warning signs of a deteriorating human rights situation. The report warns that the current trajectory sets the scene for the recurrence of the policies and practices that gave rise to grave human rights violations.

These concerns are shared by the Tamil Canadian community in my riding of Markham—Stouffville. Groups such as PEARL have suggested actions we can take, which include encouraging Global Affairs Canada to support a strong, principled position at the UNHRC; supporting the creation of a special rapporteur for Sri Lanka at the HRC; calling for a study on Sri Lanka by the Subcommittee on International Human Rights; and operationalizing a motion passed by the House calling on the UN to establish an international independent investigation into allegations of genocide.

I support these recommendations.

* * *

LUNAR NEW YEAR

Mr. Bob Saroya (Markham—Unionville, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to wish everyone celebrating lunar new year a happy new year. Today, communities around the world are celebrating the final day of the traditional lunar new year, the Year of the Ox, which represents hard work, resiliency and courage.

This year, instead of the usual festivities shared with family, friends and neighbours, we are celebrating the new year virtually. Tonight Markham—Unionville MPP Billy Pang and I will be hosting one of these events, with the Leader of the Opposition and Premier Ford in attendance.

On behalf of the Conservative Party, I would like to wish everyone in my riding and across Canada a very happy lunar new year. I hope the Year of the Ox will be filled with joy, peace and prosperity for everyone.

Xi nian kuai le, shen ti jian kang, gong hai fat choy, niu nian da ji.

* * *

● (1110)

HARRY JEROME

Mr. Patrick Weiler (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.): Madam Speaker, this week the West Vancouver Place for Sport dedicated its track in honour of Canadian hero and homegrown athlete Harry Jerome.

Harry Jerome was a renowned track and field sprinter, but although his achievements, including an Olympic medal and seven world records, are outstanding, he faced significant prejudice and racial injustice as a Black man.

Harry's persistence in the face of discrimination and devastating injuries to achieve at the highest level is an example to us all. This Black History Month, Harry Jerome is getting the reverence he deserves, but while his legacy continues to inspire young athletes, we must also recognize that the cruelty and racism he faced persists today.

This is why our government is taking action on the recommendations identified by the Parliamentary Black Caucus to address anti-Black racism, among which is recognizing the contributions of Black Canadian culture and heritage. The unveiling of Harry Jerome Oval will provide the community with a safe haven where athletes can compete free from discrimination in the future, just as it did for Harry in the past. I invite members to learn about Harry's incredible story in this Black History Month.

* * *

JOHN WARE

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Madam Speaker, in February we celebrate Black History Month, and in my riding of Bow River, Black Canadians have been making history for well over 100 years. This history includes the story of the famous cowboy named John Ware.

John Ware was born in slavery in South Carolina. After the Civil War, he journeyed west into Texas and north with the cattle herds through the interior of the U.S. until he settled in southern Alberta.

He persevered through hardship and adversity while rising to prominence and ownership of a ranch. He became one of the first ranchers in Alberta after settling in the Bow River area. He was known for his exceptional horsemanship and is said to have popularized steer wrestling, which is still an event in rodeos today.

Bow River is a vastly diverse riding, with cities like Brooks, known as the city of 100 hellos for its ethnic diversity.

Stories about amazing Canadians like John Ware make us proud to celebrate Canada's diversity of culture and peoples, all while sharing our love for this great country.

* * *

BRIAN FRASER

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to start with the words “genius”, “savant” and “lightning-quick”. These were the words that legendary Ottawa broadcaster Bill Carroll used to describe 26-year-old Brian Fraser. Brian was known for lighting up the newsroom over at CFRA. As the technical producer, he always knew how to intersperse exactly the right jingle, clip or piece of music to bring laughter to the thousands of listeners who enjoyed the show across the city and beyond.

When he was diagnosed with leukemia, instead of feeling sorry for himself, he used it as an occasion to spread the message that all Canadians should give blood in order to help those suffering with the disease. He reached hundreds of thousands of people on social media with his pleas.

Sadly, we lost Brian just last night. He passed away just after his beloved Senators won another game and he went on to be with his maker.

On behalf of all of our residents, I send my condolences to his family, to his loved ones, to his many friends and fans. May he rest in peace.

* * *

CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Madam Speaker, a new Prime Minister's directive on the land border between Canada and the United States is creating chaos, grief, disorder and disbelief. Workers who were formerly declared essential are now being denied re-entry to Canada, their home, at the Windsor-Detroit border, and face having to remain in the United States, away from their families, with little direction, support or respect from this Prime Minister.

This week my office has received numerous calls from members of the cross-border community in Windsor-Essex County who are denied re-entry to Canada. Nurses, engineers, teachers, business owners and workers in social services, for example, are now penalized. It is rumoured that there is a grid to determine eligibility, but little has been shared or is accountable from the minister's office. How can people plan or be expected to comply when they do not have a directive from the minister?

This situation needs to be altered. These former essential workers have saved lives of Americans and Canadians, and they, as well as people with cancer treatments and other medical appointments in the United States, need to have the support of the Prime Minister and the cabinet and not be denied these life-saving and life-important measures.

This is unacceptable. It has to be resolved—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Manicouagan.

Statements by Members

• (1115)

[Translation]

POSTAL SERVICE ON THE LOWER NORTH SHORE

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Madam Speaker, last week, I met with elected officials from the lower north shore, a huge portion of my riding that is not connected by road, in order to present the disastrous results of a survey that my office conducted on people's satisfaction with Canada Post. We learned that 80% of the population have complaints about this Crown corporation.

I was heartbroken to tell them the story of a woman who was expecting her chemotherapy drugs to arrive by mail on December 25 but did not receive them until January 6. That extremely vital package was 12 days late, and there was no other way it could be delivered. That is not only unacceptable; it is inhumane.

That is just one of countless examples. We have proposed solutions, such as colour coding, the supply ship *Bella Desgagnés*, or a local air carrier. We have made those suggestions to Canada Post many times, but nothing has changed.

The government needs to demand that Canada Post do everything in its power to immediately make its postal service on the lower north shore accessible, efficient, affordable and, of course, reliable.

* * *

MAURICE TANGUAY

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Madam Speaker, today Lévis is mourning the loss of one of its most illustrious citizens, Maurice Tanguay.

Originally from Saint-Philémon, in Bellechasse, Mr. Tanguay's passion for hockey grew during his time at Collège de Lévis. It was in Lévis in 1961 that he opened the first store under the banner that would become so well known: Ameublements Tanguay.

In 1995, he founded the Rimouski Océanic Hockey Club, fuelling Quebec's passion for major junior hockey. He also became an architect of the Rouge et Or at Université Laval, a prestigious part of Quebec football.

However, his true passion was helping children who were underprivileged, sick or living with disabilities. Thirty years ago he founded the Fondation Maurice Tanguay and was honoured many times for his compassion for human suffering. He and his family created a true dynasty of generosity.

For his exceptional involvement and his human values, we thank Maurice Tanguay and offer our condolences to his loving and devoted wife Madeleine, their children Jacques, Hélène and France, and the entire extended Tanguay family.

* * *

[English]

JAGAN NATH DHAWAN

Mr. Sven Spengemann (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.): Madam Speaker, last December 11, Mississauga lost one of its community builders when Jagan Nath Dhawan passed away.

Oral Questions

Jagan immigrated to Canada in 1969 at the age of 38 and lived in what was then the Town of Port Credit, becoming a schoolteacher in science and mathematics. His life journey is one of community service as a beloved educator and as someone who worked to forge and strengthen the multicultural community that Mississauga is today and the Canadian values that it exemplifies.

Jagan believed that if we truly understand each other's cultures and traditions, it would help to bring about acceptance, inclusion and unity. He led the way through his many tireless efforts, including the Peel District School Board's heritage language program, the Carassauga Festival of Cultures and the Mississauga Santa Claus Parade. He also helped newcomers to find work and housing and to overcome difficult circumstances.

Jagan Nath Dhawan lived a life of purpose and compassion, deeply rooted in a selfless concern for the well-being of others. He will be profoundly missed.

Mr. Dave Epp: Madam Speaker, on a point of order, my statement was interrupted with an order to close the door that I can assure you did not come from my office. I request that I have the opportunity to deliver my statement again.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): There was indeed a comment during the hon. member's statement. Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent to reissue his statement?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Chatham-Kent—Leamington, please go ahead.

• (1120)

Mr. Dave Epp: Madam Speaker, the Supreme Court of Canada has declined to hear an appeal by the big telecom companies of a CRTC order that could significantly lower wholesale Internet rates. This means that the Supreme Court now joins the Federal Court in rejecting these appeals. All eyes are now on the last remaining appeal, which is in front of the CRTC. This issue is, of course, vitally important to almost all Canadians, as wholesale rates effectively determine what everyone pays for Internet access regardless of provider.

In my riding of Chatham-Kent—Leamington, affordable and reliable Internet is critical to our future. This has only been accelerated by remote working and learning, and our need to access government programs. For remote communities such as Pelee Island, it can be their only lifeline. Internet users in my riding demand the immediate implementation of federal measures to deliver affordable Internet and wireless services.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Speaker, millions of Canadians want to know why Canada is not able to manufacture vaccines. Yesterday, the Standing Committee

on Industry heard some very interesting testimony from witnesses, including Dr. Gary Kobinger, a microbiologist at Université Laval's faculty of medicine. He said that at least two platforms, maybe three, in Canada could have been online by now, if there had been the right amount of support behind them.

Why has the government not provided the right amount of support for our scientists?

Mr. William Amos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry (Science), Lib.): Madam Speaker, at the beginning of the pandemic we announced some significant investments in the most promising Canadian candidates. Dr. Kobinger said that Medicigo was the first vaccine candidate he would look at. We agree, which is why we invested up to \$173 million to help Medicigo move forward with its vaccine candidate and to restore a large-scale biomanufacturing facility in Quebec City. We invested \$1 million in Dr. Kobinger's research, through an independent, peer-reviewed process. We are very pleased that the Government of Quebec has announced it also plans to support this research.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Speaker, he failed to mention that that was not exactly the amount that Dr. Kobinger was looking for. The Government of Quebec had to come to this scientist's aid.

It is not just scientists, but industry too, that are complaining about the federal government's inaction on vaccine production. The president and managing director of Merck Canada criticized the climate of mistrust and the absence of constructive dialogue, stating that it is hard to understand why her industry is not even mentioned as a priority sector.

Why did the government ignore the industry and scientists?

Mr. William Amos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry (Science), Lib.): Madam Speaker, let us get the facts straight.

We knew from the start that we had to rely on the best scientists to determine which vaccines could be used in Canada and what investments we needed to make to have a biomanufacturing industry in Canada.

That is why we established the COVID-19 vaccine task force and therapeutics task force, which are made up of scientific experts and industry leaders, to guide our decision-making. They made vital recommendations about the international vaccines we should select, resulting in advance purchase agreements with several companies and investments—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary said that we need to get the facts straight. Let us do just that.

This morning, we learned that unfortunately, Canada is once again lagging far behind. We are now ranked 56th for vaccine doses administered. Only 3% of Canadians are currently vaccinated, and barely 8% will be by the end of March.

Vaccination is the key to our economic recovery from the pandemic. What is the government's post-pandemic economic plan?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the member is well aware, we got some very good news this morning with the announcement that a third vaccine was being approved.

That is in addition to all of the other vaccines that are now quickly arriving in the country. The six million Pfizer and Moderna vaccines will be here by the end of March.

Over 14 million Canadians will be able to be vaccinated by the end of June, and the whole country will be able to be vaccinated by the end of September, so there will be economic growth.

* * *

[English]

HUMAN RIGHTS

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Madam Speaker, when it comes to calling out genocide, the Liberals have gone from abstention to obstruction in just a few days. Last night, they filibustered to keep the committee from adopting a report on the Uighur genocide. When my colleague from Wellington—Halton Hills moved unanimous consent to get to the report, Liberal members refused.

Why would they turn a blind eye to government-coordinated rape, torture, indoctrination and forced sterilization? Why are the Liberals holding up further action to call out the Uighur genocide in China?

• (1125)

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Speaker, this government takes any accusation of genocide extremely seriously. We have repeatedly said that we remain disturbed by troubling reports of human rights violation in Xinjiang. We have repeatedly called on the international community to work to investigate the egregious human rights abuses taking place in Xinjiang. We have repeatedly called for an international investigation in response to these allegations.

We will continue to stand up for human rights in Canada and around the world.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Madam Speaker, he said stand up, but the Liberal government abstained. That is a disgraceful answer.

Oral Questions

During debate, multiple Liberal members said they wanted to know what Canada could do to support a genocide declaration, but when the committee tried to offer those ideas, it was the Liberals who stonewalled, clearly under the direction of the Prime Minister. This confirms that the Prime Minister is more worried about angering his friends in Beijing than acting on the will of the House and standing up to bullies and tyrants.

Why is the Prime Minister all talk and no action when it comes to the Communist regime in China?

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Speaker, Monday's vote in Parliament ensured that every member had a chance to voice their opinion and to make a determination based on available evidence to express that concern. That is now the voice of Parliament; it is Parliament's view.

The Government of Canada welcomes parliamentarians working together on this critical issue, but the government has additional responsibilities. It is working with the international community to ensure these allegations are investigated by an international independent body of legal experts. They are doing what they need to do, and Parliament has done what it needs to do.

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[Translation]

HEALTH

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, why on earth has this whole quarantine business turned into such a fiasco?

All we want is for people to be able to follow the public health guidelines and be safe. All we want is a hotline that works. If TV talent shows can do it, I think the government should be able to, too.

Cancelling quarantines in the middle of a pandemic is not the solution. What we need is a government that governs. What will it take for the government to handle this issue properly?

[English]

Mr. Darren Fisher (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, Canada has some of the strictest travel and border measures in the world. With new variants of concern, we know that we need to take further steps to protect Canadians from COVID-19. We have been very clear from the very start of the pandemic that no one should be travelling. Doing so can put people and their loved ones at risk. We will always act to protect Canadians.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, the Bloc Québécois is not saying that quarantines are bad. We are saying the government is managing them badly.

Quebec wanted travellers to be quarantined in hotels during the holidays. The government was unable to finalize the arrangements until the end of February. Even with that extra two months, it was not able to set up a hotline that works. Even with that extra two months, it was not able to keep the people it is responsible for safe.

Oral Questions

What did the government spend those two months doing? Nothing?

[English]

Mr. Darren Fisher (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Again, Madam Speaker, we have some of the strictest border measures in the world and we take the safety of Canadians very seriously. We are aware of delays in accessing the phone line for the hotel reservation system. We were experiencing over 27,000 calls daily. PHAC is working hard to solve this issue and is adding staff to support the backlog.

I ask people to please only call at this time if they are ready to reserve their stays and if their travel is within 48 hours. I thank Canadians for their patience as we implement these very important public health measures.

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TAXATION

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Speaker, as the pandemic hit, the first action of the government was to provide liquidity supports for Canada's big banks of an unbelievable \$750 billion, a banker nirvana. This week, those banks announced \$42 billion in pandemic profits so far. This is outrageous as small businesses close and Canadians struggle to feed their families. Other countries have cracked down on profiteering.

Why is the Prime Minister so opposed to measures like a wealth tax and why does he encourage pandemic profiteering?

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have great respect for the hon. member who posed this question, but I must register my disappointment with his attempt to conflate liquidity support from direct financing from the federal government. The fact is that our focus from the beginning of this pandemic has been to extend supports directly to households and businesses to help them weather the storm. I can point to the 8.9 million Canadians who have received CERB and been able to keep food on the table and a roof over their heads because of the actions of this government, or the 4.5 million workers who have received support and remained on the payroll of businesses as a result of the wage subsidy.

We are going to be here for small businesses and ordinary Canadians as long as it takes, no matter what it takes.

* * *

● (1130)

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Madam Speaker, Canadians who live in rural and remote communities know the boom and bust cycles. In my riding, a paper mill has been curtailed, the forestry sector is still recovering from a lengthy strike, tourism struggles with COVID-19 and the Discovery Islands decision will impact aquaculture jobs. Like those in so many rural communities, people in my region are dealing with the pandemic and want the government to invest in meaningful jobs for rural and remote areas. The government needs to step up.

Will the minister agree to locate a branch of the new B.C. regional economic development agency in my riding?

Ms. Gudie Hutchings (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Rural Economic Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we understand the importance of rural economy. I too live in a rural riding, and we understand that as we reach the post-pandemic, we do need rural.

I can say that our government does believe in rural economies. That is why we announced a universal broadband fund, with a rapid response stream to connect Canadians. We know the importance of connectivity, and going forward, we will meet our mandate of connecting 90% of Canadians by 2026. I look forward to working with the member to advance our goals.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Madam Speaker, if excuses were paycheques, then we would not have over 800,000 people without jobs since the beginning of the pandemic, but excuses are all that we are getting and they are pretty creative ones too. The government blames COVID, but of course the other G7 countries also have COVID and they all have significantly lower unemployment than Canada.

The next excuse is that the Liberals tell us the unemployment rate no longer matters, that we should not worry about it. What they really mean is that the people who are unemployed no longer matter. We think they do matter and they do not want excuses, but they want jobs. However, we do not expect that from the government, so what excuses do they have today?

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, with respect, the hon. member who is the critic for jobs ought to know that the Federal Bureau of Labor Statistics in the United States uses a different definition for unemployment than we do in Canada through Statistics Canada. He is comparing apples to oranges.

The reality is that because of the measures we have put forward, we have been able to support 4.5 million workers who have remained on the payroll of their employers through the Canada emergency wage subsidy, and another nine million nearly who have received the Canada emergency response benefit so they could keep food on the table for their families.

We are going to continue to be there to protect jobs and support Canadians through this time of unprecedented difficulty.

Oral Questions

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Madam Speaker, in fairness it is true. The U.S. bureau does use a different method, but happily, Statistics Canada lines those methods up apples to apples, so when we compare Canada and the U.S. unemployment, apples to apples, what do we get? Canadian unemployment is still one-third higher than in the United States, higher than in Japan, Germany, the U.K., Italy and France. Every single G7 country has lower unemployment than Canada. The Liberals cannot just blame COVID, they cannot just shift the statistics. They need to get to work to try and create jobs because what Canadians need are paycheques.

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, with great respect, if the hon. member wants to compare apples to apples, I would point him to the fact that 71% of the jobs have returned from the peak pandemic job losses in Canada compared with 56% in the United States. If he wants apples to apples, I point him to labour force participation, which is 64.3% in Canada, compared with 61.3% in the United States.

Before we get to the job numbers, if he wants apples to apples, our public health response may not have been perfect, but I would invite him to talk to the family members of 500,000 Americans who are no longer living who might have been had they adopted an approach that we took in Canada. We know that public health and economic policies are indivisible, and I—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Calgary Rocky Ridge.

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SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, yesterday the CFIB told the finance committee that small businesses have accumulated, on average, \$170,000 in COVID debt. This debt is typically not to governments or banks, but to creditors like landlords and suppliers and cannot be deferred. This is a crisis that threatens to wipe out tens of thousands of small businesses and two and a half million jobs.

What is the government doing to catch up with the rest of the world and safely open small businesses?

• (1135)

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the member opposite for raising the CFIB. The CFIB has been asking all parliamentarians, including the Conservative Party, to stop delaying the passage of Bill C-14, which would allow more small businesses and more entrepreneurs to access our financial support programs at the federal level. I would encourage all members of the House to work for our entrepreneurs, work for our small businesses and help us support them through this pandemic.

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, here are the facts: Fifty per cent of small businesses are closed; only 26% have accessed rent support; 60% have reduced their staff; 60,000 have already closed permanently, and one in six is on the brink.

The CFIB pleaded yesterday with the government to freeze or reverse tax increases, including the CPP hike, the alcohol escalator and the carbon tax hike. Will the government commit, today, to do so?

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.): Madam Speaker, if the member opposite would like to cite some facts, I have a few for him as well: 4.5 million Canadians have been supported by the wage subsidy; our rent subsidy covers up to 90% of fixed costs for our small businesses; and 850,000 small businesses have received our interest-free CEBA loan program, and that includes a grant.

I understand that our entrepreneurs are having a hard time through this pandemic, but this government is there to see them through to the other side.

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[Translation]

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Auditor General had scathing remarks for the federal government's oversight of rail safety.

It has been eight years since the Auditor General's first report, but Transport Canada has yet to implement all the recommendations. Consequently, in 2019, the number of rail accidents in Canada was 17% higher than the 10-year average.

My question is for the new Minister of Transportation.

To avoid another tragedy like the Lac-Mégantic derailment, will he undertake to implement better measures more quickly than his predecessor, who clearly failed to make rail safety his top priority?

[English]

Hon. Omar Alhabra (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, let me assure my hon. colleague, and all Canadians, that rail safety will always be our top priority. I welcome the Auditor General's review of Transport Canada's oversight of rail safety. In fact, the Auditor General's report has demonstrated that Transport Canada has made important and meaningful changes, including to track maintenance, increasing the number of inspections and improving fatigue management for workers. Our department is already working to address all of the recommendations, and we will continuously work to improve the safety—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, "It is a scandal."

Who said that?

It was not my colleague from Lévis—Lotbinière, it was the columnist Bernard Drainville who said it this morning. Projected spending for building 15 frigates has gone from \$26 billion to \$77 billion, a threefold increase. How could the Liberals miss the mark so badly?

We are talking about \$50 billion of Canadians' money. The Prime Minister is the person responsible for public funds. The frigates file is dead in the water and sinking like a stone.

Can he do his job and end this financial scandal?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we are fully committed to providing our navy and our Coast Guard with the ships they deserve.

As the hon. member knows full well, the previous government systematically underestimated the cost of building frigates, ships and the national shipbuilding strategy, and it excluded the Davie shipyard and other Quebec builders.

We are in the process of getting things back on course, calculating the cost of these ships and providing vessels to our navy that will be the pride—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Order. The hon. member for Manicouagan.

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Madam Speaker, the cost of shutting out Quebec and the Davie shipyard from these shipbuilding contracts currently amounts to \$51 billion in cost overruns.

Let us think about that: \$51 billion. To put it into perspective, that is more than the total amount the federal government transfers to Quebec and all the provinces to fund health care. To shut out Quebec, this government is going to waste more money on cost overruns than it invests in health care.

Why will the government not award these contracts to Davie and stop the hemorrhaging?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Speaker, that is exactly what we have done.

We have corrected the past mistakes made by the Stephen Harper government, which shut the Quebec shipyard out of the national shipbuilding strategy. We began by awarding the Davie shipyard contracts for icebreakers and for the life extensions and refits of frigates into ferries. We are currently in talks to make Davie the third authorized shipyard in our national strategy, which would open the door to other valuable contracts for the shipyard.

As the member well knows, we did not need the Bloc Québécois to take action on this file—

• (1140)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Order. The hon. member for Manicouagan.

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Madam Speaker, the government needs the Bloc Québécois because it is weaving a big web of lies here.

The shipbuilding contracts are now \$51 billion over budget because the federal government refused to give the Davie shipyard its fair share. One per cent of that amount is \$510 million, which is more than the government's total increase in health transfers during the pandemic.

How does the government justify wasting 99% more money than it is putting towards health transfers during the worst pandemic in 100 years, all to prevent contracts from being awarded to Quebec?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member knows full well that when the current government came to power, it made sure that the Davie shipyard and other shipyards in Quebec were able to participate more fully in the national shipbuilding strategy, which is only right.

Because of us, the Davie shipyard is getting frigates to repair icebreakers and ferries. Beyond that, the government is in negotiations to open the door wide open to the shipyard's fuller and more active participation in the shipbuilding strategy.

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TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Richard Lehoux (Beauce, CPC): Madam Speaker, national media reports are saying that federal funding was used to bring Bell's Fibe Internet to the Lac Pémichangan region of Quebec. It was reported that the CEO of Bell owns a cottage on that lake and that there are fewer than 100 residences in that area that will benefit from the improved service. Meanwhile, hundreds of families in neighbouring Lac-Sainte-Marie do not have a reliable Internet connection. The Liberal government is once again showing that people need to be well connected to get connected in this country.

Why is the Liberal government giving priority to rich cottage owners rather than to rural communities?

[English]

Ms. Gudie Hutchings (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Rural Economic Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, connecting all Canadians from coast to coast to coast, and our friends in Quebec, is a priority for the Liberal government.

We will work with the Province of Quebec and all Internet service providers to make sure we meet our mandate of connecting all Canadians by 2030, and 98% by 2026. I welcome my colleague reaching out anytime if I could help him any further.

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Madam Speaker, rural Canadians have waited long enough to access reliable Internet services.

A small Quebec community has been waiting for years to get access. The Liberals provided millions of dollars to upgrade this community's Internet. Unfortunately, all of the money has gone to help wealthy cottage owners, including the CEO of Bell Canada, instead of rural residents.

Why did the Liberal government prioritize the wealthy and well-connected cottage owners instead of the rural community, or is this just more Liberal incompetence?

Mr. William Amos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry (Science), Lib.): Madam Speaker, while the member is entitled to his own over-heated political rhetoric, he is not entitled to his own facts.

The facts are very simple. Since 2015, our government has hooked up over 1.7 million homes, and with the \$1.75 billion that has been invested, many more homes are going to get connected. In my particular riding, several million dollars, indeed we are talking of \$20.4 million in projects, is connecting many households. We need to do way more.

The member should know, very clearly, that there is not a single member of Parliament, in neither government nor opposition, that has any choice in the matter. Good public servants make these good decisions. We need to continue investing more money to get every Canadian connected.

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HEALTH

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Madam Speaker, Edmonton veteran Fred Russell is one of the few remaining survivors of the Dieppe raid. He served Canada for six years during World War II, fighting through Normandy, Holland and Germany.

Today Fred lives isolated from friends and family because he has still not received the COVID vaccine, because of the failures of the Liberal government.

In Canada's time of need, Fred was there for us. Why in Fred's time of need is the government not there for him?

• (1145)

Mr. Darrell Samson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as my colleague is well aware, the vaccine rollout is the responsibility of the provinces. Veterans are a vulnerable population and we urge them to get vaccinated as quickly as possible. I can inform my colleague that veterans at facilities such as the Camp Hill hospital in Nova Scotia, Ste. Anne's Hospital in Quebec and Sunnybrook hospital in Toronto have been vaccinated.

We remain in touch with long-term care homes that house veterans to ensure all veterans are getting the supports they need.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Madam Speaker, it has been over a year since the first COVID-19 case was confirmed in Canada. Despite the government's messaging at the time that it was not a threat or a reason for worry, the virus spread across the country. The government finally decided to shut down our borders, a little too late. A year later, our unemployment rate is

at historic highs, our economy is stalled and Canada is now behind over 50 countries for vaccine injections.

When will my constituents get the vaccine?

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to share some good news with the hon. member. With the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines in place, we anticipate that over six million Canadians will be vaccinated by the end of March. I am pleased to report that, this morning, Health Canada approved the AstraZeneca product as well.

With respect, we know there is a clear link between the economic and public health response. We are going to continue to work to promote vaccine uptake throughout Canada for every Canadian who wants one by the end of September.

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PHARMACARE

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Madam Speaker, COVID-19 has put enormous strain on the budgets of families. With jobs lost or hours reduced, many have seen their health benefits cut or eliminated altogether. Every month, Canadians are making tough choices between paying for medication, rent, utilities and groceries.

The Liberals first made their pharmacare promise 24 years ago, but two days ago they cynically voted against Bill C-213, which would have established a national pharmacare framework modelled on the Canada Health Act.

Why do the Liberals consistently raise the hopes of working families, only to crush them when the time comes to act?

Mr. Darren Fisher (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we have done more than any government in a generation to lower drug prices.

The Minister of Health's mandate letter explicitly calls for the continued implementation of national universal pharmacare.

Instead of imposing a top-down approach on the provinces and territories, we are committing to work together with the provinces and territories to create a pharmacare system that works for all Canadians.

In the meantime, we are establishing a transition office to create a new Canada drug agency and a national formulary, while investing \$1 billion over two years to help Canadians with rare diseases get access to the medications they need.

*Oral Questions***JUSTICE**

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Madam Speaker, the government likes to talk about its commitment to equal rights based on sexual orientation and gender identity, but often seems to confuse action with surveys and press conferences.

Last fall, the justice committee heard moving and compelling testimony on the urgent need to bring an end to conversion therapy in Canada. The committee worked hard to bring Bill C-6 back to the House promptly, but since it was reported back last December the government seems to have forgotten all about conversion therapy.

When is the government going to bring Bill C-6 back for final debate and a vote so we can finally put an end to conversion therapy in Canada?

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the member opposite for his question, for his conviction on this issue, and for all of the advocacy and work he has done at committee and otherwise.

We know that conversion therapy efforts are rooted in the premise that one's sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression can and should be changed to a narrow ideal of what is considered natural or normal. There is absolutely no place for the destructive, harmful and deadly practice of conversion therapy in this country, and that is why we introduced legislation that would criminalize this cruel and degrading practice. If passed, this legislation would make our laws among the most progressive and comprehensive in the world.

* * *

• (1150)

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my private member's motion, Motion No. 36, calls for the House to designate August 1 as emancipation day, acknowledging the abolition of slavery in the British Empire. One of the key pillars of my motion is education on Black Canadian history and recognizing the contributions of Black Canadians to our society.

Can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth update the House on the efforts being taken to address anti-Black racism?

Mr. Adam van Koevorden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth and to the Minister of Canadian Heritage (Sport), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for Richmond Hill for his extraordinary hard work on Motion No. 36 to designate August 1 as emancipation day in Canada.

There is much work to be done in the fight against anti-Black racism in Canada. That is why \$50 million was spent to support anti-racism initiatives, and the work of the Anti-Racism Secretariat was included in the fall economic statement. We have also introduced funding programs to help Black-owned businesses, to support capacity building in Black communities, to combat systemic

anti-Black racism and to advance diversity inclusion in the workplace.

Sunday being the last day of February, I invite Canadians to join us in the Black History Month—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Edmonton Centre.

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EMPLOYMENT

Mr. James Cumming (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Madam Speaker, as the economy recovers, we are going to see a massive drop in the demand for workers in the hospitality industry and other close proximity industries. Meanwhile, we are seeing an equally large growth in the demand for skilled workers in the emerging tech economy.

Edmonton's unemployment rate is over 11%, and demand for tech workers in my riding in Edmonton Centre is high. How does the government plan to address this imminent, frictional unemployment?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we recognize that it is a challenging time for many. Some workers are having difficulty returning, or their jobs just are not available. That is why we are committed to making the largest investment in training in Canadian history. This will include supporting Canadians as they build new skills, helping workers receive education and accreditation, and strengthening workers' futures by connecting them to good jobs. These historic investments mean supporting those hardest hit by the pandemic.

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AIRLINE INDUSTRY

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Madam Speaker, WestJet announced last week that it would be halting its regional route to Lloydminster. This route is an important service to my constituents in Lloydminster and the surrounding communities. Its permanent loss would be devastating. This closure is just the latest, as the Canadian aviation industry continues to wait endlessly for a plan from this government.

What is the Prime Minister's plan to ensure that rural communities like Lloydminster will be reconnected?

Hon. Omar Alhabra (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, let me just say that accessibility to all of our regions is important, and air links are essential to regional economic development and prosperity.

Everybody knows that the COVID-19 pandemic has hit the air sector very hard. That is why our government provided support to individuals and businesses early on in the pandemic. I can assure my hon. colleague that we are currently in the midst of discussions with major airlines on specific, additional supports for them, and that the discussion includes the restoration of regional routes.

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COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Madam Speaker, the tourism and entertainment industries are being devastated by COVID and more than a few in my riding are on the verge of shutting their doors for good. The government extended the Canada emergency wage subsidy until June, but the eligibility rules for the extended period have not been announced. The old rules will expire on March 13, and the lack of certainty is quickly becoming a major problem.

Can the minister tell us when the new eligibility rules for the wage subsidy program will be announced?

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will point out that we are well aware that some of these sectors have been hit particularly hard. That is why we advanced programs like the wage subsidy, to cover 75% of the cost of the work force, and the rent subsidy, for up to 90% of the rent. We have also established certain loan programs to help hard-hit businesses, including HASCAP.

When it comes to the eligibility criteria for some of these programs as they evolve, I want to reassure the member that we are continuously working to refine the criteria so that they meet the needs of businesses. We will reassure businesses and say that these supports are going to remain in place to help weather the storm until the end of the pandemic.

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SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Madam Speaker, last week I asked about a small business being hurt, not helped, by the government. The response was that the government ignored the question, as it is ignoring many businesses with such leases right across the country. That business is being told by Parks Canada that it will not get the rent support it needs because the Department of Finance believes seasonal leases are annual leases.

Would the minister like us to drop off some calendars to her department so the staff can see for themselves the difference between six months and a year?

• (1155)

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we are always pleased to work together to support our entrepreneurs. I would be happy to work with the member opposite.

Oral Questions

I would like to know why the Conservative Party is playing politics with a bill that will help our small businesses and entrepreneurs in this country. Bill C-14 is going to provide additional support to our small businesses. Will that member and the Conservative Party help us help our small businesses, yes or no?

* * *

[Translation]

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, Quebec is friendly and welcoming. It is all about joie de vivre, sharing and togetherness. It looks toward the future without forgetting its heritage and traditions.

If there is one place that is truly symbolic of Quebec, it is the sugar shack. However, three-quarters of the province's sugar shacks may have to close their doors for good this spring if they do not receive any support. There is no federal program that addresses their unique situation.

What is the Prime Minister going to do to help our sugar shacks?

Mr. René Arseneault (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages (Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and Official Languages), Lib.): Madam Speaker, my region has also been affected by the pandemic, and our maple syrup producers, of which there are several in northern New Brunswick, are really suffering.

We are committed to helping all our businesses. That is why the government has continually introduced measures that have been approved by the House over the past few months to help all economic sectors, including sugar shacks.

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, the government found a way to help the Liberal Party, the Conservative Party and the NDP with wage subsidies. It found a way to help its wealthy oil and gas friends. It also found a way to send millions of dollars to WE Charity. It should be able to come up with a program to support our sugar shacks. This industry is unique to our part of the world. Sugar shacks are who we are, a big part of who we are.

Will the Prime Minister commit here and now to financially supporting our sugar shacks right away?

[English]

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, from the outset of the pandemic, we were focused on extending support to workers no matter what kind of business they were engaged in. We worked to develop the Canada emergency wage subsidy and covered 75% of the wages for workers who had been impacted by the pandemic. We have also extended support for individuals who needed personal income support and suffered a loss of that income. It has benefited nearly nine million Canadians.

Oral Questions

I would be pleased to work with the hon. member to make sure that workers in the sugar shack sector in his province and mine receive the kind of support they need to weather the storm through to the end of the pandemic.

Ms. Gudie Hutchings: Madam Speaker, on a point of order, the English and the French are coming in at the same level on interpretation, so it is hard to hear.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We will try to repair it. I thank the member.

The hon. member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes.

* * *

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Madam Speaker, Canadians are counting on access to reliable high-speed Internet: students to connect for classes, small business owners to access the virtual market, farmers for crop and herd management, seniors to access health care services and families to connect with their loved ones. The universal broadband fund was announced in 2019, nearly 711 days ago.

When will the government finally deliver on high-speed Internet access for eastern Ontario?

Ms. Gudie Hutchings (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Rural Economic Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am delighted to stand and speak about what our government has done to connect Canadians from coast to coast to coast. We have so many tools in our tool box. We have the connect to innovate program, we have funding through the Canada Infrastructure Bank and we have low-earth orbit satellite funding. Now, with the universal broadband fund and a component of it, the rapid response stream, we are connecting Canadians. We have connected, since 2015, 1.7 million Canadian households and are connecting another quarter of a million households this year.

I encourage the member opposite to have his communities make sure they have applied under the rapid response stream. That will see Canadians—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Northumberland—Peterborough South.

* * *

• (1200)

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food released a statement earlier this week that deliberately misled Canadians to believe that Bill C-206 does not provide relief for the fuel costs of grain drying.

Does the minister honestly believe that a grain dryer is not an industrial machine used in farming, as prescribed in the legislation? Is she this out of touch with farmers or is she just incompetent?

Mr. Neil Ellis (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Madam Speaker, pollution

should not be free. A pricing system where all the revenues stay in the province is one of the key solutions to reduce emissions. Bill C-206 would not provide relief for the fuel cost of grain drying, as it does not add grain drying as an eligible farming activity.

We are committed to new rebates for on-farm fuel use, such as grain drying, to support our producers and are making grain drying and barn heating a priority focus under the new \$165-million agriculture clean technology fund. Having a serious plan that achieves our environmental goals is expected not only by Canadians, but also by the next generation of farmers.

* * *

PENSIONS

Mr. Matt Jeneroux (Edmonton Riverbend, CPC): Madam Speaker, we have heard from many across Canada that the pensions of thousands of U.K. expats are frozen, despite the government's negotiating a new trade deal. These U.K. state pensions are not operated when the pensioner lives in a country that does not have a reciprocal operating agreement with the United Kingdom, like Canada. As a result, thousands of British pensioners living here are not able to access the pensions they have earned.

Can the minister tell us what the government is doing to negotiate an agreement that will unfreeze these pensions?

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would be happy to work with the hon. member to get more details on the back end of this question. With respect, it is not an issue that has come to my attention personally, so I will make myself readily available as soon as this afternoon, if he would like to delve into this issue in more detail.

* * *

[Translation]

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the opposition often cites incorrect figures on vaccines. For the residents of my riding, Orléans, and for all Canadians, it is important that we provide the most up-to-date figures and talk about the measures we have already taken and what we can expect.

Could the parliamentary secretary set the record straight with respect to the vaccines that have been and will be delivered to Canada and reassure Canadians about the future?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from the national capital for her question and for her work.

As the member knows, 643,000 doses have already been delivered to Canada this week. This means a total of 2.5 million doses by this weekend, 3.5 million doses by the end of March and 1.5 million Pfizer doses in the first two weeks of April.

We will have enough vaccines to vaccinate 14.5 million people by the end of June, and every Canadian who wants to—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Red Deer—Lacombe.

* * *

[English]

COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Madam Speaker, tax time can be stressful, especially after a year like 2020. Residents in my riding have been calling my office because of a dramatic decline in service by the CRA. Getting to speak to an agent about their locked-out CRA account is taking at least a three-hour time period. It takes hours on the phone simply to change their address, and that is if they are lucky enough not to get disconnected while they wait. Simple reassessments are dragging on for months, putting people's homes, savings and benefits at risk.

Why are Canadians not able to speak with the CRA? Why will the minister not address this staggering failure?

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we know this tax-filing season is one like no other. The CRA's call centres have seen an 83% increase in traffic since 2019 due to the COVID programs the CRA is administering.

In October, our government announced an investment of \$99 million in these call centres. The funding will help allow the CRA to improve services by hiring 2,000 more employees, onboarding a third party call centre, extending the hours of operation and implementing an automated callback service.

I want to thank our call centre employees from coast to coast to coast, who have been working tirelessly to provide information to Canadians throughout this pandemic and in this current tax-filing season.

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Hon. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Wetaskiwin, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have asked this question three times and three times, through what I can only assume is some kind of Zoom glitch, it was like the person answering was in a completely different conversation, so I am going to try again.

The Liberals have made it virtually impossible for the private sector to build a pipeline in this country. Over the past few years, we have imported tens of millions of barrels of oil per year into Canada by tanker from Saudi Arabia, Nigeria and Algeria.

Is that oil subject to the same rigorous regulations on upstream and downstream emissions as oil coming from Alberta, Saskatchewan and Newfoundland, yes or no?

Oral Questions

• (1205)

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Madam Speaker, let us talk about the facts. The majority of oil imported to Canada comes from the United States, at 74%. Under our government, imported oil has consistently decreased to the lowest levels in 10 years to just under 660,000 barrels per day.

The member opposite referenced Saudi Arabia and Nigeria. Does he know who was happy to buy more oil from Saudi Arabia and Nigeria combined instead of strengthening trade with the United States? It was the previous Conservative government from 2008 to 2012.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Madam Speaker, my friend JD from Slave Lake works in the oil patch and he likes his job, but Keystone XL has been cancelled and now we could lose the easement for Line 5. Alberta's ability to get its energy to market, and by extension our ability to get a fair price for our energy, is in danger. The energy sector is the engine of Canada's economy.

On what day will the Prime Minister pick up the phone, call the Americans and defend Alberta energy markets and jobs?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Madam Speaker, actually, the Prime Minister raised Line 5 directly with the President and members of his cabinet during the virtual summit this week. We have approached this at the highest levels because we take threats to Canadian energy security very seriously. Line 5 is vital to our economy, vital to workers, vital to producers and vital to consumers in Canada and the United States.

I assure the House that we are working on all of our options. Line 5 is a vital pipeline for Canada's energy security. The Prime Minister has already addressed it with the President of the United States.

* * *

[Translation]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms. Annie Koutrakis (Vimy, Lib.): Madam Speaker, in Vimy, many of my constituents rely on safe, reliable and affordable public transit every day.

Can the Minister of Infrastructure explain how the new permanent public transit fund will help communities develop their public transit networks, while growing the economy and fighting climate change?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Vimy for the question. There is no question that municipalities need predictable funding for public transit in order to plan and develop projects to help people get around in a clean, quick and cost-effective way.

Routine Proceedings

These historic investments in public transit seek to truly help Canadians get around more quickly and in a more green and affordable way while creating good jobs, fighting climate change and creating cleaner communities.

* * *

[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Madam Speaker, a new report says that nearly one in 10 federal inmates in structured intervention units is being subjected to treatment defined as torture. Solitary confinement, supposedly outlawed, continues. It confirms what inmates, prisoner advocates and investigators have been saying for years: that Canada is not following its own laws and court rulings. Now it is clear it is also violating the UN convention on torture. The inescapable conclusion of this report is that we cannot rely on the Correctional Service of Canada alone to protect the rights of inmates.

The question is simple. What is the Minister of Public Safety going to—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. minister.

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I share the hon. member's concern. In Bill C-83, we imposed legislation, and we have been working with the Correctional Service of Canada to ensure the proper implementation of the SIUs. We are very grateful for the work of Dr. Doob and our external panel in their review. Their insight and analysis have been very helpful. We also rely on the work of our external review bodies that also examine this issue. It is a complex one.

I want to assure the member and the House of our absolute commitment to ensure that people who are in our custody in our federal institutions are treated fairly. We recognize the challenges of—

• (1210)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Brampton Centre

Mr. Ramesh Sangha (Brampton Centre, Ind.): Madam Speaker, the Sikh community was grateful and delighted by the government's removal of Sikh religion words from the "2018 Public Report on the Terrorism Threat to Canada". However, a large number of communities still have questions for the government even today.

Who pressured the Prime Minister's Office, the Minister of Public Safety and the Canadian intelligence community to compromise the national security of Canada, because Sikhs in general never wanted—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. minister.

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Madam Speaker, with respect to this issue, I want to assure the House that our national security intelligence services monitor the activities of concern within Canada and internationally. We work very closely with our partners. Frankly, I would also caution the member about the use of intemperate language and

making allegations not based on evidence or fact. It is very important that these matters be dealt with responsibly, and we rely entirely on the good work of our national security intelligence agencies and law enforcement to keep Canadians safe.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[Translation]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Sven Spengemann (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, an interim report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. This is the committee's third report and is entitled "Part 1 of a study on the aftershocks of the COVID-19 pandemic—The humanitarian burden: ensuring a global response and reaching the most vulnerable".

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this interim report.

[English]

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 12th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, entitled "Final Report: Protecting Public Health and Democracy during a Possible Pandemic Election."

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 35(2), on behalf of the official opposition, I am tabling the Conservative supplementary report to the 12th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

This supplementary report addresses the shortcomings of the committee report and highlights several of the risks of the Liberals calling an unnecessary pandemic election before it is safe to do so. This supplementary report particularly notes the challenges for Canadian voters living in long-term care homes.

I would like to thank the clerk, the analysts, the interpreters and all committee staff for their exceptional work during these difficult circumstances.

[Translation]

HUMAN RESOURCES, SKILLS AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE STATUS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the second report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities concerning Bill C-220, an act to amend the Canada Labour Code with regard to compassionate care leave. The committee has studied the bill and has decided to report the bill back to the House with amendments.

* * *

• (1215)

[English]

PETITIONS

FALUN GONG

Mr. Marty Morantz (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, CPC): Madam Speaker, I present a petition on behalf of concerned Canadians in my community about the mistreatment of the Falun Gong practitioners in China.

For over 21 years, the Chinese Communist regime's corrupt officials have orchestrated the torture and killing of many who practise Falun Gong, a spiritual discipline promoting the principles of truth, compassion and tolerance, and harvest their organs for the regime's organ transplant trade.

The Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act, also known as the Magnitsky act, sanctions foreign officials responsible for gross human rights violations or acts of corruption.

The petitioners call on the Government of Canada to deploy all legal actions, including freezing assets and barring entry to Canada against the 14 individuals identified by name in this petition and any others committing these acts.

TOURISM INDUSTRY

Mr. Tony Baldinelli (Niagara Falls, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure to present e-petition 3027 on behalf of the concerned citizens of Canada who call upon the government to present a sector-specific tourism recovery plan on or before the date of the 2021 federal budget.

Among their requests, the petitioners call on the government to ensure that this tourism recovery plan addresses the specific needs of the many travel and tourism sectors across Canada and to use this recovery plan as a tool to begin restoring public confidence in travel and tourism.

I would like to thank and acknowledge all 3,868 citizens who signed this e-petition. I look forward to the government's response.

ANIMAL WELFARE

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Madam Speaker, today I will introduce four petitions related to animal welfare.

The first two petitions are related to labelling. Petition e-2981, on behalf of over 800 residents, calls for improved consumer labelling to easily inform Canadians whether products have been made using

Routine Proceedings

ingredients derived from an animal. Petition e-2614, on behalf of over 900 residents, highlights the science of the risks of processed meat and calls for labels that inform Canadians that processed meats are carcinogenic.

The third petition, e-2700, is signed by over 3,000 residents who love their companion animals. The petitioners call on the government to ban the sale of animals through online classified websites and other social media platforms, noting that such sales help to fuel an underground puppy mill economy.

The final one is a written petition that calls on the government to, among other things, prohibit the live export and import of horses for slaughter for human consumption. There is a growing campaign across Canada on this issue. The petitioners ask our government to take that campaign seriously.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Speaker, the petition I present today once again stresses that Canada cannot remain silent in the face of the ongoing atrocities against the Uighur people by the Chinese Communist Party, such as birth suppression through forced sterilization and abortion, political and anti-religious indoctrination, arbitrary detention and separation of parents and children, invasive surveillance, destruction of cultural sites, forced labour, and forced organ harvesting. Three million Uighurs and other Muslim minorities are being detained in what can only be described as concentration camps.

These Canadians petition the Prime Minister to formally recognize the genocide. They are aware that the House, including many sitting members of the Liberal Party, support Canada recognizing this genocide by the Communist Party. They also call on Canada to use the Magnitsky act to sanction those who are responsible for heinous crimes against the Uighur people.

Mr. Brad Redekopp (Saskatoon West, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition today on behalf of Canadians about the recent news of coordinated Uighur birth suppression as well as their concern about the mounting evidence that Uighurs are being subjected to arbitrary detention, separation of children from their families, forced labour, forced organ harvesting and more.

The petitioners therefore call on the House of Commons to formally recognize that Uighurs in China have been and are subject to genocide and for it to invoke the Magnitsky act for the heinous crimes that are being committed against the Uighur people.

Mr. Arif Virani (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Madam Speaker, today I have the privilege of presenting two petitions on behalf of my constituent.

Routine Proceedings

The first petition was sent to me by my constituent, Arkady Silverman. Arkady and the petitioners in my riding of Parkdale—High Park are deeply concerned about the ongoing human rights abuses in the anglophone region of Cameroon.

The petitioners call on Canada to impose targeted Magnitsky-style sanctions to prevent travel and immigration of Cameroonian government military officials and self-proclaimed leaders of the non-state armoured groups implicated in these abuses.

• (1220)

FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Mr. Arif Virani (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the second petition I am presenting on behalf of petitioners in my riding of Parkdale—High Park is with respect to credit card fees charged to small businesses.

The petition recognizes small businesses as the lifeblood of our communities and the fact that during this pandemic credit card payments have become much more prevalent.

As such, the petitioners call on the government to ensure that financial institutions reduce processing fees charged to small businesses for credit card transactions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

TAXATION

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have three petitions to present and I will be brief on each of them.

The first petition recognizes that our tax code does not allow a tax on a tax. The petitioners call for the Government of Canada to eliminate the GST on the federal carbon tax, levies and additional costs as well as the newly announced clean fuel standards.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Madam Speaker, the second petition calls upon the Government of Canada to adopt the 2017 recommendation of the Alberta jobs task force and create a bipartisan equal membership committee to develop a small business action plan that will take into account the realities of communities of Canada, not just those that favour a particular election outcome.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Madam Speaker, the third petition calls upon the government to immediately put in place a plan for an east-west energy corridor to replace foreign oil so Canada's source of oil and crude remains in Canada, serving the dual function of economic stimulus and environmental protection.

TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Patrick Weiler (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.): Madam Speaker, today I have the honour of presenting two petitions.

The first is petition e-2891. The petitioners, Gambier Islanders and friends, call upon the Minister of Transport to ensure long-term public access to the New Brighton dock, the primary port of Gambier Island's southwestern peninsula. They also call on the minister to assist the Gambier Islanders and friends in working with the

Squamish nation, the provincial government and the Sunshine Coast Regional District to ensure that the New Brighton dock is permanently maintained as a public facility for the benefit of all.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr. Patrick Weiler (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the second petition is petition e-2748, which I present on behalf of Canadians across the country. The petitioners request that the government require all financial institutions with more than 50,000 customers to offer free-of-charge, easily accessible multifactor authentication as an enhanced security option for online accounts.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have four petitions to present today.

The first petition calls on the House and the government to recognize that Uighurs have been subject to and are subject to an ongoing genocide. This follows, of course, the recognition by this House, as well as that this week by the Dutch Parliament. I send my congratulations to our Dutch friends for taking this important step, as have, as well, two American administrations. Petitioners call on the government to impose targeted Magnitsky sanctions against those responsible for these gross violations of fundamental human rights.

HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, the second petition is with respect to organ harvesting and trafficking. It calls on the House and the Senate to work swiftly to pass Bill S-204, which would make it a criminal offence for a person to go abroad and receive an organ obtained without consent.

MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN DYING

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, the third petition is in opposition to many of the provisions in Bill C-7. The government has piled many things into that bill that are completely unrelated to the Truchon decision. Those things include, for instance, removing the 10-day waiting period, which would create a mechanism by which there could be same-day death in Canada.

The government is now also trying to allow euthanasia for those with a mental health challenge. Petitioners recognize that mental health associations have said that mental health conditions are neither terminal nor permanent, and euthanasia for people in that situation goes against the advice and opinion of experts.

CARBON PRICING

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, the fourth and final petition is about the carbon tax. Petitioners are very concerned about the government's decision to hike the carbon tax, especially with that announcement being made in the middle of a pandemic. It goes against previous promises and commitments.

Petitioners call on the government to repeal the decision to increase the federal carbon tax to \$170 per tonne. They also call on the government to have the carbon tax shown as a separate expense when products are bought so that citizens are aware of exactly how much money they are spending at any given time on the carbon tax.

LIVE MUSIC INDUSTRY

Mr. Ron McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to table petition e-2995. This petition was initiated by Juno Award-winning musician Steve Sainas of Port Coquitlam and was signed by 2,066 Canadians from every province and territory.

The petition calls upon the Government of Canada to create an ongoing Canadian musicians support fund to provide sustainable financial relief to professional musicians, so they can earn an annual living wage; support rebuilding our music economy by providing professional live music performance incentives to venues; and provide additional funding for creative grants to support new Canadian music creation, as well as for public school music education to foster the development of future Canadian musicians.

The petition also calls upon the government to amend the Broadcasting Act to consider which regulatory tools would be most suitable to address fair and transparent remuneration for music artists.

• (1225)

FIREARMS

Mr. Kerry Diotte (Edmonton Griesbach, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am here to present two petitions.

The first petition is on the concerns law-abiding gun owners have with the Liberals' recent firearms regulations. The petitioners are rightly concerned that the changes miss the mark. The new regulations target lawful gun owners while ignoring the real issue of illegal guns being smuggled in from the U.S.

CARBON PRICING

Mr. Kerry Diotte (Edmonton Griesbach, CPC): Madam Speaker, the second petition is about the Liberals' carbon tax. The petitioners are rightly concerned about the cost of the job-killing carbon tax for their families and for Canadian industries.

USE OF IMAGERY IN PROTESTS

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to table two petitions.

The first is e-petition e-2977. There are increasing concerns in my riding, within the City of London and across all of Canada, that groups have been gathering in protest and distributing leaflets displaying extremely graphic images of allegedly aborted fetuses. The petitioners are concerned by the impact that such imagery will have on individuals and children, and that it is triggering for persons who have suffered trauma and loss.

Routine Proceedings

The petitioners ask the Government of Canada to work with provinces and municipalities to amend or create legislation setting out the limitations regarding what imagery and content can be used in a protest or demonstration that is subject to public viewing, and amend or create legislation regarding if and how graphic imagery can be delivered to homes across the country, for example, by putting such pamphlets in envelopes with a viewer discretion warning.

RELATIONSHIP VIOLENCE

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Madam Speaker, the second e-petition, e-2881, is about relationship violence in any form: physical, emotional, spiritual or financial abuse, or negative social control. The petition talks about violence in relationships impacting all Canadians and children; how the behaviour is learned intergenerationally, which normalizes violent behaviour; and the cost to Canadian society due to the loss of economic productivity and wages, social services costs and so on.

The petitioners ask the House of Commons and the Government of Canada to develop a national prevention plan that includes a media campaign on healthy relationships and the consequences of relationship violence, and to proactively address educational goals and societal change to establish a society with healthier and happier relationships.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Ms. Nelly Shin (Port Moody—Coquitlam, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to present a petition that is asking the government to not remain silent and to formally recognize that Uighurs in China are being subjected to genocide. It also asks the government to use the Magnitsky act and sanction those responsible for the heinous crimes being committed against Uighur people.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Milton, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am proud to present a petition from my neighbours in Milton.

The petitioners call upon the House of Commons to ensure that the human rights of Uighurs, Kazakhs and predominantly Muslim minorities are protected. It also calls for an investigation into the human rights situation in Xinjiang, China, to be pursued, because Canada is obligated to confront the violation of international human rights in China against the Uighur Muslims and other minorities.

*Government Orders***QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS**

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, if the government's revised responses to Question No. 314, originally tabled on January 25, 2021, could be made orders for return, these returns would be tabled immediately.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 314—**Mr. Matthew Green:**

With regard to government business finance programs and government contracts, broken down by funding program, contracts and fiscal year, since 2011: (a) what is the total funding for (i) Facebook, (ii) Google, (iii) Amazon, (iv) Apple, (v) Netflix?

(Return tabled)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I would ask that all remaining questions be allowed to stand.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1230)

[English]

ECONOMIC STATEMENT IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2020

The House resumed from February 22 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.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Peace River—Westlock has three minutes remaining for questions and comments.

We will continue with questions and comments. The hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to ask a question of my friend from northern Alberta. Could he share a little about the specific economic challenges that are being faced in his riding? I know it is probably similar to the challenges in my riding, maybe a little different, but we are seeing a confluence of factors related to the government's anti-energy policies and factors related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

These are at least two storms that businesses in our province in particular are facing simultaneously. What is the member hearing about these two issues in his riding? I am interested particularly in the recovery. We know at some point that the situation with

COVID-19 will be brought to an end, but it will be hard to have a recovery if the government's anti-energy policies continue even after the COVID-19 pandemic is over.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to raise the example of the Loon River Cree first nation in northern Alberta, which is about a five-and-a-half-hour drive north of Edmonton. This first nation has significant business interests in construction and forestry. Essentially, they build roads. Since the downturn in oil prices, the need to build oil field roads is down significantly.

Many of the people who used to work at this construction company are no longer working, so the revenue for the band is down significantly, but the expenses are up, given that they are now dealing with the COVID crisis. They have a checkpoint at the end of the road, so visitors coming in are screened at the entrance to the community. All of these things have added costs for the administration of the community and—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We have time for one question from the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council.

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 am wondering if the member could explain, on behalf of the Conservative Party, why, at a time when we are experiencing the pandemic, the Conservative Party continues to play a destructive force in the House by not allowing this important piece of legislation to pass.

Conservatives continue to debate it indefinitely, and there is so much within the legislation that would help small businesses and other Canadians. Why are they doing this?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Peace River—Westlock has 15 seconds to reply.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Madam Speaker, I would like to point out that the Liberals have been debating this as much as anyone. I believe they have had over 22 speakers to the bill to this point.

Conservatives are concerned about the fact that we have rushed through legislation—

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Order. The hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am glad to be adding my perspective to today's debate on Bill C-14. I am doing so virtually, but I am really looking forward to being back in the House of Commons in person. It works so much better for us.

I will be talking about Bill C-14, an act to implement certain provisions of the economic statement tabled in Parliament on November 30, 2020 and other measures. Specifically, I will be talking about part 6, which authorizes payments to be made out of the consolidated revenue fund in respect of specified initiatives related to health.

My big fear is that we are heading for yet another Liberal Party sponsorship scandal. I am sure everyone remembers that scandal, when the Liberals used public money to fund various PR campaigns aimed at influencing Quebecers.

Using taxpayers' money, the government signed huge contracts with ad agencies—\$322 million worth, to be precise—without subjecting them to strict oversight.

The situation and the objective are a little different now, but the Liberal government's actions seem familiar. Let me explain.

In the case of the sponsorship scandal, the Gomery commission found that there was a lack of oversight at the highest level of the public service. This allowed the Liberals to bypass the proper reporting relationship procedures. The Liberal government is doing the same thing today with respect to the COVID-19 crisis.

We have seen sole-source contracts awarded to the Prime Minister's friends, like the ones awarded to Frank Baylis and the Kielburger brothers from WE Charity. As Canadians will recall, these contracts were signed the same way as the ones involved in the sponsorship scandal: contracts signed hastily without following strict, established controls.

The Gomery commission also concluded that there was a veil of secrecy surrounding the administration of the sponsorship program and a lack of transparency in the contracting process. We are seeing the same thing today.

The Prime Minister is hiding everything he possibly can. He is hiding the details of contracts. He is hiding the details of products and services and, in many cases, he is hiding company names. We even found contracts where the dollar value was not given.

In one case in particular, a contract worth more than \$180 million was awarded to company “M”. You heard that right: “M” as in “mother”.

On the list we also find company “B” with a \$91 million contract, company “F” with a contract valued at more than \$35 million, company “K” with a contract for more than \$69 million. I think we are beginning to understand that the Liberals are playing hide it and keep it hidden. That is unbelievable.

Contracts worth billions of dollars were awarded between February 2020 and July 2020, and it is impossible to find out anything about them. We know nothing about them. Only the name of the product, but not the quantity, was disclosed. Therefore, we cannot calculate the unit price. This prevents us from determining if corruption played a part in the awarding of these contracts.

This kind of management or governance can only be qualified as being completely senseless or corrupt, as I have said. It is up to Canadians to decide.

In its inquiry into the sponsorship scandal, the Gomery commission also came to the conclusion that the sponsorship program lacked objectives, criteria and clear guidelines, so the sponsorships were used for purposes other than national unity or federal visibility.

Government Orders

We must acknowledge that the same thing is happening now with the COVID-19 procurement process. Clearly, the program's guidelines and criteria are not consistent.

For example, if the Prime Minister had trusted Canadian scientists, he could have ensured that taxpayers' money was invested in Canada's efforts to develop a vaccine and not in China's Communist regime. The Liberal government decided to invest in China because it has no faith in our scientists and their expertise.

We were all shocked to hear the Minister of Public Services and Procurement downplay the quality of our Canadian scientists when she said, “The reality is that setting up new manufacturing of a vaccine requires expertise, and it requires resources from the supplier.”

In response, Gary Kobinger, the director of Université Laval's research centre on infectious diseases, said that her comments were “an insult to the last decade” and that the minister should “look to our universities and manufacturing facilities, because they are not being run by aliens.”

The Prime Minister often talks about Canadian expertise. However, when it comes time to take action, his lack of confidence in our institutions is clear. The Gomery commission also found that the sponsorship scandal involved political interference in the administration of the sponsorship program.

Looking at the programs put in place by the government to fight COVID-19, we certainly have a number of reasons to believe that the Liberals are once again playing the same old political games by giving gifts to their friends, such as Frank Baylis or the Kielburger brothers.

• (1235)

Finally, in addition to recommending limiting the powers of the Prime Minister and cabinet, the Gomery commission also called for the strengthening of the power of members of the House of Commons. The commission's central recommendation in that regard was designed to provide additional support for parliamentary committees. These committees are working groups of members who examine government decisions in key public policy areas, such as public finance, health care and social services. I can say that the committees did their work, but the Liberal ministers refused to answer questions. Their answers were vague and imprecise. After hours of asking questions in the House and committee and sending formal letters, we still do not know anything more about the contracts granted to deal with the health crisis.

The corruption in the Liberal Party was obvious during the sponsorship scandal and it is obvious again today when we consider the contracts that the Liberals are giving their friends. If what I am saying is not true, then I invite them to put all their cards on the table. We are talking here about tens of millions of dollars in public funds. The Prime Minister should be ashamed, but instead he just continues to hide the truth from Canadians.

Government Orders

As elected representatives, it is our duty to be transparent because every dollar spent comes from taxes paid by Canadians. The people of Canada should be able to trust their government and know that it is being transparent, not hiding anything and not trying to do anything corrupt. It is up to the Prime Minister to decide what to do.

● (1240)

Ms. Andr anne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles for his speech, in which he spoke about health care. This is a very relevant topic these days, given the pandemic.

If we want to provide better care, we need more money, as my colleague pointed out. A special committee on WE Charity would have been able to shed light on some aspects, review the spending and determine how much money was spent on this scandal, money that could have been spent on Canadian health transfers.

My colleague's party and his leader often talk about how important it is that health transfers be stable and predictable. Right now, health transfers cover 22% of total costs. Quebec and the provinces are calling for this figure to be increased to 35%. What does my colleague think about these demands? For some, stability and predictability could mean an increase of just 2% or 3%. Is my colleague prepared to go as high as 35%?

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

I agree that health transfers must be stable. These days, however, the government is setting conditions. The Liberal Party prefers providing health transfers with strings attached and allocating money to specific sectors. We have always taken the position that the money is to be transferred with no strings attached.

However, we first have to be responsible, assess the damage caused by the Liberal government's management of COVID-19 and see how the public finances are doing at the end of the fiscal year before we can determine how much of an increase we will be able to provide. We will have a serious discussion with the provinces before making any serious proposals.

[English]

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Madam Speaker, my colleague covered a lot of the issues of the corruption and entitlement of the government when it comes to COVID spending, and also the incredible lack of transparency. Last week, the Liberals introduced massive proposals to reverse the decline of the French language in Canada and yet we saw with the \$1-billion handout to the WE friends of the Liberals that the President of the Treasury Board, from Quebec City himself, testify that he violated the Official Languages Act to push through the sole-sourced contract for the Liberal friends of WE Charity.

I would like my colleague to comment on the duplicity of the Liberals in saying they are standing up for the French language, but at the same time their senior Liberal minister in Quebec City admitted that he violated Treasury Board rules and the Official Languages Act by refusing to do an official languages analysis of the \$1-billion gift to the WE Charity.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. I want to start by saying that I hope the minister in question, the President of the Treasury Board, who is off on sick leave, gets well soon.

That does not excuse what happened with the WE Charity. Quebec was completely ignored. The impact of the contract on the Francophonie and the French language were deemed irrelevant and not even considered, even though we are talking about a \$900-million pan-Canadian contract. That is completely unacceptable. It also serves as further evidence of who the Liberals really are when it comes to French. They claim to take the French language into account, but we see the truth in their actions, which clearly show that they have no interest in French.

[English]

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to speak in the House today representing the good people of North Okanagan—Shuswap and take part in the debate on Bill C-14, the economic statement implementation act of 2020.

Here we are today, at the end of February, debating an economic statement, not a budget, from last year. We are debating the 2020 economic statement today because the government has not tabled a budget since March 2019, long before the last election. In fact, we have a minority government that has been spending money for over a year without presenting a budget; but then, this is from a Prime Minister who said that budgets balance themselves.

Budgets are a means to identify the objectives the government has set for itself. A federal budget would be the means by which Canadians could determine if the government is recognizing the people's priorities. Last March, it was appropriate to delay budget 2020, but the government has now denied Canadians and parliamentarians a federal budget for nearly a year. The Liberals needed an inch, but now they have taken a mile.

I know that my colleagues on the government side will shrug their shoulders and suggest that none of this matters. They will tell Canadians that they provided Parliament with a fiscal and economic snapshot last July and then a statement in November and all is well, but only because the government party says so. Well, it is wrong. All is not well when a federal government fails to present Canadians and Parliament with its plan for managing fiscal policy.

Government Orders

The persistent absence of a federal budget over the past 700 days should raise red flags for all Canadians and, indeed, all parliamentarians. A government that refuses to provide and abide by a budget is a government that is evading accountability and transparency. Having a comprehensive and realistic plan for managing the finances of Canada during the greatest crisis we have faced in generations is even more important. In fact, the persistent hazards and harm that Canadians are continuing to face in this crisis actually increase the necessity for sound fiscal planning and policy. During this time of crisis, more Canadians than ever before are looking to the federal government for a plan, for leadership, for a budget. I believe that if the government possessed any of these, it would have presented them, but it has not.

It is my honour to represent the people of North Okanagan—Shuswap in British Columbia and my representation is based on one foundation: the people. Over the past year, I have spent countless hours on the phone and computer, connecting with constituents. I want to share some of what I have heard from those constituents whom I represent:

People in the North Okanagan—Shuswap are concerned about their families, their jobs and their businesses. Last month saw the loss of almost 213,000 jobs across Canada, five times more than economists had expected. That sounds bad enough, but to put that into perspective, Canada has lost 858,000 jobs since last February and another 529,000 Canadians are working less than they usually do. That is almost one and a half million Canadians who are working less than usual or not at all, compared with a year ago.

At the same time, the recovery of employment opportunities has been damaged by the current government's policies that have severely undermined the confidence that Canadians need to make investments in local businesses, local economies and communities. I have been contacted by individuals, small business owners from across the North Okanagan—Shuswap and across B.C., who are trying to find ways to keep their families together and operations viable, but they keep getting beaten down or beaten back by the policies of the government.

I have one constituent in Vernon who is just trying to get an answer on what channel their company needs to go through to apply to get a device registered that could help in the fight against COVID. She has been trying for over eight months to simply register a machine that could generate sanitizer inside hospitals, but she has been stymied in getting an answer to the regulatory pathway she needs to take. Meanwhile, the same government found a fast track to issue a contract for ventilators to a company owned by former Liberal MP Frank Baylis.

● (1245)

Last year, as the first wave of the pandemic was building and Canada had a shortage of sanitizer, a craft distiller in the North Okanagan—Shuswap answered the call from the Prime Minister for Canadian businesses to step up and help fill the gap. This constituent set aside his regular business and production plans so that his business could provide sanitizers to front-line workers across the region. He did not have to do this, but he did, because this is what Canadians have done through times of crisis. We have gone out of our way to support each other.

However, when it came time for the government to sign massive contracts for sanitizers, Canadian businesses that stepped up in the crisis were sidelined as the government awarded \$375 million worth of contracts for foreign-sourced sanitizers. When questioned about this in the House in December, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance smugly suggested that Canadian businesses should apply for government support programs.

This is not a plan or a pathway to recovery for all Canadians. It seems that unless one has Liberal connections, one gets to wait at the back of the line.

Canadians deserve better. They need to know what direction their government is headed and how it plans to deal with the increased debt, which will need to be serviced through interest and principal payments now and over a period of decades. Canadians are not seeing that plan, nor have they seen a budget from the government.

I am proud of the work that entrepreneurs and experienced business owners alike across the North Okanagan—Shuswap have done to keep their employees on the payroll and their customers served, but many have been asked to hold on for too long without any way to plan for their own budgets or futures. Businesses of almost every type are hurting. Personal services, bed and breakfasts, tour companies, restaurants, small markets, crafters, recreational and guiding businesses and certainly not-for-profits are hurting. They are all doing what they can, but the government has not presented a budget or a plan to help them recover.

No one gets it right all of the time, but Canadians deserve a government that will get it right most of the time and a government that is accountable. This economic statement implementation act would help correct some of the faults in previous legislation, but it is not a budget by which the government can be measured for accountability.

I wait in anticipation for the government to finally bring forward its first budget of this Parliament in an attempt to tell Canadians what it forecasts for Canada's economic future so that Canadians, my fellow parliamentarians and I can hold the government accountable. Until that time, I will continue to connect with my constituents to hear their concerns and to carry those concerns to this House and to Ottawa so that we can work together to secure our future.

● (1250)

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a lot of time for my friend from North Okanagan—Shuswap and we work well together on the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans, but the speech he has given today reminds me of the old expression often directed at parliamentarians, which is, “When all is said and done, there's a lot more said than done.”

Government Orders

I heard the sense of urgency in some of the examples he gave of people needing help. We know people need help, but is the Conservative Party prepared to talk out the clock until a budget comes down weeks from now, or is it prepared to move now on the supports and help that so many people need?

• (1255)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from North Okanagan—Shuswap for his speech.

I think we share the same view on the need to fight corruption and avoid losing billions of dollars more, like what happened with the WE Charity scandal. We need to keep all of our money here in order to reinvest it.

I would like to hear my colleague's comments on the control of the budget. We agree that we need an economic update because we have been waiting for a budget for a long time. We need the numbers in order to know where we have been and where we are going. That is important. However, I would like to qualify that a little.

Would my colleague say that there are some sectors in which budget cuts should not be made, even if that makes things difficult and choices need to be made? I am thinking about health transfers in particular, and my colleague spoke about groups that need help. What does he think about the importance of protecting certain sectors and avoiding austerity measures, such as those used by previous Liberal and Conservative governments?

[*English*]

Mr. Mel Arnold: Madam Speaker, certainly the member and I share concerns about what is really needed to help Canadians through this pandemic. We need economic recovery and jobs. That is why we are debating this bill. It introduces \$25 billion in new spending as part of a deficit that looks to be closing in on \$400 billion this year. We want to investigate and debate this economic implementation act very carefully, but it really is time for the government to step up and provide a real budget so that we know what it sees as Canada's future and Canada's economic plan.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Madam Speaker, the government first got rid of balanced budgets and is now getting rid of budgets altogether. We have not had one in two years.

However, this economic statement proposes to raise the debt limit to \$1.8 trillion. That is \$1 trillion higher than the debt was only a year ago. The combined debt of all governments is now bigger than the entire GDP for the first time in recorded history. If we add up business, household and government debt, we have a debt-to-GDP ratio of 387%, which is the highest on record. It is twice the historic average, bigger than that of the U.S. during the subprime crisis and bigger than that of Greece during the debt crisis. It is bigger than 41 of the 45 biggest debt crises in the last century.

Does the hon. member believe that if the government and this country fail to reduce the debt ratio before interest rates return to normal, we will have a massive debt crisis on our hands here in Canada?

Mr. Mel Arnold: Madam Speaker, I agree with the member for Carleton that unless we get our spending under control, the risk of increased interest rates is an incredible threat to this country.

I lived through the recession of 1981-1982, when basically there were so many jobs lost that one could not buy a job. Interest rates were over 20%. I personally paid over 9% on a primary mortgage. Our second mortgage was over 12.5%. Those kinds of interest rates are possible, so we must get government spending under control.

Also, most of this borrowing has been done under short-term rates that are subject to change. If it is going to continue, much of it needs to be done under better terms than the government has negotiated.

Mr. Gerald Soroka (Yellowhead, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise today to discuss the state of our economy and Bill C-14, an act to implement certain provisions of the economic statement tabled in Parliament back in November.

Over the past year, many Canadians have faced a complete lack of certainty about their livelihoods as a result of COVID. To use a metaphor I recently heard: When it comes to COVID, we are all in this storm together, but some have yachts, others have life rafts, and some are just trying to keep their heads above water before they drown. While the Liberal cabinet members are on their yachts looking after their good friends who also have yachts, such as WE and the SNC-Lavalin group, many of my constituents are barely keeping their heads above water or are losing their businesses.

While programs such as the Canada emergency response benefit, the Canada emergency wage subsidy, the Canada emergency rent subsidy and other programs have been welcome, and Conservatives have supported them, there are still businesses and people falling through the cracks and drowning, like a young couple in my riding who have a fitness centre. They phoned me here about three weeks ago and were asking if there were any programs available to them. I went through the list, just as I did earlier, and they said that they had applied for them and were able to get about \$2,000 from CERB, because with the full closures, partial closures and partial openings, they were not able to get much money. As well, with the rent control, they also only got about \$600. During our conversation, they also said that because they cannot be financially viable, they were going to have to close their business. On top of this, now they also owe about \$3,600 in debt, because they have to pay out their lease on the building before they can close.

This kind of thing is a big problem for our country. Together, as Canada, we face a lack of certainty in our economic outlook. We see nothing but endless lockdowns and failure after failure when it comes to vaccine procurement. The future looks bleak. Canadians need certainty back in their lives as soon as possible. Canada has the worst unemployment rate in the G7, and the last time I checked, we were 58th in the world in terms of vaccinations per capita.

The other day, my colleague from Carleton pointed out that for years the Prime Minister has been touting how low the unemployment rate is, saying it is the most important indicator, yet now Canada has the highest unemployment rate in the G7, so now it is not the best way of measuring how we are doing. It is funny how that works and that the most important statistics are always the ones that make the Liberals look best.

When I was growing up, we always talked about how many billion dollars our national debt was. When that grew too high, we started talking about debt-to-GDP ratio. Now that is growing too high and we do not even want to talk about that either. It is funny how the numbers and discussions keep changing to make the Liberals look better than what is really happening.

The government's snubbing of Alberta and its natural resources industry predates COVID, but the pandemic has made the bad economic situation worse. When the Prime Minister could be giving the green light to big natural resource projects, his government, as always, is going with its favourite job-killing strategy: death by delay. Across Alberta, hundreds of natural resource workers are wondering where to turn.

A year and a half ago, Teck made the application for the Frontier mine, and they managed to meet all of the Liberals' regulations. It was surprising that five months and three weeks later, the Liberals had still not made a decision as to whether the mine should go through. Yes, they will spout that Teck pulled out of the project, but we have to wonder why a company that spent years and millions of dollars developing the plan pulled out of the project in the last week. I assume they were probably scared that more restrictions were going to be put on than they could actually manage anymore, even though they were going to address how they would be carbon neutral by 2050.

COVID has been tough on families, especially those with young children, and that is why it is good to see in this legislation that the government would be restoring support for families after slashing the previous Conservative government's Canada child benefit program.

- (1300)

On our path to reopening the economy, we need to be incentivizing people to get back to work. A constituent of mine works reception at a small physiotherapy clinic. Under normal conditions, the clinic operates 40 hours per week, and appointments are fully booked. Because of COVID and people not making bookings unless essential, the clinic is now only getting 15 hours of bookings per week. The problem here is that if employees work more than 15 hours but less than 40 hours, they are worse off than they were before. If they work anything above 15 hours, they are no longer eligible for the CERB, and if they work anything less than 40 hours, they are making less than they would through the CERB.

Government Orders

People in all industries across the country are facing this issue. As we try to reopen the economy, we need to make sure that under no circumstances are we incentivizing Canadians to work less.

Most people I have talked to who are out of work want to get back to work. There is pride that comes with earning a paycheque, and those out of work right now are missing that, further contributing to mental health issues.

I was called by one of my friends, who is a young mother and a single parent. She started a business last year cleaning homes. Because she did not make \$5,000, she was not eligible to collect the CERB. It was devastating to hear her crying on the phone, asking how she is going to pay her bills and feed her young daughter. This is the problem we have been facing.

We know that one of the industry's hardest hit by the pandemic has been the tourism industry. As a member of the transport committee and the member of Parliament for Yellowhead, having Jasper and Jasper National Park in my riding and many tourism operators across the constituency, I have heard first-hand the struggles of the industry. Small tourism-related businesses have taken out loans that will take a decade or more to pay off, and they expect to go even further into debt before things start to get better. The HAS-CAP program is a band-aid solution for a complex problem.

Airlines are also in a precarious situation. They have been promised federal assistance, but there is still nothing, a year into this pandemic.

The entire tourism industry needs some kind of plan and soon. These businesses and airlines cannot operate indefinitely while incurring losses.

This legislation is a scary sign of the times. A year and a half ago, when I was elected, I would never have imagined that I would be standing in Parliament today discussing legislation to expand Canada's borrowing capacity to just over \$1.8 trillion by 2024. That is a staggering number. When people ask me why I am a Conservative, the simple answer is that I believe in good stewardship of tax dollars. With every dollar the government spends, we must remember that it comes off of Canadians' paycheques. When we are \$1 trillion in debt, \$1 million here and \$1 million there might not matter to the Liberals, but to the average Canadian it is a lot of money we are taxing them on. Every dollar we spend must be respected and assessed for value.

Government Orders

Canadians have been hard hit by COVID over the last year, and the economic implications of the pandemic will be long-lasting. Spending is not good enough. We need a comprehensive recovery strategy and targeted investments to help get Canadians back to work.

As I mentioned earlier, many small businesses are suffering and need financial assistance now. Without this assistance, many other small businesses will go bankrupt through no fault of their own. It will simply be because of COVID. That is why it is very challenging to represent people with small businesses in the tourism sector. Without financial assistance, they definitely will be closing. This may not seem that important to the Liberals, but the point is that they are important to our economy. Without the small business sector, we definitely will be in financial trouble in the future. We need to look after it.

● (1305)

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened with interest to the member's speech, and I am confused by how the Conservatives can say that we need to have less spending but make strategic investments and that we need to cut budgets but help more people with new dollars being extended to targeted industries. However, what really caught my attention was when the member pretended that the Canada child benefit had been slashed by our government. We, in fact, doubled it. What we did do was take it away from the very people he was worried about: those with yachts and million-dollar trust accounts. We do not send the Canada child benefit to millionaires anymore. In fact, we have doubled it for lower-income Canadians. Also, during COVID we increased it, and not just the one time in the spring. We have now forecast another expenditure increase for this year after indexing it two years ago.

Does the member opposite really want us to send cheques to millionaires, cut child benefit funds and reduce them to the Conservative levels, as he outlined in his speech, or is he just unaware of how low the Conservative benefit was?

● (1310)

Mr. Gerald Soroka: Madam Speaker, my colleague had an interesting interpretation. The Liberals talk about not giving cheques to their millionaire friends. The Ethics Commissioner sometimes has had some difficulty in assessing the same values or principles at times.

We need to assist families, and that is why I am very pleased we are working to assist families in the future. It is imperative that we do this. Without that support, many of these families will go hungry. I am very appreciative that we are working together on those programs.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

He spoke about the importance of supporting the tourism industry, among others. Tourism also includes culture. We recall that in the past, in 2008-09, Mr. Harper's government made many cuts to culture.

I would like to know the Conservative opposition's position on support for tourism and, more specifically, the cultural sector.

[*English*]

Mr. Gerald Soroka: Madam Speaker, that does go hand in hand. When we talk about tourism, without the cultural activities available, how would we attract people? We need to address that area.

It is very important that when we look at the tourism sector, we also include the arts and culture sector as well.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, my colleague raises many important issues.

It is interesting to hear members of the government talk about how can they support people in need and also control spending. The answer to that is quite simple. Have a plan for growth, support the development of our economy and stop putting unnecessary barriers in the way of manufacturing and resource extraction, which are so fundamental to our national economy. What we do not see from the government is a plan for growth and a plan for jobs.

Could the member comment on the need for a plan that gets people back to work? If people are able to work again, in larger numbers, if we address the unemployment problem, then it becomes much easier to provide the support to people who are not able to work and we will be dealing with the underlying economic situation, such that we have resources in place.

Mr. Gerald Soroka: Madam Speaker, it is very important that we point out the failures of the Liberal government. If it had looked at things a little better or done things a little differently, we would not have had to spend huge amounts of money on these programs.

The member is definitely right. If we do not have a plan moving forward, trying to get our economy back in place, we are going to be in this perpetual motion forever of continuing with these programs. We know for a fact that we cannot build an economy and, as the Liberals like to say "build back better", if we do not have a financial plan going forward.

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.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, I request a recorded division.

Private Members' Business

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Pursuant to order made Monday, January 25, the recorded division stands deferred until Monday, March 8, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

[English]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, I believe that if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent of the House to see the clock at 1:30 p.m. so we can move on to Private Members' Business.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Accordingly, the House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1315)

[Translation]

HEALTH OF ANIMALS ACT

The House resumed from November 26, 2020, consideration of the motion that Bill C-205, An Act to amend the Health of Animals Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Pat Finnigan (Miramichi—Grand Lake, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I was pleased to hear the speeches by the hon. members and I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to Bill C-205.

I understand the intent of this bill. I understand the farmers and the fact that the animals under their care have been distressed by intrusions. I understand the reasoning of the hon. member for Foothills who is addressing this issue of biosecurity. I have a great deal of respect for him. We sat at the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food and I deeply respect his knowledge and concerns for the agricultural sector.

The government agrees that biosecurity measures are crucial for protecting the health of animals and ensuring their welfare. We must protect the mental health of farmers and the marketing of farm products.

We obviously agree with implementing solid biosecurity measures. As we have already heard, effective biosecurity is a shared responsibility between the federal government, the provinces and the territories, as well as the farmers.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency, which is responsible for enforcing the Health of Animals Act and regulations, is working in close collaboration with the provinces and the industry on biosecurity standards and other issues related to animal welfare.

Cases of unlawful entry are currently dealt with by existing legislation. However, Bill C-205 proposes to amend the Health of Animals Act to prohibit trespassing on farms and other facilities.

[English]

Let us unpack this a little. As I just said, instances of trespassing or unlawful entry are currently dealt with by existing legislation, whether under the Criminal Code or provincial or territorial laws. Trespassing on farms and such premises is already addressed in several provinces. In addition, provincial governments in Ontario, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba have increased trespassing fines dating back to early 2019.

Let me provide an example. Alberta Bill 27, The Trespass Statutes (Protecting Law-Abiding Property Owners) Amendment Act, came into force December 5, 2019. That bill amends several acts. The Occupiers' Liability Act was amended to better protect property owners from civil liabilities for injuries to trespassers where the owner has reasonable grounds to believe the trespasser is committing, or about to commit, a criminal offence. The Petty Trespass Act and the Trespass to Premises Act were amended to increase the maximum fines to \$10,000 for a first offence and \$25,000 for a subsequent offence, as well as possible prison time for up to six months, and \$200,000 for corporations that help or direct trespassers.

The Petty Trespass Act was amended to broaden locations where entry is prohibited without notice to explicitly reference land used for crops, animal rearing and bee keeping. The Provincial Offences Procedure Act was amended to increase the maximum amount a court may order for loss or damage to property to \$100,000.

Of even more pertinence is Alberta's biosecurity regulation, Alberta Regulation 185/2019, which also came into force December 5, 2019. That regulation was made under existing authorities of the Animal Health Act and is intended to protect animals from potential disease introduction and stress associated with breaches of security protocols.

The regulation prohibits unauthorized entry into premises where livestock are housed without the need to give notice, such as posted signage, and where other species of animals, such as laboratory animals, are kept when notice is given orally or in writing. The regulation contains a novel prohibition against aiding, counselling or directing a person to commit an offence. The regulation provides an avenue for a grieving party to request restitution from the convicted party for loss or damage to property and the costs of remedial action that may be taken to address the potential harm of the biosecurity breach, such as veterinary care, medication, cleaning and disinfection.

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• (1320)

In relation to break-ins, the Province of Alberta had previously made reference to provisions of the Criminal Code, section 348. This section codifies breaking and entering with the intent to commit an offence, breaking and entering and committing an offence, or breaking out of a place after intending to or having committed an offence. Section 321 of the Criminal Code defines “break” for the purpose of the break and enter provision. It makes clear that “breaking” does not need to include damaging property, and can simply mean opening a door. However, under Alberta legislation, if the concern is related to use or enjoyment of property, then the offence in question is likely to be mischief.

To recap, not only do provinces have trespassing legislation, but several provinces, like Alberta, have passed legislation specifically focused on protecting farms, and I think it is important to respect provincial jurisdiction.

Under the Criminal Code of Canada, the trespassing activities targeted by Bill C-205 are already captured under the mischief offence, subsection 430(1); namely, the obstruction, interruption or interference with the lawful enjoyment or operation of property. Penalties depend on the nature on the property and whether the mischief caused actual danger to life. Punishment includes fines of up to \$5,000 and up to two years in prison. The trespass offence in section 177 of the Criminal Code against loitering or prowling at night near a dwelling or house without lawful excuse could also be applicable in such cases, and is punishable by summary conviction by a maximum term of imprisonment of two years less a day and a fine not exceeding \$5,000.

The point is that there is the Criminal Code and there is existing provincial legislation, some with higher fines. This type of legislation and enforcement largely rests with the provinces.

In closing, in addition to instances of trespassing or unlawful entry being dealt with by existing legislation, biosecurity measures already exist on Canadian farms and premises. We do not want to reinvent the wheel, but we want to find the right balance with the bill and discern the best way forward, considering that legislation and biosecurity measures already exist. If the bill before us makes it to the agriculture committee, I look forward to discussing it and finding ways to create that balance. I absolutely agree that we can improve biosecurity in places where animals are kept, but I cannot support the text of the bill as written, given some of the challenges it raises.

[*Translation*]

Not only does existing legislation already address instances of unlawful entry, but biosecurity measures are also in place on Canadian farms and other such facilities. There is no need to reinvent the wheel.

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to participate virtually in today's debate on Bill C-205, an act to amend the Health of Animals Act.

If I may, I would like to go back to a sad event that occurred in my riding just under a year and a half ago.

On December 7, 2019, 13 vegan and animal rights activists broke into a pig farm in Saint-Hyacinthe to protest the raising of animals for human consumption. They entered a hog barn, where they filmed a staged protest for nearly seven hours, sitting on the floor in front of the piggens. Several Sûreté du Québec officers then had to enter the building to get them out. The site was contaminated by approximately 30 people who should never have been there in the first place.

During a press conference in January 2020, the co-owners of the pig farm in question said that since the incident, they had noticed clinical signs of a new disease. An analysis showed that it was rotavirus. This disease of the small intestine was not a new disease, but it had not been seen in 40 years. Furthermore, rotavirus is not the only disease that can affect pigs. Pigs are extremely sensitive to stress. When they are in captivity, their environment has to be controlled, in terms of both temperature and noise levels.

During the occupation of the farm, the sows got up suddenly, and when they lay back down, they crushed some of the piglets to death. What is more, the activists put water in the generator's diesel tank, throwing off the temperature. They also left the barn doors open when it was -12°C out.

That happened in my riding, but it was not the only incident of its kind. An intrusion like this can have major consequences on farm biosecurity. The health and well-being of the very animals on whose behalf these people are protesting are at serious risk. In addition to the harm caused to the animals and the financial consequences, many farmers told me that after this incident, they were constantly afraid it would happen again. Unfortunately, these protests are becoming increasingly common.

After this incident, the Union des producteurs agricoles obtained an emergency injunction against the protest group, preventing it from coming within 500 metres of a farm without the owner's permission. Naturally, if they have the owner's permission, they can approach the farm.

The 12 members of the group Direct Action Everywhere faced two charges, namely breaking and entering with intent to commit mischief and obstructing a police officer. The other protester, a minor, had to appear in youth court.

Even though the matter is before the courts, the harassment has not stopped. Just recently, the farm owners I talked to this week were the target of people's ire on social media. They have had to stop answering the phone to avoid the invective. They are not the only ones in this situation.

People realized that, unfortunately, the law is not good enough. That is why we are discussing Bill C-205, an act to amend the Health of Animals Act. This is a very simple bill that makes it an offence to enter, without lawful authority or excuse, a place in which animals are kept if doing so could result in the exposure of the animals to a disease or toxic substance that is capable of affecting or contaminating them.

We support the bill at this stage. This is not about opposing freedom of expression, or people's right to express themselves and protest, or vegan values. Each and every one of us is free to embrace such values and to share them or not. That is not the issue. However, we can by no means allow illegal actions that hurt both farmers and animals.

It is important to mention that animal welfare is an integral part of Quebec's agricultural model, which is based on family farms, not factory farms where animals spend their whole lives never seeing so much as a blade of grass. That is not how we operate.

• (1325)

As the Bloc Québécois critic for international trade and the member for what is likely the most agricultural riding in the country, I often get the chance to talk to farmers about their concerns over meat imports competing with their products. Animal welfare is one of their considerations because their competitors have much lower production costs, not least because their animal welfare standards are much lower. This leads them to seek greater reciprocity of standards, while ours are among the best in the world. Lastly, farmers are calling for improved animal welfare standards around the world.

For example, duck farmers recently voiced their dissatisfaction with the European standards, which are less strict than ours and promote what I would not hesitate to describe as unfair competition. Poultry farmers are also concerned about what might end up on our supermarket shelves from Mercosur countries. Incidentally, poultry farmers get their workers to sign a farm welfare awareness form.

In addition, dairy farmers adopted a code of practice for the care and handling of dairy cattle, in co-operation with scientists and veterinarians. This code sets standards with respect to living conditions, feeding, health care and transportation for the animals.

There is also the proAction certification program, which has been around since 2017. This program provides a way to properly assess all these factors. I am sure some people are thinking that dairy farmers must not have been happy to have a certification program forced on them and to be under the microscope. On the contrary, this program was not forced on dairy farmers. They did not go along with it reluctantly. They took the initiative and asked for it. A well-treated cow produces better-quality milk. A study has shown that when cows are pampered and brushed, they can produce up to one kilogram of additional milk per day and are 30% less likely to develop inflammation. Farmers know that it is always beneficial to treat animals well.

The types of farms that I mentioned are just examples, not an exhaustive list. However, let us remember that the activists who are going after Quebec agriculture are missing the mark. Even though

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things can always be improved and we can always do better, that is not the issue. In many ways, Quebec agriculture is the gold standard. Attacking Quebec agriculture only promotes foreign farming practices that are far more harmful to animals.

To come back to the bill, we support it, but we fear there may be some problems enforcing it. Agriculture and animal welfare are areas of shared jurisdiction. Ottawa has limited power with regard to such a bill's scope of application. That is why it would be good to have more information on the bill's functionality and application. As the Canadian Food Inspection Agency says, the welfare of animals, including livestock, falls mainly under provincial jurisdiction. The CFIA therefore limits its own mandate to regulating the humane transportation of animals and the humane treatment of food animals in federal slaughter establishments.

The Criminal Code of Canada also prohibits anyone from willfully causing animals to suffer from neglect, pain or injury. The Criminal Code is enforced by police services, provincial and territorial societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals and provincial and territorial ministries of agriculture. We must proceed with caution because all provinces have animal welfare legislation, but not all provinces have legislation dealing specifically with intrusion. Some provinces and territories have passed legislation or regulations, while others have not. Some provinces, like Alberta and Ontario, have made stricter laws to punish offences and break-ins, but Quebec still does not have a similar law. Quebec is contemplating the issue, and it is not up to Ottawa to impose its laws on the provinces.

However, the whole point of committees is to ask these kinds of questions, and so, we will raise our concerns on the matter in committee.

• (1330)

Action is needed and that is why, in the name of respect for animals, private property laws and producers, we will vote in favour of Bill C-205 at this stage.

[English]

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Madam Speaker, for all of us as parliamentarians, private members' business is an opportunity to share our thoughts and concerns about things that matter to us and the people we represent, so I want to acknowledge the member for Foothills for his work on this.

Farming, in my riding of North Island—Powell River, is an incredibly important part of the region that I serve. Whether on the mainland or on Vancouver Island, we have a lot of farms. There are a lot of family farms, some that have been in the family for generations, and it is a proud history that we have in our region.

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This is important to all of us. People in our area continue to be very concerned about food security because we are in communities that are isolated. If food transportation becomes an issue, research tells us that we have only three days of food in our area. With some of our islands, particularly some of our small islands, this timeline could be even shorter.

We have a lot of farms that produce both produce and livestock, so this is an issue that arises in my region. I am incredibly proud of the hard work that many farmers do.

For example, our region produces wines and spirits. I think of the wonderful 40 Knots Winery and the Shelter Point Distillery, which have both won awards recognizing the high quality of their products. SouthEnd Winery, on one of the islands in my region, has lovely wines but also amazing spaces for enjoying the beautiful area and engaging with a small chicken coop as well.

Gunter Brothers Meat Co., which was started by the grandfather of the brothers who own this business and has gone through generations, processes local meat in our communities. I often drive by the Vancouver Island bison farm and get to see the bison majestically walking along the fields. It is amazing in the morning to see the mist rising and these beautiful bison, locally raised and grass fed, that are really a healthy product for our communities. Amara Farm is a family-owned organic farm that provides a great amount of beautiful produce and also important leadership in supporting people who want to grow their own food, so it provides a lot of education.

Then I think specifically of the Powell River region, where there are many tremendous small farms. A list of them is provided online at the Powell River Farmers' Agricultural Institute, and that list is significant. This organization also hosts a regular Seedy Saturday, where local farmers gather and share seeds and information about what is happening in the region. In my riding, agriculture is very important, and I am incredibly proud of that as well.

Today, we speak to Bill C-205. It specifically talks about farms with livestock and the fear that outsiders who unlawfully gain access to farms or properties could introduce contagions, thereby infecting animal populations resulting in their deaths or possible livestock culling. This is a serious concern, and I appreciate the focus drawn to this. Several provinces have already introduced similar legislation. Some provinces are in the process of considering it, so this is obviously a concern.

One of the things that I think is important for us to address, though, is when we see people doing the work to expose animal abuse cases. This bill proposes significant fines and up to two years of imprisonment. It concerns me, because I think we need to protect farms and livestock, while acknowledging that there is important work to be done around identifying challenges or when treatment of livestock is unethical in this country. I hope to see that this will be addressed in this bill, when and if it goes to committee.

• (1335)

Several years ago, we heard a terrible story that I think is important to talk about with respect to this legislation. Our office was called by a woman named Kathy from Port Hardy, who had two horses stolen from her property. Sadly, they were stolen and taken

to a slaughterhouse where, under forged identification papers, they were slaughtered for meat. That was absolutely appalling. I cannot imagine losing two beloved pets that way. They were horses. They were connected to the family and it was just a devastating outcome.

Two issues became very clear from this. First, the CFIA knows that horses are not intended for the meat market and often can contain steroids or medication that are not supposed to be in meat for consumption. There seems to be a missed mark here that we need to see addressed. Second, and very importantly, equine information documents are easily forged, which could open the doors to horses being stolen and slaughtered under fraudulent identity. We have continued to work with Kathy and the federal government around this, but have been saddened and disappointed by the lack of engagement by the government.

We have heard from people across Canada who are experiencing this. It is something that is happening and I really hope the federal government takes it seriously and starts to address it. This represents a loss of family members for those people. I also believe that in the House, all people here want to ensure the safety of livestock on farms, while allowing animal abuse cases to be uncovered.

I am just worried about some of those key points that we need to see addressed in this piece of legislation. I hope that if it does pass, the committee will really look at these and make sure that there is a more robust discussion of the inspection regime of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. It is obviously something that is really important.

I am incredibly proud of all of the farmers across my riding. I hear from them frequently. I know they work hard to provide food, beverages and produce for our communities and our region.

I hope that if this does go to committee, there are serious discussions about amending this legislation to make sure that the testimony is reflected in it. I look forward to further discussions.

• (1340)

Ms. Lianne Rood (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-205, an act to amend the Health of Animals Act, the private member's bill of my Conservative colleague, the member for Foothills. I want to congratulate the member and thank him for the bill. The member understands the challenges farmers, ranchers and processors in his riding face, and he knows what they are up against. The residents of Foothills are well served by him.

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I am very proud to represent all of my constituents of Lambton—Kent—Middlesex. In speaking to the bill, I am representing the thousands of farm families that would benefit from this change in legislation, not only in my own riding but across our great country. This last year has shown us just how important our farms and farm families are in ensuring our domestic food supply.

Mental health has come to the forefront during the pandemic, and this includes the mental health of all those who work in agriculture to produce the foods we all enjoy. The bill would protect not only animals, but also the workers and families who care for them.

It also addresses very directly the concerns of farmers, ranchers, producers and processors about biosecurity. The welfare of livestock, poultry and fur-bearing animals when outsiders trespass or insinuate themselves by false premise on farmland, grazing land, production sites or in transit is critical to protecting our domestic food supply and our agriculture industry. Viruses like African swine fever and even COVID-19 pose a real threat to biosecurity. They can decimate our livestock herds and have long-lasting devastating impacts on our farms.

It is critical that Canadians have a reliable and safe food supply system. To ensure the integrity of our food supply system, Canadians, ranchers, farmers, producers and processors adhere to the most robust security standards developed by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, and protocols and strategies in collaboration with producer organizations, provincial and territorial governments and academia. They work diligently to follow these standards to ensure the health and welfare of their animals.

Few people understand animals better than those who raise them. They understand their behaviour and instincts, their feed and water needs, what they require to feel safe where they are kept, their veterinary requirements and what is humane treatment for a particular species of animal. They understand that livestock, poultry, fur-bearing animals and even dogs and cats are not human beings. Herding animals want to be treated according to their behaviour and their instincts, as do livestock, poultry and, yes, dogs.

Those who raise livestock, poultry or fur-bearing animals do so because they enjoy being around animals. They do something they enjoy to earn a living from raising these animals for commercial purposes. Their ability to earn a living from animals depends on their giving those animals good care and treatment.

On a farm, ranch or production site with animals, every animal has a purpose. Dogs serve as an early warning sign for intruders on property and keep away foxes and coyotes. Farm cats help hold down the rodent population in barns and around farmsteads. Animals raised for commercial purposes also benefit us. The eggs and bacon we fry up for breakfast come from chicken and hogs. The milk we put on our cereal and the cream we add to our coffee or tea come from a dairy cow, as do the butter on our toast and the cheese on our burger or pizza. The steak and roast beef on our supper tables or from a favourite steakhouse come from beef cattle, as does the pastry shell made with lard that comes with a piece of pie. Our Thanksgiving and Christmas turkey with or without the trimmings comes from a poultry producer's work. I do not know about members, but I am starting to feel a little hungry.

It does not stop there. The wool in our suits, sweaters and blankets comes from fleece sheared from a sheep. The leather in belts, boots, purses and briefcases, the fur collars on a coat and the fur lining of our slippers come from the hides of animals raised for purpose.

Canadians are indebted to farmers, ranchers and producers for the food, clothing and household goods that give us sustenance, warmth and enjoyment. Their contribution to the quality of life should not be underestimated, nor should the excellent quality of life that farmers, ranchers and producers give their animals.

I understand that not everyone eats meat, poultry or eggs, drinks chocolate milk or enjoys ice cream or a slice of cheese, nor wears leather or fur. However, the vast majority of Canadians do. People's decisions not to eat meat, poultry, eggs or dairy, nor wear leather shoes or carry a leather purse, do not entitle them to prevent other Canadians from enjoying these products. Someone's freedom of choice does not entitle them to trespass on a farm, ranch or production site to engage in behaviour that stresses animals, introduces diseases or vandalizes private property.

• (1345)

We continue to see an increasing number of people trespassing on farms and at food-processing centres, and there is real potential to cause massive health and safety issues for the animals and the individuals who work with them. Despite the pandemic, we have seen that COVID-19 affects not only humans, but also poses a real threat to the health of some animals and, in turn, the livelihoods of those families who depend on animals to make a living. When individuals enter a farm unlawfully, they not only threaten the health of animals by potentially exposing them to disease, but also the welfare of the animal that is put in danger. Farmers in my riding have seen first-hand the devastating harm to the animals when protesters release them from their cages, and moms and babies are separated with no way of knowing how to reunite.

Regardless of one's own opinion, this kind of behaviour should not be tolerated, especially when the health and safety of the animal is jeopardized. The preferences of protesters do not entitle them to insinuate themselves and trespass under false premises onto a farm, ranch or production site to clandestinely capture and out-of-context video that does not take into account animal behaviour and needs.

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That said, as Canadians, we have an absolute right to hold our own views and opinions, and the right to peacefully protest. I want to be clear that this bill in no way prohibits someone's right to peacefully protest on public property.

When someone enters private property without permission, putting the health of farm families and animals at risk, there have to be consequences. This bill will increase the penalties for groups and organizations who encourage individuals to threaten the health and safety of animals and workers. There have been instances in my area where individuals have trespassed on a farm, and not only were the livestock and animals at risk, but also the families. That may include young children who also reside on the property. Parenting and raising animals for a livelihood is hard work. Farmers should not have the extra burden of worrying about the safety of their children being affected by individuals unlawfully entering their farms as well. The worry adds a whole other level of unnecessary mental health strain.

Unlike most if not all of us who have had the privilege of serving as members of Parliament, most farmers, ranchers and producers who raise animals are not very political. Most just want to get on with what they know and do best: raising animals to feed and clothe us and to serve our everyday lives. By doing so, they want to earn a living to look after their families, and like all of us, feed and clothe themselves and their families and put a roof over their heads. As they do so, they just want to be left in peace. Is that really asking too much?

Of course, there are instances of animals not being properly cared for, but this bill in no way prevents whistle-blowers and employees from reporting abusive and cruel conditions in livestock facilities. In fact, they have an obligation to report to the appropriate authorities any abuse, inhumane or irresponsible treatment, as they operate in a highly regulated environment and must follow strict codes of conduct to ensure the health, safety and welfare of all farm animals, including farm animals at events like agricultural fairs and exhibitions.

Those who raise animals for a living are the most vigilant when it comes to the well-being of the animals. In today's global marketplace, it is critical that we protect the integrity of Canada's supply chain and ensure that our food remains safe to eat and prevents disease outbreaks, and that our farmers and businesses do not lose significant income. Strengthening penalties on trespassers is something that farmers, ranchers, food processors, farm groups and commodity organizations all support. I urge the Liberal government to do the same. That is why, as the official opposition's shadow minister for agriculture and agri-food, I fully support Bill C-205. I encourage all members of the House to support it and vote in favour of this bill.

• (1350)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-205 because I come from a riding where agriculture is so important and agri-tourism makes such an enormous contribution to the vitality of Shefford.

The Bloc Québécois supports the principle of this bill because we have always stood with farmers, who would not be able to sur-

vive if they did not treat their animals properly. I grew up with horses. My father even raised a mistreated horse and practically brought it back to life. I accompanied my aunts and uncles when they went to care for their animals. That contact with the land and the agricultural community on a smaller scale was a privilege for me, and it did a lot to open my eyes to the importance of this sector in the food chain.

I want to begin my speech today by stating the main points of the bill. I will then give a real-life example from my region, and I will close by reminding members of some of the arguments for and against the bill. To start, I want to dispel the myth that Bill C-205 challenges vegan values. The bill is about respect for animals, laws and private property.

First, let me summarize the bill, which is actually very simple. It makes it an offence to enter, without lawful authority or excuse, a place in which animals are kept if doing so could result in the exposure of the animals to a disease or toxic substance that is capable of affecting or contaminating them. It also amends the Health of Animals Act, under which the penalties would be applied.

However, shared jurisdiction limits its effects. Certain difficulties may also complicate the application of this bill, including the fact that the purpose of the Health of Animals Act is really to protect animals in order to protect the humans who consume them and to prevent epidemics of zoonotic disease, or animal-to-human disease transmission. It was not created to define animal welfare. Agriculture and animal protection are shared jurisdictions, so the federal government's power to implement this kind of bill broadly is limited. That is why it would be good to have more information about how the bill would actually work.

To better understand the issue, here is a brief description posted on the website of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, or CFIA:

Canadian provinces have the primary responsibility for protecting the welfare of animals, including farm animals and pets. All provinces and territories have laws in respect to animal welfare. Provincial and territorial legislation tend to be general in scope, covering a wide range of animal welfare interests. Some provinces and territories have regulations that govern specific aspects of animal welfare, or are related to certain species.

The CFIA's animal welfare mandate is limited to regulating humane transportation of animals and the humane treatment of food animals in federal abattoirs.

The Criminal Code of Canada prohibits anyone from willfully causing animals to suffer from neglect, pain or injury. The Criminal Code is enforced by police services, provincial and territorial Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and/or provincial and territorial ministries of agriculture.

We must therefore be careful, because all provinces have animal welfare laws but not all of them have passed legislation to address this particular issue. In recent years, several provinces, including Ontario and Alberta, have created or strengthened laws to punish people who break into a slaughterhouse or farm.

Quebec does not yet have a law such as this, but it does have the Animal Welfare and Safety Act. This law is very much in line with the type of agriculture we have in Quebec, which is much more oriented towards family operations. We must avoid getting involved in a situation where it could be construed that we are telling it what to do or giving lectures. If the question is asked, the reply is simple: Quebec is considering the issue and it is not up to the federal government to impose its laws on the provinces.

I will now talk about a case that farmers and food processors in Shefford have raised with me several times, especially since I live in the region that is known as Quebec's pantry. It is a region that I share with the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot who also spoke of the highly publicized case of Porgreg in Saint-Hyacinthe. We are neighbours, so of course, people have talked to us about this a lot. Again, on December 7, 2019, 13 vegan activists and anti-speciesists broke into a pig farm in Saint-Hyacinthe to protest against raising animals for human consumption. They entered a pig barn where they filmed and protested for nearly seven hours, sitting on the floor in front of the pig enclosures to try to expose their quality of life.

• (1355)

Sûreté du Québec officers had to enter the building to remove them. These 30 people, who were not supposed to be there, then contaminated the premises, which put the health and safety of the herd at risk.

During a press conference in January 2020, the co-owners of the farm in question said that after the incident they had noticed some clinical signs of a disease. After testing was done, they found out they were dealing with the rotavirus, which they had not seen in nearly 40 years.

That is what Ms. Grégoire explained when she testified alongside the president of the UPA, Marcel Groleau, and the president of the Éleveurs de porcs du Québec, David Duval. It should be noted that pigs are very sensitive to stress and when they are in captivity their environment needs to be controlled both in terms of temperature and noise.

This type of break-in obviously has potentially disastrous biosecurity consequences for pig farms and puts the animals' health, safety and well-being at risk. Access to the pig barns is limited and controlled, to prevent the potential introduction of external diseases, viruses or bacteria, such as the swine respiratory disease, or SRD, porcine epidemic diarrhea, or PED, the rotavirus, which is a viral disease of a pig's small intestine, or African swine fever, which has ravaged pig populations in Asia.

Farmers whose herds are infected as a result of a break-in end up having to spend a significant amount of money. This event was quite unsettling for the animals. One of the owners, Ms. Grégoire, reported that the activists had put water in their generator's diesel tank, tampered with the building's thermostats and left the barn

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doors open. The temperature in the barn dropped to -12°C. The noise and stress even caused the sows to get up abruptly and then kill the piglets when they lay back down. Anyone who has spent any amount of time on a pig farm could have foreseen this outcome.

The UPA had to seek an injunction against the activist group to prohibit it from coming within 500 metres of a farm without the owner's consent. That injunction was urgently granted because the group was planning other stunts.

When I read the request for injunction, it was worrisome to see that the risk of criminal conviction clearly did nothing to curb the behaviour of the individuals in that group and did not have the desired deterrent effect. Farmers in my region are therefore extremely concerned, because the activists do not seem to regret their actions. The fear that it will happen again is legitimate.

One month after the incidents in Saint-Hyacinthe, UPA representatives made a public announcement with the owners of the farm to show their support and denounce this type of practice, which is clearly becoming more and more common. Marcel Groleau even said that "the acts committed seek to impose an ideology through defamation, propaganda, threats and fear. ... Society strongly condemns this type of abuse, for which there must be serious consequences".

The Bloc Québécois values freedom of expression highly, as we recently demonstrated. People absolutely have the right to protest and make themselves heard and share their vision of how things should be. However, we cannot allow that to take the form of illegal activities that can harm both farmers and animals.

I mentioned the Porgreg farm earlier, which raises pigs, obviously, and, without downplaying the consequences for other animal species, pigs in particular are genetically very similar to humans. Their sensitivity to stress is very high. The incident stressed the animals. In addition to exposure to contaminants and changes in temperature, light and noise, as well as the commotion of the tussle with police, the pigs are in danger of getting sick.

That is unfortunately what happened at the Porgreg farm. The owners hold the activists responsible for the fact that the farm has been dealing with a rotavirus outbreak since late December 2019. They told the media that none of their pigs had had that disease for nearly 40 years. They also said, and I quote, "Our sows are feverish and sick. Since they entered our hog barn, our maternal mortality rate has increased considerably." They also pointed out that several visits from veterinarians have been required, and that also means additional costs. According to one of the owners, the stress of seeing activists breaking into farms will cause a lot of anxiety for many Quebec livestock producers.

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Let us now look at the views of both supporters and opponents. Obviously, most producer federations are in favour of this measure. These include the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, the Canadian Pork Council, the Chicken Farmers of Canada, the Egg Farmers of Canada, the Turkey Farmers of Canada, the Canadian Meat Council and, of course, the Union des producteurs agricoles.

From the animal rights activists' perspective, the legislation does not go far enough and should punish offending producers and processors when the living conditions of animals are deemed to be poor.

Many people go as far as to discount the biosecurity argument, believing that the meat industry hides behind all kinds of bogus arguments to the effect that surprise visits from activists to slaughterhouses can create contamination problems or endanger the lives of animals.

● (1400)

In closing—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Order. The hon. member for Beauce.

Mr. Richard Lehoux (Beauce, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am honoured to rise today in support of Bill C-205, an act to amend the Health of Animals Act, the private member's bill introduced by the member for Foothills.

Much like my friend and colleague, the member for Foothills, I have a profound love and respect for the agriculture and agri-food sector. I am a strong supporter of farmers and ranchers. They get up at dawn every single day to do a vital job and feed Canadians.

This important bill proposes some essential amendments to the existing Health of Animals Act. I do not think the existing legislation does enough to protect farmers and ranchers from people unlawfully entering their farms. Bill C-205 would make it an offence to enter farms and ranches, in order to protect livestock and other animals from trespassers who could intentionally or unintentionally cause damage to them or to their owner.

The existing law provides a framework to control diseases and toxic substances that may affect animals or that may be transmitted by animals to humans. However, the requirements and prohibitions apply to the owner of the animals. The act does not currently cover people who unlawfully enter a farm, and that is what the bill would amend.

It is important to note that the purpose of the bill is not to limit a person's ability to protest peacefully, but to add guidelines, and especially rules, that individuals must follow when it comes to animal welfare and cross-contamination, which can have disastrous consequences for the health of an animal or the ability of an owner to keep their herd safe.

As hon. members surely know, animal rights activists have organized many protests on farms and at some processing plants. As my colleagues have mentioned, these protests are not limited to certain segments of the agriculture sector or certain parts of the country. In the Saint-Hyacinthe region, many problems were caused by activists who broke into pig farms and caused irreparable harm to the animals and their owner.

In this case, in December 2019, protesters broke into the pig farm in the early hours of the morning with the intention of causing a disturbance. The activists entered the pig barn and caused severe damage to the facilities. The farm owner reported losing over 500 pigs as a result of the contamination. Two different biological infections were subsequently detected on that farm. Not only did the protesters cause the pigs serious health problems, but they also traumatized the animals by taking pictures with ultra-bright flashes and causing the animals to run around the pens, leading to considerable losses. The activists also left the barn doors open and tampered with the building's thermostat, causing additional problems for the farm owner. Members can imagine what happens when the doors of a farm building are left open in the middle of December. For the protesters, this intrusion led to nothing more than a slap on the wrist. The police even told the farmer that there was nothing they could do to keep the protesters off the property. This incident was definitely a premeditated attack, since all but one or two of the protesters were not even local residents.

That was just one of the many protests that took place in Quebec. They are happening far too often, and they are happening across the country. I am worried things will get worse if nothing is done. When activists trespass on farms and farm buildings, they are probably not aware of the consequences of their actions. First and foremost, they are endangering livestock, farmers, their families and workers.

I know my colleagues will agree that our farmers, ranchers and processors care deeply about food safety, animal health and the environment. They will also agree that mental health and anxiety in the agricultural sector are reaching crisis levels and that we are already seeing a significant impact during the pandemic in particular.

● (1405)

It is essential to protect Canada's food supply. Viruses like African swine flu are a real threat to our agriculture. These threats to biosecurity can decimate cattle herds and devastate our industry and our economy. An epidemic in Canada would devastate our farms and immediately close export markets, paralyzing the pork industry and countless other sectors.

Private Members' Business

Enhancing biosecurity measures as they relate to trespassers is a move that is supported by farmers and ranchers, as well as food processors and various farming organizations. Recently, a growing number of individuals have been breaking into farms and food processing centres. This could lead to major biosecurity problems for the animals and the people who work with them. Even the Minister of Agriculture has spoken out against these protests by extremist groups on dairy farms, saying that her department was concerned about this.

I would like to share with the House some of the perspectives of the stakeholders who completely agree with the proposed changes in this bill.

According to Benoît Fontaine, chair of Chicken Farmers of Canada or CFC, Canada's 2,877 chicken farmers take pride in raising safe food for Canadians. CFC's raised by a Canadian farmer on-farm food safety program enforces strict biosecurity measures on every farm across the country to limit the spread of disease. He believes that the proposed legislation will further strengthen the Health of Animals Act to ensure trespassers are prosecuted for their actions, while preventing the potential spread of disease.

For his part, Pierre Lampron, president of the Dairy Farmers of Canada, said that Canadian dairy farmers are committed to giving their herds the best care and respecting the highest animal welfare, food quality and biosecurity standards. Mr. Lampron believes that the amendments proposed by the member for Foothills to the Health of Animals Act will better protect the health and safety of animals.

As we can see, the industry generally supports these important changes. The Conservative Party hopes to have the support of the other parties to implement this bill as soon as possible. We have the sense that many of the recent incidents in Canada are not organized by individuals but by groups of activists who encourage people to break the law in some cases. This amendment would serve as a deterrent to these groups by doubling current prison sentences and maximum fines.

In conclusion, Bill C-205 will protect the biosecurity of farm operations and food processing plants, where the protection of animals and workers must remain the priority. I hope that all members of the House understand the importance of this bill and that they will support it when the time comes to a vote in the House. This is not in any way a partisan bill; it is just common sense.

We must do what we can to protect our agri-food sector. As we heard in previous speeches and in my presentation, protecting our national food supply is extremely important. It is imperative that the federal government intervene to ensure proper regulations and enforcement with respect to this issue. We must put in place guidelines for the provinces, on which they will work with all stakeholders—

• (1410)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Order. Unfortunately, I have to interrupt the hon. member.

[*English*]

I will now give the hon. member for Foothills the right to reply.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Madam Speaker, I think it is very fitting that I have the opportunity to speak to my private member's bill, Bill C-205, on the week that we celebrated Canada's Agriculture Day. It means a lot when we look at the bills that have come forward. I want to congratulate my colleague from Northumberland—Peterborough South for the passing at second reading of his private member's bill, Bill C-206, which would exempt all farm fuels from the carbon tax. It is a huge message we are sending to Canadian farmers: We are advocating for them and working on issues that are important to them.

I want to take the short time I have remaining in this debate to thank my colleagues who have stepped up and spoken to my bill, and certainly my colleague from Beauce and my colleague from Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, who spoke in favour of the legislation today. It is important that we talk about how this legislation builds on the very robust biosecurity measures we already have in Canada.

I also want to thank my colleagues in the New Democratic Party, especially the agriculture critic, who spoke about another very important issue in our first hour of debate. I heard it raised again today. It is the issue of whistle-blowers. Nothing in the bill does anything to prevent whistle-blowers from doing what I believe, and what many Canadians believe, is a very important job. Someone with a lawful reason for being on a farm, like a farm employee, who sees something that is concerning or is not up to standard should absolutely take the opportunity to raise the issue with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency or their employer to ensure that our farm animals are protected.

I also want to thank the Bloc's agriculture critic, who talked about another important issue: the mental health impact on Canadian farmers. The Tschetter family, in my riding, went to their barns at 7:30 in the morning and saw 40 protesters in one of their barns. It was shocking, and it has had a profound impact on them. I know it still impacts them to this day.

My colleague from Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot spoke today about a very recent issue at a farm in his riding, where 30 protesters came onto a hog operation. They did not understand the biosecurity protocols that are in place. That is exactly what this legislation is trying to address. As a result of the protesters being on that hog farm, the farmer has now seen rotavirus in his herd. He had not seen it on his farm in more than 40 years. These issues are very real, and they do impact Canadian farmers. It could have been African swine fever, which would have devastated that farm and spread across Canada.

Private Members' Business

This is a \$14-billion industry to Canada. A protester or an activist, unknowingly, does not understand the biosecurity protocols that are in place, and they are very strict. Any of us who have gone to visit a farm in our riding or a neighbouring riding understands the things we must do before we go onto farms, and certainly into barns or processing plants. Protesters and activists many times do not understand the protocols that are in place. I know they do not do it on purpose, but sometimes they do not understand the consequences of their actions. They could be bringing in African swine fever, BSE, foot-and-mouth disease or avian flu. All of these things have an impact.

As I said, we saw it at the hog farm in Quebec. However, we also saw mink farms in B.C. have to euthanize their animals because of COVID-19. We have seen the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on our Canadian economy and what has happened. Imagine a similar virus or disease came onto a farm. It could have a similar impact throughout our agriculture sector. That is what the legislation is trying to prevent. It is not a statement against protesting. Protesting is an important part of our society, but people can do that on public property, outside of the farm. This is about when they cross the line and go onto private property. That is what the bill is trying to address.

I want to thank the commodity groups and farmers across Canada I have worked with, including the Tschetter family, to develop this legislation and bring it forward. It would not have been possible without their support and encouragement.

I ask that all members of the House support Bill C-205 to get it to committee for further discussion. I hope they will all vote in favour of it. I want us to send a message to farmers and farm families that we are here for them, we understand what they are going through, we are here for their financial and mental health, and we are here to protect the sanctity of our food supply.

• (1415)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): It being 1:15 p.m., the time provided for debate has expired.

Accordingly, the question is on the motion.

[*Translation*]

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.

[*English*]

Mr. John Barlow: Madam Speaker, I would like a recorded vote.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Pursuant to order made on Monday, January 25, the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, March 10, at the expiry of the time provided for oral questions.

Before the House rises, I would like to say that this is the last day at the Table for one of our clerks, Patrice Martin, who will be retiring soon. He began his career with the House in 1992, and, over the years, has served in various roles in Committees, the Table Research Branch, the Journals Branch and the International and Interparliamentary Affairs Directorate.

Patrice, thank you for the tremendous support you gave parliamentarians throughout your career. We wish you all the best for a long and happy retirement. I would also like to thank you on my own behalf.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

[*English*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until Monday, March 8, at 11 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 2:17 p.m.)

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