



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

43rd PARLIAMENT, 2nd SESSION

House of Commons Debates

Official Report
(Hansard)

Volume 150 No. 079

Tuesday, April 13, 2021

Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



CONTENTS

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

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, April 13, 2021

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*English*]

STRENGTHENING ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION FOR A HEALTHIER CANADA ACT

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): moved for leave to introduce Bill C-28, An Act to amend the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999, to make related amendments to the Food and Drugs Act and to repeal the Perfluorooctane Sulfonate Virtual Elimination Act.

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

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the third report of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development, entitled “The Road Ahead: Encouraging the Production and Purchase of Zero-Emission Vehicles in Canada”.

[*Translation*]

This study, which is extremely relevant in today's context where we are making the transition to a greener economy, was proposed by the member for Repentigny.

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

I would also like to present, in both official languages, the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development in relation to Bill C-204, an act to amend the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999 (final disposal of plastic waste). The committee has studied the bill and has decided to report the bill back to the House with amendments.

[*English*]

HEALTH

Mr. Ron McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the following seven reports of the Standing Committee on Health.

The fifth report is entitled “Bill C-237, An Act to Establish a National Framework for Diabetes”. The committee has studied the bill and has decided to report the bill back to the House with an amendment.

The sixth report is “Request for Government Response to the 23rd Report from the 42nd Parliament, 1st Session”, entitled “A Diabetes Strategy for Canada”.

The seventh report is “Request for Government Response to the 24th report from the 42nd Parliament, 1st Session”, entitled “Tackling the Problem Head-on: Sports-Related Concussions in Canada”.

The eight report is “Request for Government Response to the 26th Report from the 42nd Parliament, 1st Session”, entitled “Impacts of Methamphetamine Abuse in Canada”.

The ninth report is “Request for Government Response to the 27th Report from the 42nd Parliament, 1st Session”, entitled “Get Canada's Youth Moving!”

The 10th report is “Request for Government Response to the 28th Report from the 42nd Parliament, 1st Session”, entitled “The Health of LGBTQIA2 Communities in Canada”.

The 11th report is “Request for Government Response to the 29th Report from the 42nd Parliament, 1st Session”, entitled “Violence Facing Health Care Workers in Canada”.

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to its sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, 10th and 11th reports.

* * *

• (1010)

FOREIGN INFLUENCE REGISTRY ACT

Mr. Kenny Chiu (Steveston—Richmond East, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-282, An Act to establish the Foreign Influence Registry.

Routine Proceedings

He said: Mr. Speaker, we are all aware of the instances of foreign interference in Canada and the threat of further intimidation and corruption. For years, we have heard the dangers of such foreign interference, cautioned by Canada's National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians and the Canadian Security Intelligence Service. Beyond calls for action and attention, the government has suggested no other plan to counter interference operations.

Today, I present my private member's bill, an act to establish a foreign influence registry. This is directly inspired by Australia, our Five Eyes ally, in its efforts to address its own problems with foreign interference. This bill is only the first step in improving domestic safety measures. I pray our nation will come together to recognize and increase vigilance to shine a light on harmful interference from abroad.

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

* * *

FIGHT AGAINST FOOD WASTE ACT

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-283, An Act to establish National Food Waste Awareness Day and to provide for the development of a national strategy to reduce food waste in Canada.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am incredibly proud to be here today tabling my bill, an act to establish a food waste awareness day and to provide for the development of a national strategy to reduce food waste in Canada.

I want to thank the member for Cowichan—Malahat—Langford for seconding my bill today, and I also want to knowledge Ruth Ellen Brosseau, who tabled this bill in the last Parliament.

Every year, about 11.2 million metric tons of edible food is wasted in Canada, costing more than \$49 billion. This waste goes into landfills, and about 20% of Canada's methane emissions come from landfills. A day set aside in Canada to recognize the impacts of food waste on the environment is a strong step in developing awareness and in creating meaningful solutions.

The other part of this bill is to develop a national strategy to address food waste. Currently, 79% of food items that can be rescued and distributed are perishable. Having a national strategy to address this is imperative. When over four million Canadians do not have enough food to eat every day, having a national strategy is a better way of planning to keep people fed.

I want to thank the many local organizations in North Island—Powell River that support this bill.

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

* * *

DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRY ACT

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-284, An Act to amend the Department of Industry Act (financial assistance).

She said: Mr. Speaker, this pandemic has required extraordinary support for business and industry, which will be an obligation on

current and future taxpayers. An example, of course, is the airline announcement of yesterday.

While we support many of the measures, government transparency and accountability are essential. My private member's bill, an act to amend the Department of Industry Act, financial assistance, would require annual publication of all grants, loans and contributions that total over \$100,000. I picked \$100,000 so that we would not be capturing all the small businesses that were seeking much-needed support.

Parliamentarians and all Canadians have a right to know the status, terms and conditions, especially for repayable loans. This bill is not only about greater transparency and accountability, but it is also about our ability to scrutinize the effectiveness of spending and, more importantly, the ethics of the spending.

Certainly, I want to thank the member for Carleton for seconding this bill, and I think it should have the support of all members in the House for us to do the critical work that we need to do.

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

* * *

● (1015)

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

INDUSTRY, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I move that the third report of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology, presented on Friday, November 27, 2020, be concurred in.

The Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Speaker: The question is on the motion.

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

The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, I would request a recorded vote.

The Speaker: Pursuant to the order made on Monday, January 25, the division stands deferred until later this day, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

[Translation]

PETITIONS

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present to the House today.

The first petition, which has been signed by 101 petitioners, states the following: “Whereas: The Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act sanctions foreign officials responsible for gross human rights violations or acts of corruption”. The petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada to deploy all legal sanctions, including freezing of assets and barring of entry to Canada, against the perpetrators of these crimes.

The second petition, which has been signed by 203 petitioners, also has to do with the Magnitsky Law. The petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada to apply all sanctions, including freezing of assets and barring of entry to Canada, as well as refusing visitor visas and permanent resident visas, to the perpetrators of persecution in China.

[English]

FORTRESS REAL DEVELOPMENTS

Mr. Doug Shipley (Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise today and present my first petition since becoming an MP. This one was started by Rose Ray in the city of Barrie. Rose was part of a group of people, and this petition has been signed by over 1,200 people who invested and lost their life savings. They worked hard for their money and they have lost it all, many losing everything they have worked for over their lives, so they have started this petition.

The petition is calling for an independent public forensic inquiry to investigate the financial records and assets of Fortress and principals, its brokerages, executives and trustees, including Sorrenti Law; ensure that the RCMP integrated market enforcement teams have the resources and funds to continue their investigation; review the Standing up for Victims of White Collar Crime Act and increase the current punishment and imprisonment if the fraud exceeds \$1 million; and mandate communication across all financial Canadian regulators to reduce loopholes and protect investors.

COVID-19

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I present a petition started by a number of my constituents, but with wide support across Canada.

It deals with the critical ongoing health issue of thousands of Canadians who experienced COVID-19 and are now considered not infectious, but they certainly are not recovered. They are sometimes referred to as long haulers. Sometimes people refer to the illnesses they suffer as long COVID. The petitioners urge the House to consider the many ways in which they are not able to access help or benefits. One of the problems, of course, is referring to someone who no longer has active COVID as recovered. It is completely inaccurate.

The petitioners ask, in brief, for the following things. They ask that the Government of Canada recognize this is a health condition with serious implications, and that it be labelled as such so that

Routine Proceedings

people who are suffering have somewhere to go to identify their problem; they ask that there be a registry so that Canadians from coast to coast can be accurately counted, and so we know the extent of the problem; they ask for research into how they can be treated and helped; and they ask for clinics for people who are suffering, because the health effects range from mental confusion and significant damage to organs to being unable to work for months. In fact, some people have been unable to work for more than a year at this point.

The petitioners ask the Government of Canada to move, to help and to provide much-needed medical assistance and financial support to people suffering from COVID many months after they are no longer infectious.

● (1020)

PEFFERLAW

Mr. Scot Davidson (York—Simcoe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, have you ever been to Pefferlaw? We would love to have you stop in. It is a great small town in the great riding of York—Simcoe.

I rise today to present a petition on behalf of the residents of Pefferlaw. The petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada to rehabilitate the historic Pefferlaw Dam and to ensure the Pefferlaw River flows again. Built in the 1820s, the Pefferlaw Dam has a cultural, historical, environmental, economic and recreational significance to Pefferlaw's residents and visitors.

[Translation]

YEMEN

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I am pleased to present three petitions.

The first petition was signed by hundreds of people who are concerned about the civil war and the humanitarian crisis in Yemen. The people of Yemen have been suffering since 2015. The petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada to encourage both sides in the conflict to seek a long-term, peaceful and democratic resolution and to provide another life-saving allocation to support the humanitarian response in Yemen.

Routine Proceedings

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition concerns a group of immigration applicants who have been living in Quebec for some time. Wait times have become extremely long, exceeding 30 months in some cases. This situation is putting them at risk and making their lives extremely difficult. The group is asking the Government of Canada to grant a bridging open work permit to persons who have applied for permanent residence in Quebec until a final decision has been made. The group is also asking the Government of Canada to include the delay in wait times for permanent residence in the citizenship calculation, to propose reasonable compensation and to give them a realistic completion date and make a commitment to meet it.

The third petition concerns Mamadou Konaté, who arrived in Quebec in 2016. He worked as an orderly at a CHSLD, a long-term care facility, and contracted COVID-19 but is now facing deportation. Hundreds of people are calling on the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship to lift the deportation order against Mamadou Konaté and to grant him a work permit and a temporary resident permit pending the granting of permanent residence.

[English]

SEX SELECTION

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to present a petition today signed by 440 individuals who are calling upon the government to pass a Criminal Code prohibition of sex-selective abortion. Their rationale is that sex-selection abortion is legal in Canada as Canada has absolutely no restrictions on abortion. We are the only democratic country that does not. The only other is North Korea.

Sex-selective abortion is antithetical to our commitment to equality between men and women. A 2019 DART & Maru/Blue poll conducted for the National Post showed that 84% of Canadians believed it should be illegal to have an abortion if the family does not want the child to be a certain sex. International organizations such as the World Health Organization, United Nations Women and the United Nations Children's Fund have identified unequal sex ratios at birth as a growing problem internationally. As well, Canada's health care profession recognizes that sex-selection abortion is a problem in Canada.

• (1025)

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to be presenting four petitions in the House today.

The first petition highlights the ongoing genocide of Uighurs and other Turkic Muslims in East Turkestan and China. It calls on the Government of Canada to respond to that by recognizing the genocide and by holding all of those responsible accountable through the Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act: the Magnitsky Act.

The House of Commons has undertaken this action of recognition, but there is still much more work to do, including directly by the government.

ETHIOPIA

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition highlights the situation in the Tigray region of Ethiopia. Recent armed conflict between the TPLF and Ethiopian government forces, as well as the involvement of Eritrean forces, has led to significant human rights abuses as well as humanitarian costs.

This petition has received a very strong response. It calls on the government to step up its engagement with that situation and to support investigation, humanitarian access and independent monitoring; to be engaged in the long term to promote short, medium and long-term elections monitoring in Ethiopia; and to engage directly with the Ethiopian and Eritrean governments on the conflict.

HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the third petition highlights Bill S-204, proposed in the other place by Senator Ataullahjan. This bill would make it a criminal offence for a person to go abroad and receive an organ for which there has not been consent.

Petitioners want to see the government pass this important bill. It has been over 10 years in the making and it received unanimous consent at different times from this and the other place, but has not yet been able to pass in identical form in the same Parliament. Petitioners are hoping this Parliament will be the one that finally gets the work done.

CONVERSION THERAPY

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fourth and final petition I am tabling today is with respect to Bill C-6, the government's conversion therapy bill, which we are scheduled to be debating tomorrow.

Petitioners are supportive of initiatives to ban conversion therapy. However, they are concerned about drafting problems with this bill, in particular the poorly written definition of "conversion therapy" and the fact that, as drafted, the bill would effectively ban many conversations people might enter into that really have nothing to do at all with conversion therapy.

Petitioners want to see the government have the humility to recognize when drafting errors have occurred and to try to build consensus by fixing the definition and then proceeding with a conversion therapy ban.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour and privilege to table two petitions from constituents here in my riding of Nanaimo—Ladysmith.

The first petition outlines a series of human rights abuses sanctioned and perpetrated by officials of the Chinese Communist Party. Petitioners urge the Government of Canada to deploy all legal sanctions against these perpetrators under the Magnitsky Act, including freezing assets and barring entry to Canada.

HEALTH

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition highlights that proactive holistic health practices play an important role in building immune system strength and help to keep people healthy, and that there is not enough focus on proactive health and wellness care.

Petitioners request the Government of Canada increase the focus on educating and empowering Canadians on holistic approaches to optimize and maintain their natural immunity and well-being. They call on the government to include proactive health and wellness care practices in the Canada Health Act and enhance access to these services.

ANCHORAGES

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to present petition e-2985.

The over 1,200 petitioners who signed this recognize four basic things. Number one, that Transport Canada's interim protocol on the use of B.C. southern anchorages has been largely ignored and not enforced; two, that there is a very real risk of environmental disaster to the surrounding marine environment from the impact of these vessels, which have been shown to drag their anchors; three, that the federal government sees value in protecting this sensitive marine habitat through the establishment of a national marine conservation area; and four, that first nations in the region were not consulted, nor did they give their free, prior or informed consent for the establishment of the anchorages. Therefore, the petitioners are asking that the Government of Canada support Bill C-250, which calls for an end to these anchorages.

Finally, this petition would not have been possible without the efforts of Chris Straw, who tragically passed away in a workplace accident on March 16. I want to take this time to express my very sincere condolences to his friends and family, and recognize what a wonderful person he was for his effort in bringing this issue for our region.

* * *

● (1030)

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Government Orders

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CRIMINAL CODE

The House resumed from March 24 consideration of the motion that Bill C-22, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with my good friend, the member for Beaches—East York.

I am speaking to members from the traditional lands of the Mississaugas of the Credit in Scarborough—Rouge Park. I want to, first and foremost, thank the Minister of Justice and his team for their hard work in bringing this bill together. I will be speaking in support of Bill C-22. There are three basic elements to it. First, it repeals mandatory minimum penalties of imprisonment for 14 such offences. Second, it allows for conditional sentence orders to be expanded and, third, it requires police and prosecutors to consider all other measures for simple possession of drugs, such as diversion and addiction treatment programs for those who may be charged.

I have worked extensively within the criminal justice system as a youth worker. I used to run a youth organization here in Scarborough called the Canadian Tamil Youth Development Centre. During my tenure there, I met with dozens of young people who had been charged both criminally and under the YCJA. My experience led me to believe that the criminal justice system has a profound impact, particularly on racialized youth, and in the case of Scarborough, particularly Black youth.

The experience goes beyond my work at the Canadian Tamil Youth Development Centre. It goes into my work as a lawyer when I started practising, as well as into when we developed the national anti-racism strategy in 2019. As I went across the country, community after community spoke to the disproportionate impact of the criminal justice system on young people, particularly Black, indigenous and racialized youth. I believe Bill C-22 addresses, in part, some of the concerns that stem from the imposition of mandatory minimum sentences, particularly since 2006 when it was brought forward by the previous Conservative government.

My experience with young people leads me to believe that they are often caught in a moment when they were in the wrong place at the wrong time. They may have been with the wrong set of friends or they may have just acted stupidly. This gets them into the criminal justice system. It is an on-ramp that eventually leads to greater charges, in part because they are also being surveilled by several police services.

I want to highlight the recent case of someone I know quite well now. His name is Rohan George. He was admitted to the bar of the Law Society of Ontario just last year. He served eight years for manslaughter. He talks about his life experiences as a young person who went to St. Mother Teresa school in my riding of Scarborough—Rouge Park.

Government Orders

It started when he was about 14 with a stolen bottle of alcohol and a failure to attend court. This eventually escalated into something much more serious. This speaks to the failure of the criminal justice system to ensure that there are adequate supports and off-ramps for these young people. This young man served his time. He served eight years, went to law school and did thousands of hours of community service. I know him because he was working at an organization called the South Asian Autism Awareness Centre. I never knew that he had a criminal conviction and he was finishing his time.

I want to quote a line from the Law Society panel. It said, “The concept of rehabilitation is based on the capacity in human nature for someone to recognize their mistakes, to make amends, to correct the course of their lives, and to become productive and positive members of their community.” I believe that young people, particularly those from racialized communities who have been charged, are often not given the support that they need to get out of the criminal justice system.

• (1035)

As a member of Parliament, I have seen many cases that have come to our office where there may have been criminality that has escalated to removal from Canada because of immigration status. I believe the supports were not there when young people were around and getting into trouble for them to get off on these off-ramps.

The work I did, particularly with young Tamil men in Scarborough, has proven to me the need for community intervention and investments into the community. At that time, the work we did stemmed from the national crime prevention strategy funding of \$50,000. We were able to help hundreds of young people avoid the criminal justice system. Those who did enter into it were supported to get out, often through education.

Since being an MP, I had the chance to visit institutions such as Millhaven and Beaver Creek. One does not have to spend too much time there before one realizes there is a gross misrepresentation within these institutions. It is partly because when one goes in, the officers, those who help people enter the facility, are primarily white, but once one goes into the facility it is racialized Black and indigenous people who occupy the cells. Once one talks to people, and I think as MPs we have the prerogative to speak to these individuals, one soon finds out there is an incredible story, which is the failure of the system, when one digs deeper into each and every one of those cases.

In 2019, I had the opportunity to welcome the Minister of Justice to Scarborough—Rouge Park. There are many organizations in Scarborough as well as around the GTA that do a great amount of work supporting youth. I want to recognize their work. Fernie Youth Services is an organization that provides an off-ramp right here in Scarborough—Rouge Park, as well as the Canadian Association of Black Lawyers, which has been really vocal in its opposition to the impacts of mandatory minimum sentences, particularly on Black youth. TAIBU Community Health Centre, the Zero Gun Violence Movement, the Urban Rez Solutions, Urban Alliance on Race Relations are some of the organizations that were able to meet with the Minister of Justice and outline the disproportionate effects

mandatory minimums and other measures have on young people within our community.

The numbers speak for themselves and I want to give members some highlights.

Between 2007 and 2008, 39% of all Black offenders and 20% of all indigenous offenders were admitted into federal custody for MMP offences. That is an astonishing number. When we look at the proportion of indigenous offenders admitted with an offence punishable by an MMP, it has increased from 14% in 2007-08 to 26%. It has essentially doubled in the decade from 2007 to 2017. Of the offenders convicted of a Controlled Drugs and Substances Act section 6 offence, 42% were Black. The proportion of Black offenders increased from 33% in 2007-08 to 43% in 2016-17.

In 1999-2000, indigenous people represented 2% of the Canadian adult population, but accounted for 17% of admissions to provincial and federal sentenced custody. In 2020, despite this population growing to 5% of the overall adult population, 30% of male inmates and 42% of female inmates were indigenous.

• (1040)

The numbers are quite clear and show that there is a need for this to be addressed. This is systemic racism that needs to be addressed. I believe—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Unfortunately the hon. member's time is up.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Cowichan—Malahat—Langford.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Madam Speaker, I appreciate my hon. colleague's speech, but I am going to call the Liberals out on Bill C-22.

There are absolutely some helpful measures, and I appreciate that we are tackling some important reforms to the justice system, but let me be very clear, a declaration of principles is not a substitute for decriminalization. Warnings and referrals are not a substitute for decriminalization. The problem with giving police officers this kind of power is that their discretion varies, depending on what province and what city they are in.

Could the hon. member tell us why, despite all of the evidence from so many organizations, including the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, the Liberals are not being bold with this reform to our justice system and getting rid of section 4 in our Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, making it fully decriminalized?

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Madam Speaker, I believe these are very important measures to address issues of systemic racism.

When I was going across the country to develop the national end to racism strategy, it was evident across the board that mandatory minimum sentences, in particular, had a disproportionate effect on indigenous and Black communities. I believe this is an important step in that direction.

Government Orders

Obviously there is more to do. There is more to do on, overall, addressing systemic racism, but in this particular case, I think this is a very important step that does take us in the right direction.

Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his work at the community level to support youth and recidivism rates.

I do have some concerns about this bill, however. My understanding is that it eliminates prison time if somebody robs someone with a gun or fires a gun at someone with the intent to harm them. Further, it eliminates mandatory minimums if a criminal sexually assaults someone or kidnaps someone, and it allows them to serve that time on house arrest.

I am very unsettled and think this would make communities very unsafe. It also does not adequately ensure punishment for someone who robs someone with a gun or intends to hurt them with a gun.

I would appreciate it if the member could comment on that.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Madam Speaker, the member's interpretation of this bill is incorrect.

There are 14 mandatory minimum sentences where the mandatory component would be taken out. It would still leave discretion with our highly qualified judges to make the determination. In terms of sexual offences, they are not included in this bill. As well, any serious offences that are highlighted would continue to have mandatory minimums.

The member's comments on this measure are incorrect. I would invite her to review the changes to the mandatory minimum provisions as outlined in the bill.

• (1045)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am concerned.

I have experience working with community organizations that focus on delinquency prevention. My concern is this: What ever happened to a change that would target basic prevention needs to avoid minimum sentencing?

I would like to hear my colleague's comments on that. When will there be a clear commitment to education, monitoring and prevention for these crimes that lend themselves to changing the bill?

[*English*]

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Madam Speaker, the changes to the particular provisions of the criminal justice system are just one aspect of a broader set of measures that our government has introduced over the years, including the Canada child benefit. This has directly taken over 300,000 children out of poverty, which in my opinion is one of the major factors in reducing overall crime. In fact, the social determinants of health have impacted many communities, particularly the racialized communities.

I believe the measures taken by the government are an important step in addressing the systemic issues that my friend opposite has highlighted.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am in support of Bill C-22. Bill C-22, for those interested in the subject, comes in three parts. It would address mandatory minimum sentences in a serious way; it would restore judicial discretion as it relates to conditional sentencing and an emphasis on restorative justice; and the third piece is an emphasis on treating drug use as a health issue, and I will have more to say about that in a bit.

I want to start by focusing on mandatory minimum sentences with a simple premise that is overwhelmingly supported by the evidence, which is that mandatory minimum sentences do not work. They are ineffective; they do not deter crime. I am the member of Parliament for Beaches—East York, and we were deeply impacted by the Danforth shooting a few years ago. If mandatory minimum sentences could prevent another Danforth shooting from happening, I would support them, but they would not, and instead they disproportionately and negatively impact racialized Canadians. We see the numbers. We see, of Black Canadians, who represent 3% of the population, 9% are imprisoned. We see, of indigenous people, who represent 5% of the population, 30% are imprisoned. There are obviously instances where crimes are so abhorrent that retribution demands a lifetime in prison, and that obviously accords with our sense of justice, but we have seen cases before our courts, and there are obviously any number of hypotheticals that lawyers will devise, where mandatory minimum sentences do not fit the crime and judicial discretion is important. We have seen courts render these mandatory minimums unconstitutional because of their unfairness. They are not only ineffective, but unfair.

It is the same with conditional sentencing, that notion of effectiveness but also fairness. Punishments and remedies need to take into account context. There are reasons of fairness, and I mentioned reasons of fairness as it relates to racial justice, but also I have already heard a question from a Conservative colleague emphasizing public safety, so let us talk about public safety. Unless offenders are sentenced to life or something close to it, they will, as a simple fact, be released into our community. If we do not focus on restorative justice, rehabilitation and reintegration, we put our communities at greater risk. The evidence is there. It is as simple as that. If we care about public safety first and foremost, we ought to care about restorative justice.

Government Orders

I want to move to, for the remainder of my comments, the third part of Bill C-22, which is the reform, in a more sensible way, of our drug policy laws. This is roundly accepted by anyone who has studied the issue, but the so-called “war on drugs” is an abject failure. I will read from the Global Commission on Drug Policy. They write, “the evidence overwhelmingly demonstrates that repressive strategies will not solve the drug problem, and that the war on drugs has not, and cannot, be won.” The long-term answer is regulation, that all drugs should be, in many cases, strictly regulated according to their respective harms. Caffeine is different from morphine and they should be regulated, of course, differently. Again, this is the view of the Global Commission on Drug Policy, a commission made up of experts and former world leaders who have been deeply impacted by the failings of the war on drugs. They write:

Regulation and management of risky products and behaviors is a key function of government authorities across the world. It is the norm in almost all areas of policy and law – except drug policy. ... In the field of public health, when compared with policy responses to other risky behaviors – such as dangerous sports, unhealthy diets or unsafe sex – it is punitive drug prohibitions that are the “radical” policy response, not regulation. Drugs should be regulated not because they are safe, but precisely because they are risky.

We are not going to get there tomorrow, so on the road to that goal, let us first take stock of where we are and where we will go from here, realistically. In taking stock, we can look over the last five or six years. We have as a government regulated cannabis, a real model for the world. We have expanded harm reduction options, including safe consumption sites across this country to save lives. We are in the midst of an opioid crisis, and we know that the benefits of safe consumption sites have been proven and that they save lives. We have also increased money for treatment options for the provinces.

● (1050)

We have implemented safer supply pilot initiatives, including here in the east end. South Riverdale just received funding to renew its safe supply pilot for another two years. Again, this will save lives.

We have established new guidelines for prosecutors in relation to the simple possession of drugs and the prosecution of simple possession of drugs. In practice, for those interested in the numbers, from 2014 to 2018 we saw drug possession prosecutions cut in half, from 13,678 to 6,374. Now, we unquestionably need to build on that progress, and that brings me to the third part of Bill C-22, which is nearly a cut-and-paste of a private member's bill I introduced in February of last year.

To go even further back to the fall of 2019, in the midst of an election I was at Hope United Church here in the east end of Toronto and I was asked this question: If you had the opportunity to introduce a private member's bill, what is the first private member's bill would I introduce? I very quickly said that I had had a bill in the last Parliament to reform our drug policy laws and to treat drug use as a health issue, and I would revisit that issue. Early in 2020, I introduced two bills in this Parliament to that end, and I never expected that one of those bills would be picked up so quickly as a government bill in an almost identical fashion.

Now, the bill is not perfect, and I said in the course of my speech on my private member's bill that I would like to see full decriminalization. I do not think that there should be any penalty. There should be no intervention other than a positive, voluntary health intervention for people who use drugs. These are the people we want to help, not the people we want to punish. However, I also recognize the reality of the ability to move a private member's bill forward, and I want to make difference in the law.

The elements in Bill C-22 as they relate to drug policy are not perfect either, but they unquestionably will make a significant difference. The bill would make it virtually impossible for a prosecution of simple possession to proceed successfully. It would not give discretion to police, as they have discretion already, and it would not give discretion to prosecutors, as they have discretion already, but it would significantly fetter their discretion in accordance with evidence-based principles, which are simply worth reading from the bill. These principles are:

- (a) problematic substance use should be addressed primarily as a health and social issue;
- (b) interventions should be founded on evidence-based best practices and should aim to protect the health, dignity and human rights of individuals who use drugs and to reduce harm to those individuals, their families and their communities;
- (c) criminal sanctions imposed in respect of the possession of drugs for personal use can increase the stigma associated with drug use and are not consistent with established public health evidence;
- (d) interventions should address the root causes of problematic substance use...; and
- (e) judicial resources are more appropriately used in relation to offences that pose a risk to public safety.

Now, there are real challenges to police and prosecutorial discretion, but the proposed system, if implemented well, is not so far away from the Portugal model that we hear many advocates of decriminalization call for. In this model, police remain first responders in many cases, and dissuasion panels have significant discretion to mete out different remedies, including some that are quite punitive.

I have spoken with Bryan Larkin, chief of police for the Waterloo area, and he has helped to lead efforts. I want to credit the chiefs of police for really pushing for decriminalization and a more sensible drug policy. I can tell members that with prosecutors and chiefs of police on board, we now unquestionably need resources from the government to expand treatment options and health services for the provinces.

There is a real opportunity with Bill C-22 to make a meaningful difference and to effectively end the war on drugs. My preference would be to simply delete section 4 of the CDSA, which is the preference of the Global Commission on Drug Policy as well.

It is important to remember that of the 250 million people around the world who use drugs, 10% are problematic cases. Therefore, the idea of throwing the book at people and that people who use drugs ought to be criminalized is significantly divorced from the evidence. We need to replace the criminalization and punishment of people who use drugs with the offer of health and treatment services.

● (1055)

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's candour regarding his desire for full decriminalization. It is vital and important. However, he speaks about the fact that he wants full decriminalization and that this bill would fail to achieve that.

I would ask him again why the government does not support full decriminalization for the possession of small amounts of drugs for personal use and the automatic expungement of previous criminal records for personal use possession.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: Madam Speaker, I have called for drug decriminalization since I was elected. I remember the then leader of the Conservative Party getting up in question period and saying that the member for Beaches—East York wants to do this and how dare he. He then asked the Prime Minister what he thought of it. I wondered if I had just indirectly asked the Prime Minister a question in the House of Commons around drug policy.

The answer to the member's question is politics. I am glad the member is calling for full decriminalization and treating drug use as a health issue. I remember when the leader of the NDP called for this in his leadership bid, and I have not heard him speak about this in a significant way since. I hope all leaders, whether they are individual members of Parliament or leaders of our parties, speak up, and speak up loudly, to change the narrative and educate Canadians, because that is the way we will move this forward.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, GP): Madam Speaker, I will ask a question around prosecutorial and police discretion because I still have concerns about the lack of understanding that still exists in Canada.

I am wondering what other additional measures the member would like to see. I am thinking about Bill C-3, which made it mandatory for judges to have training around sexual assault. What about trauma-informed care? What about information around residential school experiences, or about Canadians who continue to be oppressed in our country? Are there additional measures that the member would like to see in this bill?

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: Madam Speaker, I do not know that the measures need to be in this bill. It becomes about the implementation of the bill. I mentioned the need to implement it well, and we are lucky insofar as we have a situation right now where the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police recognizes that the status quo is ineffective and we need to reform our drug laws. Prosecutors and judges recognize this as well.

Government Orders

We are in a good place to move this forward and implement it well, but it does come down to resources, and I would say resources are twofold. One relates to health care and ensuring that, if there are referrals to health care providers, there are resources in the health care system so those treatment options exist. The second relates to training resources for police officers.

To the member's point, I do not think they need to be in the bill per se, but as we implement the bill, they absolutely need to be there. It is great for the chiefs of police to believe in decriminalization, but we need police officers on the ground to have training as well, and that will require resources. If we want to implement this well, the government will need to step up with financial resources to make it happen.

● (1100)

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my colleague and I do not always agree on things, clearly not on his desire for decriminalization, even though I very much support harm reduction in a variety of ways.

Since we have gone ahead with the legalization of marijuana, and we have certainly helped a tremendous number of young people avoid incarceration, what has he seen during this period as to the implications, negative or positive, of the legalization of marijuana?

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: Madam Speaker, I think of the legalization of cannabis in three ways. One is tackling organized crime and undercutting the profits of organized crime. It is not perfect yet, but as the system continues to develop, we will get there, just as we got there with alcohol. Two is that, as The Global Commission on Drug Policy makes clear, a legalized and strictly regulated framework can also reduce access for young people. We need greater education resources in this area, but this can do significant work as well. Three is treating responsible adults as responsible adults. That is what the framework does as well, and I would include myself in that category.

Not all of the policies as they relate to cannabis translate to other drugs. There are some that carry much more serious potential risks, but we need to learn the lessons and to be a world leader on this, not only in enacting real progressive policies domestically, but also in taking that message to the world stage to reform the narcotics control regime internationally.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will split my time with the member for Battle River—Crowfoot.

Government Orders

Conservatives are the party of law and order that ardently stands with victims of crime and their loved ones, and that applies common sense and outcomes-based principles to protect innocent Canadians from violent criminals who would harm others. Conservatives also take a practical approach and acknowledge that, of course, many offenders will be released back into society. There is a real need to prepare those offenders for release so they do not fall back into a life of crime, as seen in the good work of the member for Tobique—Mactaquac in his Bill C-228, which aims to set a federal framework to reduce recidivism.

However, Canadians also do not want the justice system to be a constantly revolving door. Common sense must prevail for the common good. Canadians, victims of crime and their families deserve to live freely without fear in Canadian society. When violent criminals seek to take that away or revictimize them, the government has a role in ensuring the laws and systems in place are designed to prevent it. The only thing worse than a government that fails in this duty is a government that actually promotes conditions that will ultimately lead to, or frankly guarantee, that violent criminals will strike again.

Bill C-22 gives great consideration to the relief of criminals and offenders, but it is missing any substantive policy or action to care for, protect, or prevent victims of violent crime in Canada. In fact, Bill C-22 would reduce the penalties for many violent crimes, some of which disproportionately affect the most vulnerable in Canada.

The first thing Bill C-22 does is build on the Liberals' "guns for gangs only" bill, Bill C-21, which targets law-abiding licensed firearms owners, retailers and even hobbyists who play airsoft and paintball. What is missing from Bill C-21 is a strategy to deal with the root cause of shooting deaths in Canada cities, criminal gangs with illegally smuggled guns.

In fact, Bill C-21 does nothing to protect public safety or victims from violent gun crime and criminal gangs. It lays a heavy hand on law-abiding Canadians who already follow the rules, but takes a hands-off approach to the very criminals and gangs who should obviously be the targets of public safety policy.

Bill C-22 takes the hands-off approach even further. It reduces jail time for violent firearms offences and will not stop the flow of illegal firearms into criminal gangs in Canada. In Bill C-22, the Liberals are telling Canadians these offences are no big deal by reducing penalties for: weapons trafficking, possession for the purpose of weapons trafficking, importing or exporting a firearm knowing it is unauthorized, possession of a firearm knowing its possession is unauthorized, possession of a prohibited or restricted firearm with ammunition, possession of a weapon obtained by commission of an offence using firearms in the commission of offences, robbery with a firearm and extortion with a firearm. We should all think about how each of these offences ties into actual violent crime and deaths in Canada.

That is not all. Bill C-22 would also reduce penalties for discharging firearms where it is unsafe to do so, say, for example, in the streets of Toronto, and for discharging firearms with intent, such as in a drive-by shooting, like the one in Montreal two months ago that tragically and horribly killed 15-year-old Meriem Boundaoui.

In fact, Montreal police inspector David Bertrand says his city had a 10% rise in gun crimes between 2019 and 2020, despite the Liberal firearm ban at the time. He says that this is due to the "trivialization" of gun use by criminals and that criminals are "using more guns when committing infractions".

Bill C-22 plays right into the wrong hands. If the Liberals listened to experts, they would know not to trivialize crimes for which consequences need to be strengthened in order to keep Canadians safe from criminals with guns.

It seems Conservatives are the only ones listening to experts on gun crimes, but we cannot take all the credit for tough sentences for these crimes. Most of the above examples are long-standing and were introduced under previous Liberal governments, so sentences for using firearms in the commission—

● (1105)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I am sorry, but I have a point of order.

The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. This particular piece of legislation, Bill C-22, is with respect to the Criminal Code as it relates to controlled substances. The member has spent her entire speech talking about gun control.

I am not trying to be obstructionist. I really think she might be speaking to the wrong bill. The content is certainly not relevant—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I appreciate the hon. member raising a point of order. However, as I am sure he is well aware, there is some flexibility within debate on specific bills. I do want to remind the member that she needs to keep her speech relevant to the subject matter at hand, which is Bill C-22.

I would ask the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands to ensure that he stops his debate in the House while I have the floor or when anybody else has the floor.

The hon. member for Lakeland.

Government Orders

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Madam Speaker, Bill C-22 would reduce penalties for all those crimes with firearms, except the member gave me a perfect segue. With Bill C-22, the Liberals would also soften consequences for other violent crimes, like prison breaches, criminal harassment, motor vehicle theft, theft over \$5,000, breaking and entering a place other than a dwelling house, being unlawfully in a dwelling house, arson for a fraudulent purpose, causing bodily harm by criminal negligence, assault causing bodily harm or with a weapon, assaulting a peace officer causing bodily harm or with a weapon.

To summarize, under Bill C-22, someone could break out of prison, steal a car to escape, break into several businesses, steal massive amounts of goods and cash, break into a home, assault the occupants with a weapon and then attack a police officer with a weapon. Apparently, according to the Liberal government, that is all worthy of a slap on the wrist and definitely no baseline consequence set by elected representatives.

In Canada, during the first six months of last year, there were 17,602 opioid deaths. That is 24 people per day, and a 54% increase over the same period of the previous year. Opioid deaths jumped nearly 60% last year in Ontario. In Alberta, 2020 was the deadliest year on record for overdoses.

Dr. Jennifer Jackson, an associate professor at the U of C's nursing program, says, "From the data we have available, more people are dying in Alberta from opioids than they are from COVID."

As the opioid and overdose crisis grows, Canadians will be concerned to know that Bill C-22 would reduce consequences for drug trafficking; possession for the purpose of trafficking; importing, exporting or producing hard drugs such as heroin, cocaine and crystal meth, with increasingly deadly fentanyl.

The Liberals talk about how this would help those suffering with addiction, but the reality is that the police already have the tools and discretion to take alternative approaches with addicts other than only criminal charges and there are no mandatory minimum sentences for simple possession.

The truth is that the Liberals are not helping the vulnerable or acting with compassion in this measure in Bill C-22. Instead, they are enabling and enlightening the consequences for the very criminals who prey on people struggling with addictions during an unprecedented national overdose crisis.

One of the most galling aspects of Bill C-22 would be creating situations for offenders to revictimize by allowing those who commit violent crimes against women to return home instead of facing jail time. The sentences for these heinous criminal acts could be completed in the very places they occurred, next to the very people they victimized.

Incredibly, in Bill C-22, the Liberals aim to allow house arrests for kidnapping, abduction of a person under 14, sexual assault and human trafficking. The Liberal Bill C-22 says that criminals who kidnap, rape and enslave or trade human beings for sex should be at home in their own beds in our neighbourhoods instead of behind bars. It has not even been two full months since this House designated February 22 as National Human Trafficking Day.

StatsCan says that about 4.7 million Canadian women, 30% of all women in Canada, 15 years of age and older, have been victims of sexual assault at least once and 55% of women who identify as being in an indigenous group have experienced violence since the age of 15. The justice department says that in 86% of sexual assaults, the victim knows the accused; 41% were assaulted by an acquaintance; 28% by a family member; 10% by a friend; and 20% were victimized by a stranger. It is unjust and unconscionable that the government would enable convicted abusers to be sent to the places where they are most likely to have easy access to 86% of their victims, and even living under the same roof.

Human trafficking in Canada must end. There is not a single MP who disagrees. It is also true that human trafficking victims should not be at risk of being exposed to further heinous acts by the action of the government. Human trafficking victims and witnesses are often reluctant to come forward due to feelings of shame and mistrust of authorities. Certainly, Bill C-22 would do nothing to instill confidence in the system for victims or their loved ones.

StatsCan says that 1,400 human trafficking victims were reported by Canadian police over a 10-year period. Half involved other offences related to sexual services, physical assaults, sexual assaults or other sexual offences where Bill C-22 would reduce penalties. It is a fact that 97% of human trafficking victims are women and girls, half between the ages of 18 and 24, a third of them minors below the age of 18.

Several hundred kids in Canada are victims of this unimaginable evil and 92% of the victims know their abusers. Therefore, where do children go to escape when their abusers are put right back in the same place they found them? Violent crime victims already do not necessarily get notified when their abusers re-enter neighbourhoods. Bill C-22 would make it incumbent on the victims to uproot their lives to protect their personal safety. It says to victims that through some fault of their own, the burden now rests with them. One of the hallmarks of abusers is a shifting of responsibility and blame to victims, something that Bill C-22 does repeatedly.

● (1110)

Twice this year on February 18 and March 19, in written statements, the public safety minister said:

We are working together to build a safer and more resilient Canada, where all people are protected from human trafficking and its harms.

Government Orders

His department says that there were over 107,000 victims of police reported intimate partner violence in Canada in 2019; 80% were women.

How can the minister say that he is protecting Canadians from human trafficking and days later bring in a bill that would reduce the penalties for it and many of the other crimes abusers inflict on their victims? It is heartbreaking and it is infuriating.

On International Women's Day, the Prime Minister talked about reaffirming gender equality so all women and girls could contribute to their full potential and be in a better, safe and more inclusive world. However, Kelly Franklin, the founder of Ontario-based Courage for Freedom says that predators are hiding in plain sight and that victims are younger and younger. She says that every 30 seconds another person becomes a victim of human trafficking.

The lives of women and girls are being stolen away more and more, but the Liberal plan is to go softer and easier on criminals that specifically target them.

Let us all vote against Bill C-22, because it is the right thing to do.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my colleague's speech touched mostly on gun control. I would argue that taking assault rifles off our streets will absolutely help to reduce gun violence.

However, on the subject of Bill C-22, it is important to note that the Conservatives put forward legislation for mandatory minimums and we did not see a reduction in the amount of violence in Canada.

By eliminating mandatory minimums, this bill proposes to put the power in the hands of our judicial system and our judges to determine the best sentence possible in the circumstances. We know that mandatory minimums disproportionately affect indigenous and Black offenders, and they do not work.

What is the member's position on mandatory minimums?

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Once again, we see the member without a headset. We all know that translation in the House of Commons is very tough. Clearly, the member does not have a headset today. How do you allow a question without a headset?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I do apologize. I did not notice that the member did not have her headset on. I will double-checked to ensure the interpreters did hear. There was no problem for them.

I want to thank the member for Saskatoon—Grasswood for raising that point of order. I want to remind all members to ensure they have their headsets on before they speak.

• (1115)

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Far be it for me to challenge the Chair, but the question is not whether the interpreters heard it. We have been told in our caucuses that there is a health and safety risk to the interpreters because of the lack of the use of headsets. That is the question. It is not whether the interpreters heard it and can pass on the question; it is

that there has to be respect for the interpreters and their protection because they are doing this day in and day out.

I would ask the Chair to consider reminding members that it is not just that they should but they have to wear their headsets. If they are not, they should not be putting questions.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I appreciate the additional information the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay has brought forward. I certainly am very aware of the challenges this brings for the interpreters.

The reason I asked whether the interpretation had been heard was that I would have asked the hon. member to repeat her question, with the mike on, to ensure the question was heard.

Again, I do want to remind the member, and I will do my best to recognize whether members have their headsets on before questions are asked. I know I looked at it for the member giving her speech, because it was difficult to see if she had it on.

I will go to the hon. member for Lakeland for a response.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Madam Speaker, I am not sure what legislation the members who are raising this issue are reading. Frankly, I do not know if they are actually examining the fact that Bill C-22 would reduce mandatory prison times, eliminate mandatory prison times for these firearms offences, robbery with a firearm, extortion with a firearm, weapons trafficking, importing or exporting knowing it is unauthorized, discharging a firearm with intent, using a firearm in commission of offences, possession of firearms knowing its possession is unauthorized, possession of a prohibited restricted firearms with ammunition, possession of a weapon obtained by commission of offence, possession for purpose of weapons trafficking, discharging a firearm with recklessness. Members who do not recognize that these are in the legislation and do not want to talk about them are not applying the scrutiny and due diligence to the bill as they ought to.

The reason the front half of my speech focused on that is because that is what Bill C-22 would do. I also focused on all the other violent crimes for which the consequences would be lightened and softened by Bill C-22. That is also what the bill would do. Elected representatives—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): There are many others who want to ask questions.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Thérèse-De Blainville.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am trying to understand the member's approach.

Government Orders

We all remember that under a Conservative government, the system was very judicialized in areas that warranted a different approach. That is what this bill seeks to do. Evidence suggests that some measures and the way certain offences are handled are ineffective. Criminalization leads precisely to outcomes we do not want. In Quebec, there has been a heavy focus on rehabilitation for certain issues.

Why do the Conservatives fail to recognize that this evidence on offences shows that this is more of a public health issue than a public safety issue?

[*English*]

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Madam Speaker, I do not think I have a single constituent in Lakeland who actually thinks that prison breach, criminal harassment, sexual assault, kidnapping, trafficking persons for material benefit, abduction of a person under 14, motor vehicle theft, theft over \$5,000, breaking and entering a place, being unlawfully in a dwelling house, arson for fraudulent purposes, causing bodily harm by criminal negligence, assault causing bodily harm or with a weapon and assaulting a peace officer causing bodily harm or with a weapon are in any way, shape or form minor offences, as the member just said.

I think Canadians expect the government to stand up for the rule of law, put victims first, stand up for their rights, target violent criminals, sexual offenders and criminal gains, ensure the Criminal Code protects Canadians and changes and evolves as public safety and crime trends shift. As well, as MPs, also relative to the question asked to me previously, we must be willing to reflect the values of the people we represent. That is what I am doing here.

My constituents, and I believe all Canadians, consider these crimes to be extremely serious. They want the system to combat them. By reducing mandatory sentences for serious crimes, Bill C-22 says that elected representatives do not need establish any bottom lines, do not have to set any automatic consequences. It would turn the government's back on those who need its support and need to know right now more than ever that someone has their backs.

• (1120)

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to stand once again in this House and participate in an important debate. I plan to address two major themes in my speech. The first has to do with the fact that it seems the members opposite are simply not aware of what is contained in this bill. This bill actually reduces some of the penalties for serious firearms offences. I will get into the specifics of that here in a moment. The second is the larger topic of conversation surrounding being soft on crime and the very troubling trends that we see, not only with this bill, but with some of the larger context of how the government is failing victims.

First, on firearms, I find it absolutely tragic that we are debating firearms in this place in a way that completely ignores the facts. The members opposite will talk about how it is important to ban assault rifles and these military-style weapons, when very few members opposite understand the reality of what they are talking about. The reality is truly a trifecta of misinformation and political

rhetoric torqued to the highest extent possible to appeal to a narrow band of political interests that is simply not based on reality.

I have a few examples. The Conservative member for Markham—Unionville brought forward Bill C-238, a bill that was meant to bring many people together to combat a real issue, and that is violent gun crime. However, the Liberals voted against it. How tragic is it that the Liberals, who claim to be targeting law-abiding firearms owners, would absolutely dismiss an attempt by parliamentarians to address some of those issues? It is absolutely shameful.

Second, we see the context of aspects of this debate with last year's order in council banning 1,500 firearms. It was absurd logic. In fact, when I participated in the member of Parliament's briefing for that OIC, the officials who were brought in did not even understand the very basis of the firearms they said they were banning. How absurd is it that we have such a disconnect between the consequences of what I would suggest is a massive overreach of the executive branch, targeting something, and then they torque it up with their rhetoric about how they are somehow taking action on crime? It is shameful, the record of the government.

The members opposite suggest that this somehow does not have relevance to the debate today, which is absurd and again more of their torqued political rhetoric, at a time when they seem to be bent on calling an election in the midst of a pandemic. I would note, as a bit of an aside, that there is a Supreme Court challenge in Newfoundland that has been launched today by an opposition party because of an election there that many would suggest, and certainly this lawsuit suggests, does not have the confidence of the people. It was a Liberal majority, yet the Prime Minister and the government seem bent on stealing power at any cost.

The third aspect of this bill is that it takes the serious criminal offences. Specifically, as I mentioned in the first part of my speech, I want to talk about the firearms side of things. The fact is that they are lessening penalties on serious firearms offences.

The Liberals introduced Bill C-21, literally banning toy guns. They said that was fake news, yet the reality, as we have learned, is that bad legislation creates bad outcomes and does not do what they say they are trying to accomplish. In the same week, they introduced Bill C-22, only a few days later. On Tuesday, they introduced a bill to punish law-abiding Canadians for simply living their lives, in many cases using something that is a tool in many parts of our country.

I come from a rural constituency, where a firearm is a tool like many others. It can be used as a weapon, but so can a baseball bat, a kitchen knife or a van, yet that torqued-up rhetoric based on a blind ideology has labelled so many thousands or millions of Canadians to be somehow criminals.

Government Orders

• (1125)

The same week, only a couple of days later, on a Thursday, the Liberals introduced Bill C-22, eliminating penalties for serious firearms offences. It is absurd that this is what they think they can get away with. Certainly, my constituents see through that absurdity. I hear from Canadians across the country, including the constituents of quite a few members opposite, who are saying they are starting to see through the facade, the political spin that the government is trying to bring on this and how absolutely shameful it is in that regard.

That brings me to the second part of my speech, which addresses some of the other aspects of this bill and the very troubling trend that I would suggest it is setting.

Bill C-22 eliminates a number of those firearms offences and the mandatory prison times, such as robbery with a firearm, discharging a firearm with intent to harm, and weapons trafficking. Those are the problems, not the law-abiding firearms owners.

The Liberals are also proposing in this bill that criminals could serve house arrest rather than jail time for a number of offences, including sexual assault, in the midst of the conversation around sexual assault in the military. I listened to the testimony on the Bas-tarache report regarding sexual assault in the RCMP and the revelation of how terribly pervasive that is within our society, yet the Liberals, who talk tough, with their woke feminist Prime Minister, are truly being soft and punishing victims at a time when victims deserve an advocate.

There is also trafficking in persons for material benefit and kidnapping. At a time when we are trying to bring awareness to human trafficking, the fact that the Liberals are punishing victims is absolutely absurd and shameful.

There is a series of other offences where the sentences are being reduced. The trends that are being set are very troubling, such as the soft-on-crime approach and ignoring victims. Meanwhile, we have seen, especially in my large constituency in rural east-central Alberta, a massive growth in rural crime and serious offences that have really affected the way of life of my constituents, the ability of Canadians to feel safe in their homes, and so many aspects of the way in which we live.

The Liberals are going to suggest that somehow we, the evil Conservatives, want to punish people for not breaking the law, which is just Liberal spin. It is unfortunate that it has devolved to the point it has, because it is taking away from the seriousness of this debate. It is quite simple. Conservatives are focused on ensuring that Canada's drug laws target individuals who prey on Canadians struggling with addictions through the trafficking and sale of drugs to the victims of what is an opioid pandemic, which is what those drug dealers and gangs deserve. The member for Lakeland, who spoke prior to me, articulated very well the challenges we face regarding drug use in this country. This is not about punishing a victim; it is about ensuring that those who are responsible for those abuses, the gangs, the drug dealers and whatnot, are punished.

The Conservatives have talked about mental health. We believe there needs to be a clear plan on ensuring there is restorative justice and a plan that addresses and helps victims. That is the clear differ-

ence here. We have the hug-a-thug mentality from the Liberals on the other side, and we have the Conservatives, who want to stand up for victims. Bill C-22 is incredibly troubling in the context of the bigger picture and the blatant hypocrisy that exists on the firearms debate.

I would conclude by saying that I cannot in good conscience support this. My constituents have overwhelmingly told me that this is a bad bill. I certainly will not be supporting it going forward.

• (1130)

Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Madam Speaker, before I had the privilege of representing the people in Kings—Hants, I served as a lawyer, and I can certainly say that not all the factors of each case are the same. Every case is built differently.

Does the member believe that it is his job here in Parliament, and that he is in a better position than the men and women we appoint as judges, to decide the sentences of individuals who commit crimes? Does he think he is better placed here in Parliament than someone who would hear the actual facts of the case?

Mr. Damien Kurek: Madam Speaker, there we have it. It is the spin of somehow suggesting that Conservatives are simply wanting to target or prescript offences and whatnot. The reality could not be farther from the truth. Conservatives do believe that serious crime deserves serious time, and the vast majority of Canadians suggest the same. I find it very ironic that the Liberals want to paint this as all being the evil Harper era that brought in all of these things, when it was actually Pierre Elliott Trudeau. They are repealing some laws that date back to the Prime Minister's own father.

To acknowledge the member, a proper balance has to be found. In practice, right now, in the public prosecution service and the discretion of law enforcement there is a great deal of flexibility, but when it comes to serious crimes, there have to be serious penalties for that in this country. Victims deserve it.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, we have been working with the Mushkegowuk Council on the fire keeper patrol to deal with the opioid crisis in downtown Timmins, which has caused devastation, to have a mobile team working with the homeless, getting them off the streets and getting them the help they need. That is only part of what we are facing with the devastating impacts of fentanyl and crystal meth in all of our communities. We need to have treatment centres. We have been reaching out to the Liberals saying we need action and we need a commitment. We are losing people every day across the country, and in our communities we have had massive deaths because of fentanyl and the opioid crisis.

Government Orders

I would like to ask my hon. colleague why he thinks it is that we are talking about many things in the House, but we never hear from the Liberal government on the crisis that we are seeing right on the ground in all our communities.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Madam Speaker, I agree. Certainly the pandemic has taken a lot of airtime regarding health issues, but at the same time there has been an epidemic of opioid deaths. In fact, in British Columbia, and I will be forgiven for not having the most recent stats, there were more opioid deaths than there were COVID deaths, at least a number of months ago. I think it is absolutely tragic that we are not taking this seriously.

Part of the reason I am opposed to this bill in particular is that the government seems intent on lessening penalties for those who would be responsible, not the victims who are experiencing mental health challenges and a series of other factors that would lead to addiction, but the people who are bringing these drugs, getting them onto our streets and smuggling them into our country, and the gang activity associated with that. It is troubling that this issue is not taken more seriously.

Then, on the other side, I was proud of the Conservative private member's bill to deal with recidivism, and further significant Conservative pressure to deal with mental health challenges to ensure that we are addressing the full context here. Certainly victims, including victims of opioid addictions, need to be stood up for, and this bill fails miserably at that.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Madam Speaker, the Harper Conservatives did bring in a significant number of tough-on-crime measures. I am trying to understand what this bill is all about.

I have a question for you that is strictly about opioids. You talked about victims, but there are also people who use opioids who need to be protected.

Would you support the decriminalization of the possession of substances like opioids?

• (1135)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I would remind the member to address her questions through the Chair and not to the member directly.

The hon. member for Battle River—Crowfoot.

[*English*]

Mr. Damien Kurek: Madam Speaker, the simple answer is no. I do not agree with the decriminalization of drugs. However, it is a misconception that this bill would somehow fix the problem of individuals who would be charged with simple possession. That is not what this bill addresses. It addresses the serious offences of those who are trafficking, smuggling and involved in the gang activity that leads to these victims on our streets. We have to have a plan to address opioid addiction in this country.

Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time this morning with my hon. colleague from Humber River—Black Creek.

This is the first time that I have had the chance to speak in the House since the passing of Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh and the royal consort. I want to go on record to recognize his significant achievements to public life and the Commonwealth. I know other parliamentarians have spoken to this, but I want to add my voice.

We are here today to talk about Bill C-22, which is about repealing mandatory minimum sentences that had been established under the previous Harper government. For Canadians who are listening in today on this debate for the first time and so they can understand the intent of the legislation, essentially there are three elements underpinning what this legislation is about. It is about repealing mandatory minimum penalties for certain offences, it is about allowing the judiciary to use greater discretion in terms of conditional sentence orders and it would also require police and prosecutors to examine whether it is appropriate to treat simple drug possession as more of a health issue as opposed to a justice issue.

I am the member of Parliament for Kings—Hants, in which there are three indigenous communities. I often say—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I am sorry to interrupt. There is a point of order by the hon. member for Battle River—Crowfoot.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Madam Speaker, I am sure my friend would not want to deliberately mislead the House. Many of the changes being made to this bill are not Harper changes. They date back to—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): That is a point of debate and not a point of order.

The hon. member for Kings—Hants.

Mr. Kody Blois: Madam Speaker, as I mentioned, there are three indigenous communities in my riding of Kings—Hants. There is also a sizable African-Nova Scotian population as well. When we look at the statistics across Canada, they are jarring, to say the least. Five per cent of the Canadian population is composed of indigenous adults, yet they account for 30% of the incarcerated population. Indigenous women account for 42% of women incarcerated in Canada. Black Canadians represent about 3% of the Canadian population, but in prisons represent 7.2%.

This type of thinking of getting rid of mandatory minimums and letting the judiciary have the discretion on sentencing for some of these offences is the type of thinking that will resonate in the communities of Kings—Hants, particularly in the marginalized communities.

We do not have to think back far to the death of George Floyd and the global movement it drove, which is something that resonated in my own riding of Kings—Hants. There were Black Lives Matter movements in Kings County and Windsor. I had the opportunity to speak with the African-Nova Scotian community directly, and we have been working on a series of local initiatives since last summer.

Government Orders

I want to thank groups like the Valley African Nova Scotian Development Association, VANSDA, for the work it does, as well as Robert Ffrench. There is a whole host of individuals who are doing great work on the ground in my community, and I would like to just take a moment to recognize their contributions.

When I look at this legislation, it really comes down to two underlying principles that are important. One is the recognition to try to alleviate systemic barriers and systemic issues that put individuals, whether they are in marginalized communities or not, behind bars for longer when the circumstances of the case may not necessarily warrant a mandatory minimum penalty. It goes back to allowing the judiciary, the men and women we appoint, to hear the circumstances of each case and have the discretion.

I asked my hon. colleague before I had the floor whether he saw this as being our role as parliamentarians when the particular circumstances of a case and the sentencing could be taken five, six or seven years down the line. As parliamentarians, we do not have all the facts. As I mentioned, I was a lawyer before I became a parliamentarian. I did not practise criminal law, but I have been involved in civil litigation and other matters and can say not all circumstances of cases are treated equally in the sense that each case is uniquely different. There might be some symmetry in a rare circumstance, but there is always a bit of nuance.

At the end of the day, when we look at sentencing in our courts, to me, as a parliamentarian, I do not think it is my job to sit here six years down the line from when a case could actually come before the courts and say I know what is best when it comes to sentencing. We have common law in this country. We have common-law principles in terms of sentencing. We have adopted Gladue principles through the Supreme Court of Canada.

There are both aggravating factors, where an individual should be perhaps incarcerated for a longer period of time because of the nature and circumstances of the particular offence, and there are sometimes mitigating factors, which really warrant a different treatment of the sentencing. That is what the core of this type of legislation is getting at.

I guess what I would compare it to is Her Majesty's loyal opposition. I do not want to stereotype all parliamentarians, but there is generally a great respect for the independence of the judiciary. We have seen that with some of the legislation that have gone through, where members would get up and talk about this, and yet when we are talking about giving the independence to the judiciary to be able to make decisions around sentencing, we have this huge push-back.

I hear the "soft on crime" and the traditional slogans that come up any time this discussion happens, but really this is about allowing the judges to be able to assess the situation and be able to make a proper sentencing. Yes, it is our job as parliamentarians to help craft what offences are under the Criminal Code, but let us leave the sentencing to the common law and to the individuals who are actually involved with hearing the circumstance of the case.

● (1140)

I also want to take this opportunity to talk about the third element and marginalized communities. We are talking about repealing certain mandatory minimums, but we are also talking about small drug

offences and treating those more as a health issue as opposed to a justice issue. The member before me talked about trafficking, large amounts of drug abuse and kind of preying on victims, but this is really targeted at someone who might have simple possession, and we do not necessarily want to put them in prison for a mandatory period of time if the circumstances warrant that it is not necessarily an appropriate way to go about this. I think that a lot of members in this House understand this.

At the end of the day, the bill would allow the discretion for the men and women who hear the case and for the prosecution and police to be able to look at this from a certain angle to try to get better outcomes. It is not to necessarily put individuals into a federal penitentiary and hope that would alleviate the issues that these individuals could be repeat offenders. This is another element. Maybe there are different ways we could treat individuals to try to resolve it, whether it be mental issues or other challenges. This is the type of thinking that I support. As I mentioned, I have worked in law before, and I think, across the board, that this is the type of direction we should be going.

I also want to speak to the piece around the conditional sentence orders. Again, this is giving discretion to the judiciary to make decisions. However, my time is quickly coming to a close, and so I will stop there and look forward to taking questions from my hon. colleagues.

● (1145)

Mr. Warren Steinley (Regina—Lewvan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I sit on the agriculture committee with the member for Kings—Hants and we enjoy our debates.

The member talked about the independence of the judiciary and how much we need to respect that. Well, I would ask him to answer a question about his leader, the Prime Minister, who really did not have that respect during the SNC-Lavalin case. In fact, he actually kicked out the first indigenous woman from being the attorney general. So, if the member wants us to have respect for the judiciary, which we all do on the Conservative side, why would he not start with his own side and have a conversation with his Prime Minister so that they respect the independence of the judiciary?

Mr. Kody Blois: Madam Speaker, it is always great to see my colleague across the way, and we do enjoy a great relationship on the agriculture committee.

The member opposite is bringing up issues from far in the past as opposed to focusing on the issue at hand around the servicing of Canadians who could benefit from this type of aspect.

For the record, I will say that I think the bright public policy aspect around SNC-Lavalin was the deferred prosecution agreement. The member opposite, for someone who certainly talks about protecting jobs and Canadian interests, does not seem to really want to support that right now.

Government Orders

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his intervention today. It was very interesting.

While I enjoy listening to members of the Liberal government talk about necessary, progressive steps to decriminalize drug possession, I am always dismayed by the lack of bravery and commitment to go far enough. These half-measures are, of course, not sufficient.

Earlier today, we did hear from the member for Beaches—East York who said that he believed that full decriminalization was best but that he was prevented by politics.

I would like to ask the member: When will this government listen to the calls from provincial governments, mayors, health care providers, frontline service providers, police and public health officials and take action to fully decriminalize personal possession?

Mr. Kody Blois: Madam Speaker, I think that this type of legislation is taking a progressive step in terms of recognizing petty drug possession as a health issue as opposed to a justice issue. However, I cannot speak to the member that she quoted in terms of his comments around politics. I can say that, ideologically, I do not know myself, as a parliamentarian, if I am completely on the basis that decriminalization of all drugs is the best public policy approach despite the fact that there have been some experts suggesting that is the way forward. That is my own perspective as a parliamentarian. I cannot really speak to the other member's comments that she had mentioned, but I do think that this type of legislation is taking the right direction in how we need to move forward.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Madam Speaker, any debate around criminalization and decriminalization must include a conversation about homelessness. Quebec, like many other places, is currently grappling with a serious housing crisis. The homeless population in Montreal is estimated to have doubled during the pandemic.

Does my colleague not think that investing heavily in measures to end homelessness, especially in large cities, would be one way to deal with these criminalization issues?

[*English*]

Mr. Kody Blois: Madam Speaker, I would agree with my hon. colleague opposite that housing is a key issue right now. That is why we put in place the rapid housing initiative, \$1 billion to help support individuals and marginalized communities across the country. I do not have a crystal ball on what our Minister of Finance will have on Monday, but I suspect there will be additional supports that focus on ensuring we have affordable housing to have basic shelter in place. I would agree that the socio-economic determinants of health and reducing potential criminal activity is all tied and it is a really progressive approach to try to get us there.

• (1150)

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as a government, we are taking steps to try to address systemic racism that is pervasive in our institutions and Bill C-22 is a step forward in the right direction, especially for my rid-

ing of Humber River—Black Creek. With this legislation, we are advancing a policy that is truly about keeping communities safe.

We have seen throughout history how certain criminal justice policies have unfairly targeted indigenous peoples, people of colour and marginalized Canadians. Too often these policies were poorly handled and only reinforced the systemic racism, which our government has committed to eliminating in Canada. Let me clear: A justice system that jails too many indigenous peoples, Black people and marginalized Canadians is not effective, does not keep us safe and therefore must be changed.

In my riding of Humber River—Black Creek, I have seen far too many lives derailed by policies that target racialized communities. Too many careers have been destroyed because of a singular bad decision. We are a country that believes in rehabilitation and second chances, but our criminal justice policies have not followed this lofty ideal. That is why I am very proud to speak in the House today in support of Bill C-22 and the fact that the government has brought it forward.

With Bill C-22, we are turning the page on the failed policies of the Harper Conservatives, policies that did not protect Canadians, but, rather, targeted them. The measures in the bill, in conjunction with our numerous other reforms across government, are a critical step forward as we work to eliminate the plague of systemic racism and ensure that our justice system is as effective as it can be, one that is equal and fair to all Canadians. This means removing mandatory minimum penalties that unfairly target low-risk and first-time offenders, which evidence shows us only leads to the over-incarceration of racialized and marginalized groups and does nothing to decrease recidivism.

We want to expand the availability of conditional sentencing orders for those who do not pose a risk to public safety. The availability of conditional sentences means that judges will have the flexibility to determine whether offenders pose a risk to the public and, if so, will allow the offenders to serve their sentences in their communities under strict conditions. Rather than punishing these people for a bad decision, we would instead give them access to treatment programs and other supportive services. The evidence has shown us that our current system only serves to derail the lives of low-risk offenders and the dissolution of the family unit, which is so important, and negatively impacts the families they leave behind.

If we want to promote the rehabilitative nature of our justice system, we must practice what we preach. Giving low-risk offenders access to treatment and support, keeping their families together and keeping them integrated in their communities are proven methods of reducing recidivism. To answer the concerns of the opposition, these opportunities will not be available to everyone.

Government Orders

Serious and dangerous criminals must be punished severely as appropriate to their crimes. For serious and dangerous criminals, Bill C-21 would raise maximum penalties so judges would have the ability to punish the worst offenders. Those who commit serious offences would continue to receive sentences that would match the seriousness of their offences. However, this bill is about getting rid of the failed policies that saw our prisons filled with people who needed help, not incarceration.

Bill C-22 is specifically for low-risk and first-time offenders whose incarceration has proven to do little to protect communities in the long run, but has had a negative impact on the lives of these first-time and low-risk offenders. The evidence is clear that the policies of the past are not working. It is because of the harmful policies of the past that we see indigenous and racialized Canadians overrepresented in our prison populations by orders of magnitude. The policies of the past did not prevent nor deter crime and they did not keep us any safer. What they did was target the vulnerable, racialized and indigenous Canadians. Bill C-22 seeks to address some of these systemic issues, and I am proud to support the legislation.

We also want to provide police and prosecutors with the tools and guidance they need to treat addiction and simple drug possession, not as a criminal justice issue but as a health issue. With this in mind, Bill C-22 takes measures to divert away from the criminal justice system default for police and prosecutors when dealing with drug possession.

In my riding of Humber River—Black Creek, I wonder how many lives could have been altered in a positive way had these already been in place. How many individuals were required to reoffend because they could not secure employment after going through the justice system? How many families were destroyed as a result of the systemic racism pervasive within our justice system?

• (1155)

Bill C-22 would allow us to step away from these questions, because we know that those who are low-risk or first-time offenders will not be put through the gauntlet of the justice system. Instead, young people who have made mistakes or perhaps have turned to drugs as a result of a prior trauma will be able to get the help and support they need rather than just becoming another statistic.

Bill C-22 represents a vital step forward for our country. The changes that would come from this legislation would ensure that our criminal justice system would be fair, effective and would keep all Canadians from all communities safe.

I encourage all my colleagues in the House to support the legislation. Let us demonstrate to all Canadians that we will never stop working to create a justice system that embodies our values. Let us step forward together to end the scourge of systemic racism in our justice system and in all areas of Canadian society.

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, the hon. member outlined the bill and very much made it sound like the crimes that were addressed in the legislation, Bill C-22, simply had to do with public health concerns.

That being the case, I am wondering if the hon. member could comment on kidnapping. Kidnapping is one of the things in the bill,

and the sentence is being lessened for engaging in this. Could the member please help me understand how this is a public health concern?

Hon. Judy A. Sgro: Madam Speaker, it is leaving the flexibility in the hands of judges to bring down a sentence that reflects the seriousness of the crime. That flexibility is there regardless of whether it is a kidnapping issue or whatever.

Our justice system needs additional tools. Bill C-22 would provide it with the means to move forward to help the very people we are talking about, to give options in our justice system.

I have seen far too many families in Humber River—Black Creek whose family members got themselves into trouble for whatever reason and ended up with a minimum sentence applied. That has sent the family and that young person in a direction that probably will seriously impact their lives forever.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, I share my colleague's point that we should have a justice system that reflects Canadian values.

In 2011, legislation was brought in about mandatory reporting of child pornography online, yet yesterday, we learned that the Attorney General had no intention of applying those laws in Canada. The Liberal government believes in voluntary compliance. It comes down to the issue of Pornhub, MindGeek, which is in the city of the Attorney General, yet he does not know if it is a Canadian company.

A massive court case is going on in California right now for survivors of rape and non-consensual sexual assault because of Pornhub. When we look at the filings in the court, they identify that Pornhub, MindGeek is based in Montreal, just down the road from the Attorney General.

I hear the Liberals talking about Canadian values, but they are not willing to stand up for the survivors, telling them to go find it someplace else, that they are on their own. That is not acceptable in our country.

• (1200)

Hon. Judy A. Sgro: Madam Speaker, my colleague and I have worked together for many years.

I am sure that all of us in the House share the same feelings when it comes to the issues of pornography. We do not want to see it in our country or anywhere else. Whatever steps are necessary to clamp down on anyone who engages in it are steps that I believe all of us as parliamentarians want to see happen.

I know the Liberal government, no different from the NDP, or the Conservatives or the Bloc, does not want to see that kind of negative information portrayed anywhere. The Liberals are just as tough on pornography as anyone else. In fact, maybe in the future they will see that the Liberals are even harder on the issues of pornography.

Government Orders

The Liberals are about trying to open up a justice system that will better protect the very people about whom we are talking.

Mr. Derek Sloan (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, Ind.): Madam Speaker, there has been some concern about the use of mandatory minimum penalties.

There are still, and will remain, if this bill passes, mandatory minimums for various crimes. My concern is, why would some of these serious crimes, these types of offences, like the use of a firearm in commission of an offence, possession of a firearm or prohibited weapon, robbery committed with a firearm, and I could go on, have mandatory minimums removed when some mandatory minimums still remain? This is an issue, particularly in relation to the other laws, such as Bill C-21, which is being implemented to put more restrictions on legal firearms owners.

Hon. Judy A. Sgro: Madam Speaker, doing everything we can to protect society and protect our communities, I believe, is extremely important for all of us. The minimum penalties we are referring to here, in many cases, are designed to make communities safer, but also to provide flexibility to our judges, our prosecutors and so on. They can use that flexibility to not destroy a young person's life. At the same time we are doing everything possible to ensure the safety of our communities. The changes in our firearms legislation talk about just doing that, and how we can make our communities safer overall.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River.

It is a privilege to rise and represent the constituents of Red Deer—Lacombe in this debate, who would be mortified, I believe, to know what the legislation is actually proposing to do to our criminal justice system, notwithstanding the words coming from government MPs.

Let me start with a little bit of context. I am the chair of the Conservative rural crime caucus and had the pleasure of helping to create a document in 2018 that we published as MPs from rural Alberta. Virtually every one of my colleagues from rural Alberta participated in this. We consulted and talked to a wide variety of people in our province. We talked to victims. We talked to rural crime watch people. We talked to anti-crime organizations. We talked to victims-of-crime services and to law enforcement experts, and we produced a comprehensive, thorough and multifaceted report, which we then tabled at the public safety committee in the last Parliament. My colleague from Lakeland had a motion in that Parliament talking about rural crime.

I want to remind all colleagues in the House that crime in rural areas, and specifically here in western Canada, is significantly on the rise. It has been shown statistically. One does not have to go very far to look. A document from the Angus Reid Institute published January 10, 2020, shows that crime rates in Canada dropped precipitously from 1991 to 2014, falling more than 50% during that period. However, crime rates have ticked upward over each of the past four years for which data is available, and that trend is continuing. It shows that confidence is waning significantly in our law enforcement agencies, courts and provincial jurisdictions. It notes that

it is more significantly happening in western Canada, and in the Prairie provinces in particular.

Colleagues can imagine that the proposed changes to this legislation would be somewhat horrific to my constituents who ask me about it. If anybody wants to read the report, "Towards a Safer Alberta: Addressing Rural Crime", it addresses a lot of crime in general by addressing rural crime. I would encourage them to do so. It can be found on my website, www.blainecalkinsmp.ca. I would encourage people to have a look at it and see what good work MPs in western Canada have done to bring forward the concerns of our constituents.

I want to talk a little bit about the overall Government of Canada's approach since it became the government in the fall of 2015. I am not going to get into too much discussion about specific firearms legislation in Bill C-71 or Bill C-21, but I will talk about Bill C-75 and now Bill C-22, and the soft-on-crime approach that the government seems to have. The rationale that it is presenting seems to basically undermine the needs of victims in this country, especially when some of these crimes are certainly crimes against people. They are not just property crimes.

What are some of the things that the government has done? In Bill C-75, which could be called the prequel to Bill C-22, the government basically hybridized well over 100 offences in the Criminal Code. To those who wonder what that means, there are basically two ways in which a Crown prosecutor can proceed with charges before a justice. One of them is through an indictable offence. Until this bill came along, it usually carried with it a set of penalties for which there was a requirement to spend some time in jail or in custody. Then there is something called a summary conviction offence, which is the equivalent, I guess, of a U.S. misdemeanour. It usually carries with it a very small sentence or time served in jail, in lieu of being unable to pay a fine of some kind.

● (1205)

Here are some of the things for which the current government, in the previous Parliament, changed the sentences from mandatory indictable offences to hybrids. This allows the Crown to plea bargain away serious offences such as impaired driving, punishment for theft, both under \$5,000 and over \$5,000, possession of instruments for breaking and entering, selling automobile master keys and other items, enabling theft, possession of property, stolen property obtained by crime and, of course, importing or exporting property.

Government Orders

That just names a few offences. As I said, there were over 110 offences that the government essentially reduced the penalties for. In fact, it would now be possible for someone to get a summary conviction offence for abduction of a person under the age of 16 or abduction of a person under the age of 14. Those were also included in Bill C-75. It would now be possible to pay a fine less than someone would pay for failing to stop at a stop sign. That is the legacy of Bill C-75 in the first Parliament.

Now let us fast forward to Bill C-22 and take a look at what Liberals are removing mandatory minimum penalties or just basic minimum penalties for in the Criminal Code. First, there is using a firearm or an imitation firearm in the commission of an offence. Interestingly the government is removing Airsoft and paintball guns from possession completely for law-abiding citizens, but if a criminal is using a firearm or an imitation firearm in the commission of an offence, they will now get the pleasure of going home and sitting there, thinking about what they have done. Possession of a firearm, knowing that its possession is unauthorized, is the whole point. Rather than reducing penalties for people who knowingly use or are in possession of unauthorized firearms, the government is instead taking firearms away from law-abiding citizens who are cooperating with the government. It does not make any sense.

More items include possession of a weapon obtained by the commission of an offence. One of the biggest problems we have with rural crime is people going onto properties to steal vehicles, tools and other items that are easily saleable and marketable on the black market. People also, from time to time, go to these properties purposely looking for firearms to steal. Why on earth would the government want to make it less punishable for these types of thieves who are purposefully targeting establishments, casing rural farms and casing our communities?

Why would we reduce the penalties for individuals who are purposefully trying to steal firearms? These firearms end up on the streets of our cities and our communities and end up being used in the commission of offences. This makes no sense, but the government seems to think that this is a good idea.

Here is something we can categorize in the realm of the bizarre. Why on earth would the government remove any semblance of a minimum penalty for someone who was trafficking weapons and firearms? If we listen to police chiefs or victims' services people anywhere in major urban centres, crime is proliferating especially with the use of handguns and firearms in those communities. We know that most of those firearms are obtained illegally through theft or are smuggled across our border. I would think that the government would say it was going to crack down on smugglers, but it would seem that the government is encouraging smuggling while discouraging lawful ownership. Importing or exporting a weapon knowing it is unauthorized is called smuggling. The bill would reduce minimum penalties for that.

The next item is discharging a firearm with intent. Why would we reduce a penalty for somebody purposely discharging a firearm with intent? This makes absolutely no sense. The Liberal MPs are simply misleading the House and Canadians with what their true intent is with Bill C-22, and it is incumbent upon all of us with a conscience in the House of Commons, and with an eye to doing what is

right for the law-abiding citizens that we represent, to defeat this irremediable piece of legislation.

• (1210)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think it is misleading when a member rises in the House and suggests that any member here is trying to encourage the smuggling of firearms by changing legislation that has to do with the punishment associated with that.

At the end of the day, what it really comes down to is determining who is best to cast judgment on individuals in terms of what their sentence should be. I am not an expert in this field. I do not feel as though parliamentarians are in a position to cast a single brush stroke over all criminal activity. Rather, the position from this side is that we charge those who are responsible to hear a case to hear the prosecution, to hear the defence and then determine what the best sentence is based on that information. They are the ones who are there to receive the evidence, hear the facts and make their determinations based on that.

How can the member suggest that members of Parliament are better suited to make those decisions than those who are actually charged with the responsibility of upholding justice?

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Speaker, all I will say in reply is that it is the member and his colleagues who have cast judgment on all law-abiding firearms owners in this country by confiscating their lawfully obtained property. They have used misinformation campaigns to demonize and vilify those who simply own firearms for the purposes of hunting, sport shooting and recreation, or who use them on their farms as a tool.

If we are not going to cast judgment on people, then perhaps we could start with not casting judgment on law-abiding citizens in this country. If we are going to cast any judgment at all or take any responsibility as parliamentarians, perhaps we should focus on those doing the most damage in society, such as irremediable offenders and repeat offenders, whether they are doing property crimes or crimes against persons, and making sure that those people suffer consequences instead of law-abiding citizens.

• (1215)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my Conservative colleague for his speech. This is yet another example of taking a very harsh approach to safety and security issues. The Conservative Party tends to go overboard with turning these issues into legal and police matters.

I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on the NDP's proposal to address the drug problem by decriminalizing simple possession of narcotics. Decriminalization would take a big load off our legal system and our courts. It would recognize that drugs are not a police or a legal issue, but a health and social services issue. It would also recognize that a prison sentence is not the way to treat drug addiction.

*Government Orders**[English]*

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Speaker, I would encourage my colleague to look at the changes being offered in Bill C-22. The mandatory minimum penalties are being reduced for trafficking or possession for the purpose of trafficking controlled drugs or substances, importing and exporting or possession for the purpose of exporting controlled drugs and substances, and production of a substance in schedule I or schedule II. These are not simple possessions. These are people who are using controlled drugs and substances in organized crime by smuggling it into our country and dispersing it among our population. We now have more people dying, I believe, in western Canada from fentanyl overdoses than we have from COVID.

If we are going to talk about the substance of the bill, let us actually talk about what the government is proposing, which is possession for the purpose of trafficking and smuggling or the manufacturing for the purpose of trafficking. That is what the government is doing. It is a misnomer and it misleading the House to suggest that this bill is talking about simple possession. It is simply not true.

Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a number of times the Liberals have mentioned the inability of the 338 members of Parliament to make laws that are appropriate, as we do not have the expertise. I would like to ask my colleague from Red Deer—Lacombe this: Does he believe, as we are normally called members of Parliament, and sometimes called legislators or lawmakers, that those terms interchangeable?

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Speaker, we have vast experience as legislators in the House of Commons, and we know full well what our roles and responsibilities are. As the member of Parliament for Red Deer—Lacombe, I would be remiss in my duties if I did not take the government to task for its misleading ideas and information in its attempt to basically decriminalize all criminal activity in this country.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

INDUSTRY, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

(On the Order: Committee Reports:)

December 2, 2020 — Mr. Nater (Perth—Wellington) — That the third report of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology, presented on Friday, November 27, 2020, be concurred in.

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

I move:

That, notwithstanding any standing order, special order or usual practice of the House, the order for the deferred recorded division on the motion standing in the name of the member for Perth—Wellington to concur in the third report of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology be discharged and the motion be deemed adopted.

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed to the hon. member moving the motion will please say nay. I hear none.

[English]

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

(Order discharged and motion agreed to)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

- (1220)

[English]

CRIMINAL CODE

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-22, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is indeed an honour to speak in the House today regarding Bill C-22.

This last weekend the Prime Minister, while speaking to the Liberal Party policy convention, said that the Conservative Party of Canada was disconnected with Canadians. If the Prime Minister was looking for an example of a party disconnected from Canadians, he need look no further than his own party with the introduction of this bill, Bill C-22, and how it would affect those in rural Canada.

As someone who has lived my whole life in northern Saskatchewan, I not only find this bill dangerously naive, but the government's communications around it are actually offensive to me. Of course, far be it for me to suggest anyone might deliberately mislead Canadians. Perhaps it is simply a poor understanding of the Criminal Code or the tendency to rely on divisive political ideology that led to the inaccuracies in communicating what is actually in this bill.

Contrary to what members of the Liberal Party may have been given as talking points by the PMO to use in the debate, those of us who actually read the legislation understand this is not about reducing mandatory minimum penalties for simple possession of drugs. Mandatory minimums for simple possession do not exist today. This is not about minor crimes, and it is not about minor offences.

Government Orders

Here are just a few examples of what Liberals consider minor offences for which Bill C-22 would eliminate mandatory minimums as they relate to gun crimes: robbery with a firearm, extortion with a firearm, weapons trafficking, importing or exporting knowing a firearm is unauthorized, discharging a firearm with intent, using a firearm in the commission of an offence, possession of a prohibited or restricted firearm with ammunition, possession of a weapon obtained by the commission of an offence, possession for the purposes of weapons trafficking and discharging a firearm with recklessness.

Additionally, Bill C-22 would eliminate mandatory minimums under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act that actually target drug dealers. Examples of these are trafficking or possession for the purpose of trafficking, importing and exporting or possession for the purpose of exporting, and the production of substances included in schedule I or II. Examples of these are heroin, cocaine, fentanyl and crystal meth. This is not, as suggested, help for those who struggle with addictions. It is actually help for those criminals who prey on those people who suffer from addictions.

Finally, this bill would allow for greater use of conditional sentence orders for a number of offences. The list is long, so I will include only a few examples such as sexual assault, kidnapping and assault causing bodily harm or with a weapon, which includes the assaulting of a peace officer causing bodily harm or with a weapon. This clearly puts communities in my riding at risk.

As a lifelong resident of northern Saskatchewan, a hockey coach, a former mayor and now member of Parliament, I have seen firsthand how gun and gang violence, and drugs, ruin people's lives and devastate families and communities. I find myself wondering if members of the Liberal government have been contacted, like I have been, by mayors, chiefs, police officers and community members pleading for something to be done and if that would make them realize Bill C-22 is not a solution. Neither is Bill C-21.

One month ago, there was a story reported in the Battlefords News-Optimist that literally brought me to tears when I read it. I would encourage all members of this House to read the story, as it provides an incredible insight into what life can be like in the northern and often remote communities in my riding.

The story reviews a judge's decision, arguments by the Crown prosecutor and the victim impact statements of RCMP officer Robert McCready and of my good friend Staff Sergeant Ryan How. The incident, as reported, happened in my riding and shows an almost unbelievably violent disregard for human life. It includes multiple guns, pursuits, many other things, and finally, police ramming a vehicle.

In his victim impact statement, my friend Staff Sergeant Ryan How said the following:

When I encountered the gold truck you were in north of Loon Lake the only emotion I felt was sadness.

I knew right away how this was going to end. It's always the same, just a varying degree of tragedy. When I saw your co-accused run from the Equinox and point what may have been a gun at me, I just felt tired and defeated....

I knew what you would do when you came up to the road block. And you did the same thing every other desperate criminal does - you accelerated and swerved towards the police.

• (1225)

As you did that, I took off my seatbelt and accelerated my truck directly at you. I wanted to be able to at least have the chance to manoeuvre in the cab if you and your fellow gang members started shooting at me. As I lined up my truck to your head-on I fully expected to be shot but I tried to make sure my truck would stay on a straight path and hit you even if I couldn't steer because you needed to be stopped.... Even after all of this, after hours of chasing after you, hours of being frustrated, angry, and tired, [I] was required to be of calm mind and use sound tactics as I drew my gun on you and the people with you.... At that moment I was furious that it had come to this. I was furious that your stupidity was causing me to miss an important family event going on right at that moment I had you in my gun sights. I was furious that I might have to shoot and kill you.... I didn't shoot you...My coworkers didn't shoot you, even though we were taunted and dared to do it by the people in the truck with you. Even though your actions caused one of my coworkers to almost be run over and killed. We made sure you were safe. It was a joke and a game to you. It was life and death for me, for my partners, and the public. I'm telling you that on January 17, 2019, you were lucky to be arrested by some of the most capable and experienced police officers in the country. They showed incredible restraint and professionalism to make sure you lived to be here today.

Another one of those capable and experienced police officers was Officer Robert McCready, who was called in six hours before his shift was scheduled to begin. A short part of his victim impact statement includes the following. He said:

I had been in Loon Lake for a while at that time, and had a feeling that it was probably related to gang activity, firearms or both. I got geared up and found that gang members/affiliates have possible firearms and are driving in two vehicles and are evading police. My thoughts are "great, here we go again." This was a constant way of life around that area, something would pop off, at least once to twice a week or more.... This went on all afternoon, which took a bad turn when the vehicle started going through a populated area, just as school was letting off, and for fear of worsening conditions, police had to back off again.

In speaking with Staff Sergeant How later, he shared with me how these events had become almost routine. Can members imagine this being a routine part of their day? This is the part that brought tears to my eyes as I fought back the emotion.

Let me be clear, this day was the culmination of a long history, but it had to start somewhere. The idea that government is seeking to eliminate mandatory prison time for drug traffickers and for those who commit violent crimes is really hard to fathom for me. Allowing criminals who commit violent acts to serve their sentences on house arrest puts communities at risk.

Government Orders

For the last couple of minutes, I would like to talk about the issues many community leaders talked to me about. In addition to doing everything they can to combat gun and gang crime, they spend many hours fighting those who traffic drugs in their communities and who prey on the vulnerable who are struggling with mental health issues and addictions. Bill C-22 would make life far more difficult for local law enforcement and prosecutors by reducing and, in some cases, removing penalties for trafficking, importing or producing schedule I or II substances.

Conservatives believe that those struggling with addiction or mental health issues should get the help they need. They need treatment rather than prison time if their crime is not violent. Conservatives support restorative justice policies to lower incarceration rates for overrepresented groups in our criminal justice system, provided that public safety considerations are paramount.

What is clear in Bill C-22 is that the government, driven by ideology and having no basis in the reality on the ground in rural Canada, is making our communities less safe by removing many important tools. I encourage all members to take a long, hard look at the proposed legislation before they vote.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member started off talking about how the Prime Minister had made a comment that Conservatives were disconnected from Canadians. However, 54% of Conservatives do not believe in climate change and do not think that it is something that needs to be at the forefront of their agenda. The overwhelming vast majority of Canadians believe that we need to act on climate change. So, I think it is quite clear why the Prime Minister may have made that comment given some of the discussion that came out of this member's convention a few weeks ago.

However, to the member's point about reading out the victim statements, I am really glad that he did that. They were very meaningful words, and I thank him for that. I guess the difference is that I believe that those victim statements are best intended or best used for a judge to make a decision on how to cast judgment on somebody who breaks the law. Does the member not agree that the best purpose of having those victim statements is to help the judge in determining what the sentence should be?

• (1230)

Mr. Gary Vidal: Mr. Speaker, I would start my answer by simply suggesting we are talking today about Bill C-22, not about climate change, so let us stick to the topic. In the context of discretion of judges, judges are professional. They have great training and they have great abilities. As a new member of Parliament I clearly understand it to be part of my responsibility to make legislative decisions, to set laws and to set guidelines for judges and for the criminal justice system. I believe this is not a partisan issue. Many of the minimums that would be eliminated by the government were in fact introduced by previous Liberal governments. It is our job, in my understanding, as legislators and members of Parliament to, in fact, have input into these matters.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about our job as legislators.

I encourage all of my colleagues on both sides to talk to outreach workers and organizations. Pierre Laporte is an outreach worker for L'Écluse des Laurentides who is helping us understand the consequences of the crimes that may be committed by people who are suffering.

What is so wrong about trying to understand what these people went through before they committed these crimes? This is about taking a different approach to better understand the causes. I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on this and to hear him explain how he can be against this bill.

[*English*]

Mr. Gary Vidal: Mr. Speaker, fundamentally I do not disagree with my colleague. As I deal with many of the people in northern Saskatchewan, I understand there are many underlying issues and there are many issues that are foundational to the challenges faced in these communities. For example, one of my chiefs begged me one day to help him teach the people of his community to be good parents. The children of his community are begging for parents. There are many underlying issues that start well before we get to the commission of crimes, but in the commission of crimes, these are not minor offences; these are not minimum kinds of matters that we are talking about with this legislation. At the end of the day I absolutely and 100% believe that our actions result in consequences, and those consequences have to act as a deterrent at the end of the day.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the problem with the Conservative approach to the justice system is that they assume every offence is exactly the same, when there are always complicating individual factors. In the Criminal Code, there exists already section 718.2, which allows a judge to increase a sentence depending on the severity of the case.

Why do the Conservatives not have faith in our judges to dole out the appropriate punishment when the Criminal Code already has a section that allows them to do just that?

Mr. Gary Vidal: Mr. Speaker, I would provide a very simple answer like I started originally. It is the responsibility of us, as members of Parliament and legislators, to give guidelines. I believe that is one of the fundamental roles that we have. In my time as mayor of a small city, there were two things that I took very seriously. One was the management of the finances of my little city and one was the safety of my citizens. Those two were paramount. As a member of Parliament, I believe the safety of my citizens, of my riding and this country is paramount, and I believe it is our job as members of Parliament to set the guidelines, to establish the rules and laws to which those guidelines must submit.

Government Orders

• (1235)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages (Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, you are doing a wonderful job, as always, in the Speaker's chair.

I would just like to say I am coming from the traditional territory of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council.

When I heard there was a bill coming up with some of the content here, I was really supportive of it. I asked if I could speak to it to show my support. There are five items from my riding, my area or my perspective over the years, which I am very supportive of.

First, the reduction of overrepresentation of indigenous people in our jails. Parliament has wrestled with this for a long time, trying to come up with solutions to this. Two parties have already mentioned in this debate that roughly 5% of people in Canada are indigenous, yet they make up about 30% in federal jails.

Second, I would like to see movement towards the success Portugal has had in its dealings related to drugs as a health issue.

Third, the bill would make society safer, and I will go into the reasons why.

Fourth, it will lower costs for government. Almost every member of Parliament has ideas where that saved money could be spent, or it could pay down the debt.

Finally, it will reduce the number of victims.

I will explain how the three elements of the bill would do this, from my perspective. I have not written these down in a speech. I have just scratched out some points to make.

First, on the mandatory minimums and the effect on indigenous people and racialized people in our justice system. A large number of those particular people are in jails because of offences that have mandatory minimums.

Second, related to mandatory minimums—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Sorry to interrupt, but I believe the parliamentary secretary forgot to indicate that he is going to split his time with the member for Newmarket—Aurora.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, I did forget that and I thank the member.

I will now go to the three main elements of the bill and explain how they would fill the objectives of which I am supportive. I mentioned the unbalance of people in federal institutions. Certain mandatory minimums have also been found unconstitutional because they are excessive. They do not reasonably match the crime and the criminal with the punishment. People can get off unreasonably and I do not think others would want that if that happened.

Another item related to the mandatory minimums is it leads to longer trials and often more cases end in acquittals, that many would not have occurred if people were not facing an unreasonable option as an end result. Another reason, from my perspective, is for first-time offenders on minor offences. The evidence has shown that often it is less safe and has less positive results when first-time

offenders are put in jail as opposed to some of the alternatives like diversion and other types of programs and treatments.

We are all social animals. If people do not think they are, they can try to go against their own political party members on a particular issue.

I call jail the university of crime. If we put people in jail for the first time, they will learn from the people they deal with every day, and they will learn from every day on how to become more hardened criminals, rather than from dealing with their problem.

Some people say that putting criminals in jail makes communities safer. It does not if they are making more hardened criminals. The point people neglect to mention when making that case is that virtually almost everyone gets out of jail, so we want them safer when they get out and we want them rehabilitated.

Another reason to remove some mandatory minimums is that we cannot really trump other provisions of the justice system, like the Gladue provisions and other such provisions on racialized reports, by having a mandatory minimum. There is a conflict there. A number of people from various parties have raised the fact that it limits a trained judge from the individual tailoring of a sentence to the severity of the crime and the background of the criminal.

The second major item in the bill is related to the greater use of conditional sentences. For people who want evidence-based policy and legislation, it has been proven time and time again that people are far less likely to reoffend if they have the appropriate rehabilitation. A conditional sentence can be very hard with the treatment that can be assigned with it. It is not easy for someone, but it is much more effective.

I remember when we were dealing with this and debating it about 10 years ago. A big supporter of this was Conservative Senator Vern White, who had been the police chief in Whitehorse and then in Ottawa. At that time, recidivism rates were around 40% to 60%, and the conditional sentencing rates were 10% to 30%. Much progress has been made in many cases.

Government Orders

I appreciate the Bloc's view on this from the experiences it has had in Quebec with diversion, conditional sentences and other forms of dealing with people, especially young offenders. I remember in February 2001, Michel Bellehumeur from Berthier—Montcalm was really passionate about this. In fact, I think he spent most of his term in the House of Commons passionately making that case about more appropriate treatment of people. In that case, it was young offenders, but also more progressive and successful treatment of first-time offenders.

• (1240)

Also, I want to clarify what some have talked about with respect to safety and conditional sentencing. Once again, that is only allowed if the person is not a “danger to society”, which is the term for use by the judge and only for a sentence that is less than two years. There have been a number of successful stories of women who were not put in jail, but were given conditional sentences to stay with their family and their social network, and go to treatment.

The third element of the bill relates to the possession of drugs. In the majority of crimes, people are either on substance or are trying to get money for a substance, including alcohol. Therefore, I personally would move more toward what Portugal is doing. It is a step in the right direction. If people have an addiction, the last thing they need is a criminal record. It is harder for them to get a job, which is what may have caused the addiction in the first place, to feed their family, etc.

Finally, the federal economic statement, which I hope we will be voting on this week, has support for some of the items that people have mentioned, such as support for the Gladue report, the race and cultural assessments and community justice centres, all of which can deal with the root causes and the situations people are in. From my perspective, this is a move in the right direction on a number of fronts to make it safer, to reduce the number of victims, to reduce the costs and to have a fairer justice system.

• (1245)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague and congratulate him for his speech.

I am hearing a lot of comments about sentencing. We know that harsher sentences do not result in fewer crimes being committed. Prisons are overcrowded, and people from racialized or indigenous communities are overrepresented in our prison system. We are hearing a lot about good will. We are also hearing a lot about protecting victims of serious crimes.

However, I have not heard anything about a solution for the root cause of the problem. It is not necessarily by reducing sentences, eliminating minimum sentences or encouraging convicted criminals to undergo therapy that we are going to find a solution for the root cause. Racialized communities and indigenous people continue to account for a large proportion of the prison population, and I would like my colleague to tell us how to solve this problem.

[*English*]

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, the bill does deal with them, but unfortunately only once they are in the system. Then we try to ensure they do not go back into the system.

The member is exactly right. We have lobbied and made the case for years that we have to deal with the root causes as to why people come into the system in the first place. That is why we have the biggest housing fund in Canadian history. It all starts with housing first. If people do not have a home, how can they deal with other problems, such as addictions or anything else that might lead them into the justice system?

That is why we have increased the homelessness programs. I think we have more than doubled those. We have increased money for mental health, because a number of people in the mental health system end up in hospitals or jails when there should be mental health supports. That is why we have increased the special contributions to every province and territory for mental health. It is why we have supported indigenous and other cultures to ensure they are included in our policies and laws so they do not feel disjointed, which could add to them getting into the criminal justice system.

All these items relating to poverty and addiction need to be dealt with to reduce the root causes. Then we would not need to have a major debate like this.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as a member of Parliament representing a riding in Alberta, I have been horrified by our provincial government's response to the opioid crisis that is devastating our province and other regions of the country.

The lack of understanding, the lack of empathy and the lack of common sense shown by the UCP in regard to this issue has meant that Albertans, more than ever, are depending on the federal government to step up and protect our loved ones, and to treat addiction and substance abuse as a medical issue, not a criminal issue.

Sadly, this bill simply removes the mandatory minimums, but individuals who struggle with substance issues will still end up in the criminal justice system.

The member spoke about how he possibly did not agree with this, but I wonder how he can support legislation that does not go far enough, that does not take people struggling with addiction out of the criminal justice system.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, I do not think we should let the perfect be the enemy of moving forward, of having some success. We have to take steps. This is a move in exactly that direction. It will reduce some. I would like to move as far as Portugal has.

Government Orders

As the member very appropriately said, it is a health issue. A majority of crimes in Canada are caused by someone with an addiction or someone raising money to support an addiction. That is where the support needs to be to deal with that. It is not a criminal issue. Criminalizing people with addictions just accentuates the problems that would put them in jail. I agree.

It is a move in that direction, maybe not as far as some people want, but we have to take as many steps and opportunities as we can to move in that direction.

• (1250)

Mr. Tony Van Bynen (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Madam Speaker, today I join you from the traditional territories of the Wendat, Haudenosaunee and Anishinabe people and the treaty land of the Williams Treaties First Nations to speak to Bill C-22, particularly on the issue of MMPs, or mandatory minimum penalties, in the Criminal Code and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act.

The importance of equitable sentencing laws in the criminal justice system cannot be overstated. Indeed, imprisonment represents one of the most grave intrusions by the state into the lives of individuals and, as such, sentencing laws must be carefully reviewed to ensure that they reflect the values that Canadians hold dear. Unfortunately, there are inconsistencies with the current sentencing regime provided by the Criminal Code and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act that disproportionately impact indigenous peoples, Black Canadians and members of marginalized communities.

Bill C-22 proposes to repeal the particular MMPs that have shown to have the most significant impact on these communities, while ensuring that the courts can continue to impose sentences for violent and serious crimes that respond to their seriousness and the harm caused.

When considering the appropriate sanction for an offender in a criminal case, a judge must effectively balance the principles of proportionality, parity and restraint. The principle of proportionality requires a sentence to reflect the gravity of the offence and the degree of responsibility of the offender. The principle of parity requires it to be similar to those imposed on similar offenders in similar circumstances. Perhaps most importantly, the principle of restraint dictates that an offender should not be deprived of liberty if less restrictive sanctions can be appropriate under the circumstances.

Balancing these principles is a highly individualized process that demands an assessment of all relevant factors, including personal characteristics, life experiences and the individual standing before the court. However, when an offence carries an MMP, the minimum punishment is prescribed by law, which removes a certain amount of discretion from judges and means that they cannot impose sentences below the legislated minimum, even in cases where they find that a shorter period of imprisonment or no imprisonment at all would be an appropriate sentence given the circumstances of the offence.

While proponents of MMPs would argue that this ensures consistency and fairness in sentences for the same crime, the reality is that for some crimes this cannot and does not yield a fair result, which has negative impacts on the justice system at large, as well

as on the victims. MMPs can be inconsistent with the direction of the Criminal Code requiring judges to use imprisonment with restraint and to consider all available sanctions other than imprisonment that are reasonable in the circumstances for all offenders, with particular attention to the circumstances of indigenous offenders.

Between 2007 and 2017, data shows that indigenous and Black individuals were more likely to be admitted to federal custody for an offence punishable by an MMP than were other Canadians. In fact, the proportion of indigenous adults admitted with an offence punishable by an MMP almost doubled between those years, from 14% to 26%. Similarly, in 2018-19, Black persons represented 7.2% of the federal inmate population, but only 3% of the Canadian population.

Indigenous people and Black Canadians are particularly overrepresented for firearm and drug offences carrying MMPs. Specifically, Black Canadians comprised 43% of individuals convicted of importing and exporting drugs in 2016-17, while indigenous people comprised 40% of those admitted for a firearm-related offence in the same year.

Bill C-22 responds to this data by proposing to repeal MMPs for all drug offences in the CDSA, as well as for one tobacco-related offence and 13 firearm offences in the Criminal Code.

• (1255)

MMPs would remain for offences such as murder, sexual assault, all child sexual offences and for certain offences involving restricted or prohibited firearms or where the offence involves a firearm and is linked to organized crime.

While MMPs have been in place since the Criminal Code was first enacted, they were largely the exception until relatively recently. Over the last two decades, there has been an increased reliance on MMPs to further denounce crimes, deter offenders and separate them from society. The proliferation of MMPs has resulted in an increase in successful charter challenges at all levels of court, including the Supreme Court, culminating in two significant decisions. The first decision was *Nur*, in 2015, involving three- and five-year MMPs for illegal possession of a loaded prohibited or restricted firearm, and the second was the *Lloyd* decision, in 2016, involving a one-year drug MMP. Both cases make it clear that the use of MMPs for offences that cover a broad range of conduct is susceptible to charter challenges. More charter challenges mean more trials, increased costs and delayed justice, outcomes that are good for no one.

It is my understanding that as of February 8, 2021, out of 560 ongoing charter challenges in Canada tracked by the federal Department of Justice, 47% are challenges to MMPs. The proposed reforms will therefore improve the efficiency of the justice system by lowering the volume of charter challenges in the courts, which put additional pressures on their already limited time and resources.

The MMPs being repealed in this bill have failed to achieve their purported objectives: deterrence and the protection of public safety. Research has shown that increases in the severity of sanctions actually increase the likelihood of recidivism, thus failing to deter crime or protect the safety of the public. We know that a justice system that provides a one-size-fits-all response to crime can be ineffective and lead to unjust results for victims, for offenders and for Canadians in general.

Courts must have the flexibility to order sentences that reflect the circumstances of each case. In some cases, jail will be appropriate, and this bill would not change the ability of judges to sentence offenders to incarceration when it is warranted. However, in other cases, sentences that more effectively address the root causes of the offence and that better address the harm caused may be more appropriate. I might add that they would be more effective in ensuring public safety as well, because they reduce the likelihood of reoffending.

The amendments proposed in Bill C-22 would ensure that the courts are still able to impose tough sentences for violent and serious crimes, while restoring their ability to consider the systemic factors that disproportionately impact indigenous peoples, Black Canadians and marginalized people, and impose non-custodial sentences or sentences of imprisonment below the MMP when satisfied that the sentence would be appropriate to the degree of responsibility of the offender and the gravity of the offence.

The reforms would also respond to recommendations from many stakeholders in the area of anti-racism and the criminal justice system, including key stakeholders in my riding of Newmarket—Aurora, whom I had the pleasure of bringing together for a conversation with the Minister of Justice back in October.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has also called for the elimination of indigenous overrepresentation in correctional institutions over the next decade, including through amendments to the Criminal Code in the area of MMPs. Similarly, in its final report,

Government Orders

the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls called for all levels of government to evaluate the impact of MMPs on the over-incarceration of indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA people, and to take appropriate action to address their over-incarceration. More recently, the parliamentary Black caucus, composed of senators and members from all parties, called for the elimination of MMPs in the statement issued on June 20, 2020, which I am proud to support.

Bill C-22 shows that we are listening to the calls of our fellow Canadians to bring about evidence-based reforms to the sentencing regime. The proposed amendments are an important step toward creating a justice system that represents and protects all Canadians in an equitable and non-discriminatory way.

• (1300)

Mr. Derek Sloan (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, Ind.):

Mr. Speaker, I have a comment to make myself. Several people today have noted that the science with respect to mandatory minimum penalties has been conclusive and their usefulness has been completely debunked. In my opinion, this is false. I reached out to the Library of Parliament a few weeks ago and asked them this very question. Their conclusion to me, in a lengthy document that I would be happy to share, is that while deterrence, as such, may or may not be increased in certain punishments, it “is not the only factor in the debate over MMPs”, as mandatory minimum penalties are called, “and some other factors are more commonly addressed from a qualitative rather than quantitative standpoint.” Their final conclusion to me is, “Due to the variety of different metrics employed, the Library is unable to definitively comment on the degree to which scholarly opinion is settled with respect to MMPs.”

I wonder if the member could comment on the status of the science in question and the research report from the library.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

There was no interpretation for a minute. However, the problem now seems to have been resolved.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the member for her patience with the interpretation issues.

[*English*]

We will now ask the hon. member for Newmarket—Aurora for his response.

Government Orders

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: Mr. Speaker, I am sure we will have varying degrees of interpretation as to what is most effective. What I see in what is being proposed here is that we are making progress. I am not sure we will reach end-state resolution, but we are moving forward, and this bill would go a long way toward dealing with the overrepresentation that is caused by the MMPs. It is long overdue for us to give consideration to correct that shortcoming.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, before I begin, I should let you know that I will be sharing my time with the member for Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry.

I am pleased to rise virtually in the House to talk about Bill C-22, an act to amend the Criminal Code and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act.

The Liberals want to amend the Criminal Code to repeal certain mandatory minimum penalties, allow for a greater use of conditional sentences and establish other measures for simple drug possession offences.

Bill C-22 is the Prime Minister's attempt to honour his 2015 campaign promise. Unfortunately, every time we examine Liberal bills in committee or in the House, we find major flaws that suggest they never bother to consult people on the ground. That is the case with this bill too.

It is important to thoroughly analyze what the Liberals are trying to do with this bill, in which the Minister of Justice is proposing amendments that will have major consequences for Canadians' safety and well-being. I will point out various elements of the bill that I think are worth a closer look.

Bill C-22 eliminates some of the mandatory minimum sentences set out in the Criminal Code for offences involving weapons, including firearms. For example, the mandatory minimum sentence set out in subsection 85(3) for use of a firearm in the commission of an offence would be eliminated. The mandatory minimum sentence set out in subsection 92(3) for possession of an unauthorized weapon, whether it be a firearm or other weapon, would also be eliminated.

The bill eliminates all the mandatory minimum sentences set out in the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. The bill creates new provisions that advise the police or prosecutor to consider an individual's drug use and to refer the person to a treatment program. However, it is important to understand that some provinces do not even have drug treatment courts.

Bill C-22 also proposes to eliminate certain provisions of the Criminal Code related to tobacco, particularly the sale and transfer of tobacco products without an official licence. That is another thing that we are trying to understand. Finally, the bill proposes to eliminate some of the restrictions set out in section 742.1 of the Criminal Code so that more offences are eligible for community-based sentences.

Everything I just said contradicts the Liberals' official position on public safety as it relates to firearms. The message of Polytechnique was well understood, with the Liberals always claiming to be

doing a lot and much more. However, the reality is that bills such as this hamper the courts and law enforcement and greatly diminish the significance of crime when the opposite should be happening.

We always have difficulty understanding how, on the one hand, the Liberal discourse is about tougher measures when, on the other hand, their actions have the opposite effect. This is totally inconsistent in terms of public safety and the protection of Canadians.

Today we are debating Bill C-22, but we cannot forget Bill C-21, an act to amend certain acts and to make certain consequential amendments with respect to firearms. There is no consensus on this other bill among gun supporters, such as owners of guns for sport shooting or hunting, or among those who oppose guns and want them to be banned, such as the Polytechnique advocates. Bill C-21 does not do nearly enough, and the Prime Minister is not addressing the real issues.

Bill C-22 would reduce the sentences for violent gun crimes. We are trying to understand why the government wants to reduce sentences for people who commit gun crimes, when we should be doing the opposite.

I remind members that the Conservatives and my colleague introduced Bill C-238, an act to amend the Criminal Code with respect to possession of unlawfully imported firearms, which would have strengthened the Criminal Code by addressing smuggled guns and gun crimes. However, the Liberals showed their true colours and chose to vote against this bill. They would rather protect criminals than protect law-abiding citizens.

We cannot understand it. We do not understand how the Liberals can be so dishonest with Canadians when it comes to protection, public safety and firearms. The introduction of Bills C-21 and C-22 is not going to do anything to reduce gun crime. It will also not do anything to reduce the number of guns circulating in Canada, and it will simply not prevent criminals from getting their hands on illegal firearms.

● (1305)

That was made very clear two weeks ago on *J.E.*, a 30-minute investigative reporting program on TVA. I encourage everyone to watch it. Those who do not speak French should find a way to get it translated, because it is really good.

The report clearly showed what is happening with firearms in Canada, how illegal firearms from the United States are streaming right across the border. We have land management problems, our customs officers do not have sufficient resources, and the law does not allow action to be taken in certain areas. Aerial images taken by drones showed traffickers bringing in weapons by snowmobile in the winter and by boat in the summer. If members want evidence, here it is.

Montreal is starting to have the same problem as Toronto. It is easy for street gang members to get their hands on illegal firearms with the serial numbers scratched off, and young gang members are taking pride in committing crimes with the guns that are coming across the border.

Not one of the measures proposed in Bill C-21 and Bill C-22 will solve that problem even though that is what we need to focus on. Instead of helping people with drug addiction, the Liberals are reducing mandatory prison time for those producing and trafficking harmful drugs. Instead of tackling criminal gangs, they are reducing mandatory prison time for those in possession of illegal firearms.

No family should ever feel unsafe in their community, in their neighbourhood or walking down their street. The previous Conservative government pledged to change those laws and keep our streets and communities safe. Before the 2019 election, we released our platform entitled “A Safer Canada”, a three-pronged action plan targeting street gangs and arms trafficking, among other things. We covered it all in our platform.

Then the Liberals regained power. It was fortunate for them that they won the election, but it was unfortunate for Canadians because the Liberals are not doing what needs to be done to protect people and fix the firearms problem once and for all.

To read Bill C-22 we can only assume that the Liberals are incapable of discharging their governmental responsibility to ensure our safety. In contrast, the Conservative government always brought in measures to ensure the safety of all Canadians. The Prime Minister claims he wants to help Canadians, but he is doing nothing to ensure that criminals are brought to justice and answer for their actions.

We as Conservatives support our Canadian justice system as defined by our charter and our Constitution, and we do not support a justice system that would favour criminals to the detriment of Canadians' safety and security.

During this difficult time, Canadians need to know that the government is ensuring their safety and security. The Liberal government needs to show leadership and stand up to criminals. Canadians cannot afford for Parliament to get this wrong. This bill is extremely worrying for our children and for the future of our justice system.

We will do the job that Canadians have entrusted us to do: asking the government questions to ensure that the safety of Canadians remains the top priority.

● (1310)

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. I would like to talk about something that is critically important to us.

We are talking about drug trafficking. We must obviously do everything we can to put an end to it, because it affects our youth in particular and many people in our society.

However, the NDP has put forward a proposal to decriminalize simple possession of narcotics. We are not talking about hardened criminals or traffickers, but about people who often also have prob-

lems. This overloads the judicial system. For the NDP, it is not a police issue, but a health and social services issue.

What does my colleague think of the NDP proposal, which would actually prevent our prisons from becoming overcrowded with people who are victims of drug trafficking, rather than perpetrators?

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. As I have already mentioned in this place during our study of other bills, the Conservatives are willing to look at this with some degree of openness.

In the case of simple possession, these individuals are often going through problems or have developed an addiction. They are not the source of this social problem. Rather, we need to focus on those who sell or produce drugs.

We are open to exploring this and making changes, as the NDP has suggested.

[English]

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his discussion this afternoon on Bill C-22.

One of the things the bill proposes is a reduction of mandatory minimums. A little known fact is that many of those mandatory minimums were put into effect by previous Liberal governments. I am wondering if the hon. member could speak to the consequences of lowering mandatory minimum sentences for the most severe crimes, which the bill proposes to diminish.

● (1315)

[Translation]

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

This provision does indeed reflect the inconsistencies we see with this new Liberal government, which has been in place since 2015 and which we are struggling to understand. There was a time when Liberal governments had more logical positions that were more grounded in reality. However, the current Liberal government is very ideological and considers prison sentences to be problematic. These last few years, the release rate has even risen to 20%, which is a staggering jump. The government is doing everything it possibly can to empty prisons. This really reflects the ideology of the 2015 Liberal cohort. Previous governments had more common sense.

[English]

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Mr. Speaker, we know that the opioid crisis is leading to the deaths of thousands of Canadians. We have a crisis right across the country.

What does the hon. member think about decriminalizing simple possession of drugs, and eliminating section 4 of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act so that we could provide a safe supply of drugs to people who have addiction issues?

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Speaker, this is the same question asked by our colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie.

We are open to this idea. As I mentioned, we accept that users are for the most part victims of their drug use. We therefore must tackle the source of these drugs, many of which are imported. For example, we know that opioids, substances that are very difficult to detect because they are so small, come from Asia. Stopping them from entering Canada is not easy, but we must find every imaginable way possible to block the arrival of these products that are so harmful to Canadians.

[*English*]

Mr. Derek Sloan (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I want to point out briefly that there has been a suggestion in this debate that judges should have complete discretion with criminal punishments. I do not believe that is a legal principle. It is up to us here to make the laws and we have, in many cases, already fettered the judges' discretion. It is not up to the judges to choose capital punishment or corporal punishment, even if they wish to.

I want to ask the member if he believes that the House has the authority to fetter the discretion of judges in sentencing matters if it so chooses.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Speaker, I understand my colleague's question.

I agree with him in part. The government and Parliament have a responsibility to enact laws and make decisions about how justice should be administered. It bothers me a bit when the justice system makes decisions that contradict the will of the House of Commons. If there is a problem with a law or if a court decides for some reason that there is a problem, Parliament must review the legislation, debate it once again and put it to a new vote. Once Parliament makes its decision, however, the courts must abide by it.

[*English*]

Mr. Eric Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to be back in the House today to speak to Bill C-22, an act to amend the Criminal Code and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act.

This has been an issue. We come to Parliament with different goals and priorities both from our ridings perspective and also from our personal passion. One of my passions has not only been the subject of mental health but has been addictions and treatment as well, which should be the core of this bill.

COVID-19 in the last 14 months has obviously shown that the virus is a serious public health threat for our country and for the global community, but also the growing angst and mental health challenges that many Canadians are facing is certainly something we are not talking enough about or acknowledging enough. When we look at the statistics, suicides have been increasing and issues with addictions have certainly been on the rise as well, which is unfortunate.

For those who know me, I am a political junky not only in Canada but I follow U.S. and U.K. politics quite closely. There are few examples where my view has been changed or a light has gone off, an aha moment has happened for me, more than watching the U.S. presidential election, going back to 2016. I try not to bring too much American politics into our House of Commons, but I certainly think this example and this perspective is one to which we need to listen.

At that time, the former New Jersey governor Chris Christie was running for president and was in the state of New Hampshire. For those who know the state of New Hampshire and follow politics as closely as I do, a serious opioid crisis has beleaguered that state for many years. The number of people who have become addicted and unfortunately the number of people who have lost their lives is a real crisis in that state. Chris Christie was doing a town hall, and there is a video of that. I would encourage Canadians following this debate to look at that video. It is about a six-to-eight minute clip. In that video, he tells the story of his late mother and his law school friend back in the day, and it certainly hit home for me.

As a society, we have to look at addictions and substance abuse in this country differently from the way we have in the past. In politics, we talk about being more compassionate, the lens in which we see people and empathy. This is one where we need to do that.

Chris Christie talked about his mother who was diagnosed with cancer numerous times. The first time she was diagnosed she went to the hospital, was treated and went into remission. Unfortunately the cancer came back. She went back to the health care system, had treatment again and beat cancer a second time. It came back a third time. At no point did anybody in the health care system say, "Sorry, you have had cancer three times, it's a lost cause, we're not going to treat you any more." That would be an absurd proposition for a doctor, or a government or a state to say. He said that we had to think that way when it came to addictions. People who have substance abuse problems do not belong in a prison cell; they belong in rehabilitation. They need help to get their lives back on track. This is so important. Substance abuse and addictions know no barrier when it comes to gender, race or income level. It can impact and wreck anyone's life.

I want to speak today to Bill C-22 because as a Parliament, as we begin to have these conversations, more Canadians have a degree of separation, where unfortunately a friend, or a neighbour or a colleague has battled substance abuse or abuse issues. People are becoming more compassionate and know that we do not have enough services in the country when it comes to rehabilitation.

Government Orders

● (1320)

The government had the opportunity to bring a bill forward that could address this. I think we would find strong support in the House and across the country if we were to say that we would look people with simple minor possessions. As opposed to putting them through the criminal justice system or throwing them in prison with a long sentence, we would look at them with a focus on rehabilitation. That would be great.

Some parts of the bill address that. However, it goes way beyond what is reasonable in terms of prevention. Our legislation and laws need to look after individuals who need help, who need rehabilitation. However, our legislation and law enforcement should focus on people who prey on those with addictions, those who are trafficking, those who are preying on them and those who are turning to violence when it comes to drug trafficking. If we had that in the bill, I believe there would be strong support for it. I was very disheartened when I saw the opportunity for a bill to come forward on criminal justice reform but then saw the government add several pieces that would go way beyond that.

Bill C-22 would eliminate a number of mandatory minimum sentences when it comes to gun crimes, for example, robbery with a firearm, extortion with a firearm, weapons trafficking, importing or exporting knowing it is unauthorized, discharging a firearm with intent, possession for purpose of weapons trafficking and the list goes on.

Furthermore, there is an expansion of conditional sentencing. The bill would allow for a greater conditional sentence, such as house arrest, for a number of offences where the offender faces terms of less than two years of imprisonment. The following offences are now eligible: prison breach; criminal harassment; sexual assault; kidnapping; abduction of a person under the age of 14; trafficking or exporting schedule 3 drugs, like LSD; breaking and entering a place other than a house or dwelling; and arson for fraudulent purposes.

We do not need to make it easier for those criminals and people who prey in drug trafficking and drug control. We need to clamp down more than ever on them. We need to provide supports for those with addiction issues who need it. We talk about reducing this, but to go out now with a message to say that we will lessen sentences, give house arrest, and not take these types of serious offences as seriously as we have in the past is the wrong message to send as a Parliament, if we pass this legislation.

We have an opportunity here in the coming weeks and months to improve this. I hope the government makes serious amendments to the bill that focus on exactly what I have spent the last seven or eight minutes talking about. There is not a dollar more for a rehabilitation treatment centre anywhere in the country or a commitment to do more. We need to focus on that.

We need to let people know that government is here for them when they need support. We need to send a very strong message to those who are trafficking, those who are in the drug trade, that the police and law enforcement will get the tools they need from this Parliament to go after them and stop these acts from happening.

I look forward to the debates as they go forward, but the bill goes much further than what I believe a majority of Canadians want. They want more compassion for individuals who have an addiction or substance abuse issue, and tougher enforcement.

The law enforcement, front-line police officers are not asking us for less restrictions and penalties for those who are trafficking drugs. They are asking us to close loopholes. This revolving door that happens frustrates our law enforcement.

We had a private member's bill come forward from my colleague, the member for Markham—Unionville, a common-sense tough bill that would address the core issue and the core problem, and it is being ignored.

● (1325)

I look forward to the debate and to hear what my colleagues have to say. However, for a Canadian who is struggling, this bill does more to empower drug trafficking and those creating the root cause of this problem than finding solutions.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I very much feel the empathy my hon. colleague has for people living with substance abuse disorders.

My question is more on the mandatory minimums part of his speech. I find the problem with mandatory minimums is that they take away from judicial discretion in a case. I hope the member will agree with me that every offence that goes before a judge is very unique and they all have very different circumstances. We cannot have a one-size-fits-all for every offence that is committed.

What does the member think about the existing Criminal Code section 718.2, which allows judges in cases to increase sentences based on the severity of the crimes? Does he not have faith that our judges already have tools in the Criminal Code to dole out the appropriate punishment to fit the crime?

● (1330)

Mr. Eric Duncan: Mr. Speaker, the message we need to send to those trafficking drugs and preying on the vulnerable in our country is that when we make laws, in certain cases there is a benchmark and for certain crimes that benchmark needs to exist. Judges should have discretion, which we have talked about in different cases, but I look at the message this sends. We are doing the opposite of what law enforcement is asking us to do. It is asking us to close gaps, to tighten them up and to stop the revolving door that they are seeing in our justice system today.

Government Orders

I agree that we need to have a balance. Too many of the balances are being removed and the message that is sending to those in the illicit black market and trade is that we are getting easier. We need to clamp down more than ever, not take these away.

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, just by way of correction, law enforcement had asked us to take the step we are taking with respect to drug diversion in this legislation. The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police has asked for and endorsed the position we are taking.

Given that the member opposite is a member of the Conservative Party of Canada, does he recognize that the Correctional Service of Canada indicates that between 2007 and 2017, Black and other racialized offenders were more likely to be admitted to federal custody based on an offence punishable by an MMP, and the same goes for indigenous accused, such that Black individuals were more than twice overrepresented in the prison population and for indigenous people it was sixfold. Would he agree that shows proof positive through the evidence that the policies of the Harper government have failed with respect to indigenous and Black Canadians?

Mr. Eric Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I have a correction for my colleague. Many of these mandatory minimums were introduced under a Liberal government, going back as far as 1976, the Pierre Trudeau government. When he talks about a Harper failure, that is an attempt at a cheap shot that fails.

As I mentioned in my speech, when we are talking about simple possession, we are talking about people who individually have a small possession, who are not out trafficking, who are not committing robbery with a firearm, or extortion with a firearm, or weapons trafficking, or discharging firearms with intent, or prison breach, or sexual assault or kidnapping. Law enforcement in my riding is not asking me to reduce sentences for those cases.

We can deal with the issue of addictions or substance abuse of individuals. I agree with him that our prisons are overpopulated for certain demographics, absolutely. However, the answer for those individuals is getting better treatment, not sending the message that on these numerous serious offences, we are going to lower sentences or give more discretion on them. I do not believe that is what Canadian law enforcement wants.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the correlation between poverty and crime is well established.

Quebec is in the midst of a serious housing crisis. Does my colleague agree that better targeted policies to address homelessness would be a good approach to combatting the type of crime this bill addresses?

[*English*]

Mr. Eric Duncan: Mr. Speaker, we Conservatives have been very clear in the debate, the speakers the House has heard, that those struggling with addictions should get the help they need. Those Canadians should have access to treatment, not be in a prison cell. We can show more compassion, more empathy and more support for those who truly need it, but I believe we need to maintain tough laws and enforcement for those who prey on the vulnerable,

who are trafficking drugs for the purpose of wrecking the lives of people, to send the message that that type of behaviour and conduct is not acceptable in this country. I do not believe sending the message of lowering the bar on that is the right way to go.

With respect to the member's point, providing help for the individual is what this legislation should focus on, but it takes on a wide array of other offences that I do not believe belong in the bill.

• (1335)

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country.

I want to wish everyone celebrating the first day of Ramadan a very blessed Ramadan Mubarak.

It is with pleasure that I speak to Bill C-22, an act to amend the Criminal Code and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. These proposed reforms represent an important step in our government's continuing efforts to make our criminal justice system fairer for everyone by seeking to address the overrepresentation of indigenous, Black and other members of marginalized and racialized communities.

[*Translation*]

Bill C-22 focuses on existing laws, which have exacerbated the underlying social, economic, institutional and historic disadvantages that contribute to systemic inequalities at all stages of the criminal justice system, from the first contact with law enforcement through to sentencing.

[*English*]

Issues of systemic racism and discrimination in the Canadian criminal justice system are well documented, including by commissions of inquiry: the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and the Commission on Systemic Racism in the Ontario Criminal Justice System.

I will be candid in saying that it was to address such inequalities and racism that I originally ran for office in this chamber. This objective has been fostered by my progressive constituents in Parkdale—High Park who attend Black Lives Matter rallies in large numbers, who focus on reconciliation and the need to address systemic discrimination against indigenous persons, and who have attended a regular series of discussions that I have held as a member of Parliament on the issue of combatting systemic racism in the wake of the deaths of George Floyd and Regis Korchinski-Paquet, which occurred in my riding.

As a nation and as a continent, I firmly believe that we are seized with a moment and a movement now that Canadians are no longer willing to tolerate systemic racism and systemic discrimination. It is in that vein that our government is acting in response. Bill C-22 is a key part of that response to help remove systemic barriers that Black, indigenous and people of colour face in this country.

We know that the Parliamentary Black Caucus, as represented by members of all parties in this chamber, in June 2020 called for “reform the justice and public safety systems to weed out anti-Black racism, systemic bias, and make the administration of justice and public security more reflective of and sensitive to the diversity of our country”. As an ally, I was pleased to sign this statement, as were numerous cabinet ministers in our government, including the Minister of Justice himself.

All of these calls to action have recognized that sentencing laws, in particular the broad and indiscriminate use of mandatory minimums and restrictions on the use of conditional sentences, have made our criminal justice system less fair and have disproportionately hurt certain communities in Canada. To draw the juxtaposition as clearly as possible, there is a difference between being tough on crime, as the previous Conservative government purported to be, and being smart on crime, which is exactly what we, as Liberals, are doing with this legislation before us and other initiatives. This is precisely why Bill C-22 proposes to repeal a number of MMPs, including for all drug-related offences and for some firearms-related offences. Although some MMPs would be retained for serious offences, such as murder and serious firearms offences linked to organized crime, data shows overwhelmingly that the MMPs that would be repealed have particularly contributed to the over-incarceration of indigenous peoples, Black Canadians and other racialized and marginalized people. Members heard me put that to the member for Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry in the questions and answers that preceded this speech.

This bill would also increase the availability of conditional sentence orders, CSOs. This is a critical facet that has not been focused on enough: conditional sentence orders in cases where offenders do not pose a risk to public safety. CSOs allow offenders to serve sentences of less than two years in the community under strict conditions, such as house arrest or a curfew, while still being able to benefit from employment; educational opportunities; and family, community and health-related support systems.

In order to appreciate the pressing need for these reforms, we have to look back at the foundational principles of sentencing in this country. The fundamental purposes of sentencing in Canada are the result of trail-blazing reforms that were made in 1996, which created a statutory recognition that sentencing is and must be an individualized process that relies on judicial discretion to impose just sanctions. Such sanctions are proportionate to the degree of responsibility of the offender and the seriousness of the offence. The member for Cowichan—Malahat—Langford just referenced this individualized nature in his most recent intervention.

To achieve just sanctions, the 1996 reforms directed judges to take into account a number of sentencing principles, including rehabilitation and deterrence. Some of these principles acknowledge that in sentencing less serious crimes, imprisonment is often ineffective, unduly punitive and to be discouraged. The sentencing

Government Orders

principles also recognized the need to address the over-incarceration of indigenous persons who were at the time already overrepresented in the criminal justice system. This was in 1996. What has happened since then, including after 10 years of the Harper government, are some of the statistics I have already indicated in the course of this debate.

● (1340)

As such, the amendments to the Criminal Code directed judges to consider all sanctions other than imprisonment that are reasonable in the circumstances before choosing to send an offender to jail. This principle applies to all offenders and requires judges to pay particular attention to the circumstances of indigenous persons.

In order to give full effects to these remedial principles, the 1996 reforms created conditional sentences of imprisonment to allow courts to order that terms of imprisonment of less than two years be served in the community under certain conditions. An offender could be eligible for a conditional sentence if serving their sentence in the community would not pose a risk to public safety, that the offence for which they are convicted is not subject to a mandatory minimum and that the community-based sentence would be consistent with the fundamental purposes of sentencing.

However, the increased use of mandatory minimums for a broad range of offences and the enactment by the previous Conservative government of additional restrictions on the availability of conditional sentences has restricted judicial discretion and made it difficult for courts to effectively apply these principles. As a result, these tough-on-crime, Harper government measures have made our criminal justice system less effective by discouraging the early resolution of cases. These measures have eroded public confidence in the administration of justice, something that is a hallmark of the rule of law in this country and is actually entrenched in the charter in section 24.

By far the most problematic consequence of these sentencing laws has been the disproportionate impact on Black, indigenous and persons of colour. In fact, the jurisprudence indicates how these processes and policies have failed, the policies of the previous Conservative government.

The Ontario Court of Appeal found in its 2020 decision in *Sharma* that certain of the limits on conditional sentence orders enacted in 2012 undermined the purpose of the Gladue principle by limiting the court's ability to impose a fit sentence that takes the offender's circumstances into account. The Court of Appeal held that those limits perpetuate a discriminatory impact against indigenous offenders in that sentencing process.

Government Orders

If I am going to zoom out, what I would say is that we, as a government on this side of the aisle, do not believe in handcuffing judges. What we believe is in empowering them to consider the overall situation of the accused. This is exemplified in Bill C-22, but also in other things that were captured in the fall economic statement, such as our approach to Gladue principles, our approach to community justice centres and to funding impact of race and culture assessments so the judges, when faced with an accused who is Black, indigenous or a person of colour, can look at the overall context of that individual and address a specifically tailored remedy for that situation to cure this malaise of overrepresentation.

[*Translation*]

The bill targets the sentencing policies and in doing so would restore the courts' ability to effectively enforce the fundamental objective and principles of sentencing and ensure that sentences are tailored to the individual and to the circumstances of the case.

[*English*]

Although it is important to ensure that fair and compassionate sentences are imposed, it is equally important to ensure that measures are in place to avoid contact with the criminal justice system in the first place. That is why Bill C-22 would require police and prosecutors to consider alternatives to laying and proceeding with charges for the simple possession of drugs, such as issuing a warning, taking no action or diversion to addiction treatment programs. Again, this came up in my questions put to the member for Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry with respect to police and law enforcement being behind this provision of the bill.

We want to focus on getting individuals the help they need, whether that be treatment programs, housing or mental health support, instead of criminalizing them. These measures are consistent with our public health-centred approach to substance use and the opioid epidemic in this country. Together, these measures would encourage responses that take into account the individual's experience with systemic racism and health-related issues, and the particular supports they could benefit from. These reforms would allow police, prosecutors and courts to give full effect to the important principle of restraint in sentencing, particularly for indigenous offenders, and explore approaches that focus on restorative justice, rehabilitation of the individual and reintegration into the community.

It is essential that Canadians have confidence in the system and that it be there to protect them, not harm them. These reforms reflect what we have heard from Canadians, particularly now in the wake of this movement and us being awoken to the issue of systemic racism and systemic discrimination in the criminal justice system. I will leave it at that and I look forward to questions from colleagues on all sides of the chamber.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have some concerns about the debate today. Earlier on this morning, I asked one of his colleagues about full decriminalization and his colleague said that politics was getting in the way of being able to put full decriminalization of small amounts of drug possession. Later on, I asked another colleague who replied, and I am paraphrasing, that of course it was the right thing to do, but that we could not let perfect get in the way of good. This member has

also articulated how important it is to keep people out of the criminal system, particularly around possession of small amounts of drugs.

Does the member understand that, in fact, he is part of the government, that the government brought forward this bill and it has the potential, the ability and the capacity to change this bill and make it better? Why are they not doing that?

● (1345)

Mr. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Edmonton Strathcona for her contributions to this debate and others in the House.

The issue of how one treats drug offences is critical, and I appreciate she has put the question to many members speaking today. Obviously, I am painfully aware I am a member of the government, and I am proud to be a member of a government doing the work that is necessary in this regard. We have taken very important steps with respect to the legalization of cannabis and the restrictions there too. Those were taken under the previous Parliament.

What we are doing here with this legislation is an important step in the right direction, which is responding to calls from, among others, the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police in respect to what we need to do to stop clogging up the courts to free up resources such as police resources, Crown resources and judicial resources, so they can target the most serious situations.

With respect to drugs, obviously a tailored approach needs to be taken, particularly when it comes to large-scale drug trafficking and gang-related activity.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, a new resource has emerged out of the pandemic. La Halte du coin is a high-intake shelter that welcomes the homeless no questions asked, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. People who use the shelter receive help with their substance abuse. Obviously they are less likely to commit crime if they are not in the street.

However, La Halte du coin is facing a challenge. It received funding during the pandemic to run its operations, but it is waiting to find out whether it will be able to continue after the pandemic. There is certainly a demand for this type of resource to get people off the street.

Does my colleague not think that it is time to provide predictability for organizations that work with clients who are at risk of committing crime?

Mr. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, that is a good question and it aligns with our overall theme of providing support to organizations that help clients struggling with addictions.

Government Orders

[English]

Our perspective is about harm reduction and about meeting people on their own terms. It is also about not overly criminalizing either the individual or the people who are serving them. The member's question is well-founded. What we are trying to do is fund harm reduction and harm reduction centres, and ensure safe injection sites are available where all are protected, not just the people who are using the substance, but also the people who are serving them.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today on this very important bill, Bill C-22, which I have to say, having served in Parliament representing Saanich—Gulf Islands during the time many of the mandatory minimums were brought in, is disappointing on a number of levels.

As I recall it from memory, I think it was Mr. Harper's omnibus bill, Bill C-10, and we fought really hard against it at the time. There was no evidence whatsoever from any jurisdiction that mandatory minimums worked. I am disappointed. Why, when 43 mandatory minimums have already been found to be unconstitutional by courts across this country, are only 19 of them being removed?

We could go farther. We should do more. Perhaps a willingness to take on more in committee would be salutary. We certainly would not remove mandatory minimums with this bill, which do not work. They just cause increased congestion in prisons, and, as we know, provinces have to take on those costs.

Mr. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her contributions today and every day in this Parliament.

I have three responses. One is that we are responding to all of the Supreme Court determinations with respect to mandatory minimums. Two is that we are repealing all of them with respect to drug-related offences. She is absolutely correct that there are some that remain with respect to certain firearms offences that deal with things such as where a firearm is used in the context of hurting another individual or where a firearm is used in the context of increasing the supply of illegal guns in this country, or trafficking. Those mandatory minimums would remain and there is sound justification for doing so.

What we have tried to do is take a tailored and targeted approach. We have seen, particularly with respect to Black and indigenous accused, overrepresentation linked to particular firearm-related offences such as simple possession. Those are the ones we are targeting with this bill. I look forward to her work at committee going forward.

• (1350)

Mr. Patrick Weiler (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-22, an act to amend the Criminal Code and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, which was introduced a couple months ago and proposes some important reforms to reduce the over-incarceration of indigenous peoples, Black Canadians and members of marginalized communities.

As we all know, a fair and effective criminal justice system is critical to ensuring that Canadians feel safe in their communities,

and have confidence in the justice system, and have trust that offenders are being held accountable in a manner that is equitable, transparent, and promotes public safety in Canada. The unfortunate reality is that far too many people face discrimination and systemic racism in all stages of our criminal justice system. For example, indigenous adults represent 5% of the general population, but 30% of federally incarcerated inmates. Black Canadians represent 3% of the Canadian population, but 7% of federal offenders.

This is a clear problem that has been exacerbated by “tough on crime” sentencing policies, including the indiscriminate and broad use of mandatory minimum penalties of imprisonment, or MMPs, as well as added restrictions placed on the availability of conditional sentencing orders, or CSOs. MMPs run counter to the fundamental principle of sentencing, namely that sentences must be individually tailored to the particular circumstances of the offence and the degree of the responsibility of the offender before the court. An excessive use of MMPs implies that we do not have trust in the judiciary to hand out sentences that fit the acts of the crime.

Rather than giving that to the judge, who would have heard all of the evidence that had been tested in court between the prosecution and the defence, it assumes that Ottawa knows best. It assumes that parliamentarians should institute blanket penalties regardless of the facts.

This one-size-fits-all approach to sentencing denies the reality that offences can be committed in a broad range of circumstances with varying degrees of seriousness. For example, someone who steals to feed their family is arguably less blameworthy than someone who steals goods to sell on the black market. This one-size-fits-all sentencing has too often used the latter example as a baseline for sentencing laws, and this has created problems in our justice system. This is one of the reasons MMPs are often found to constitute cruel and unusual punishment and are thus found to be unconstitutional for violating section 12 of the charter.

There are other reasons we should only utilize MMPs in the narrowest of situations. Number one is that they do not make our communities safer. The weight of evidence shows that minimum sentences do not deter crime, reduce rates of reoffending or make our communities any safer. Rather, it has been shown that they increase recidivism.

Number two is that they have a massive cost to society. The average cost of incarceration per person is over \$125,000 a year. Number three is that unfair sentences are more likely to be appealed up to the highest court of the land, and this puts a strain on DOJ resources, gums up our court system and impacts the timely administration of justice.

Government Orders

This is an issue because the evidence shows that trials now take longer. Between 1996 and 2018, the time from first appearance to decision increased 228% for firearms offences and 60% for drug offences, and charter challenges to MMPs now represent 47% of all constitutional challenges to federal criminal laws. Over the last 10 years, 69% of charter challenges related to drug offences with mandatory minimum penalties have been successful, and it is the same for 49% of firearms MMPs.

The last minister of justice for the Conservative party claimed he was going to put away “the worst of the worst” during the tough on crime mandate of the Harper years, but the outcome has simply been a massive increase of unjust sentences forced on offenders, which the Supreme Court continues to deem unconstitutional.

Bill C-22 represents an important step forward, providing alternatives to incarceration where appropriate, including for indigenous and Black Canadians. One important component of the proposed reforms is a series of amendments to the conditional sentencing regime that would allow the regime to fulfill its original purpose, namely to address the overreliance on incarceration for less serious crimes. A CSO allows an offender who does not pose a threat to public safety to serve a prison term of less than two years in the community under strict conditions, including house arrest and curfew.

The law governing CSOs provides judges with the ability to impose a broad range of conditions that balance public safety with other important objectives such as rehabilitation. For example, a judge can require an offender to attend an approved treatment program, which can help address the underlying reasons that led to offending in the first place.

• (1355)

Evidence shows that allowing offenders who do not pose a risk to public safety to serve their sentences in the community under strict conditions, while maintaining access to employment, community and health-related support systems, is more effective at reducing future criminality than harsh penalties such as incarceration. In certain circumstances, it can provide the environment for offenders to take responsibility for the harm they caused to the victim by their actions, as well as take responsibility for their actions through restorative justice.

I have had the opportunity to see the excellent work that the North Shore Restorative Justice Society and the Restorative Justice Program of the Sunshine Coast have done in this regard. This is well known to be a powerful way of not only reducing recidivism, but also helping communities heal.

Having established why MMPs are problematic, it is worth highlighting that they are particularly so in drug cases. This is top of mind in my province of British Columbia, where more people have been killed by the opioid epidemic since the pandemic reached our shores than have passed away from COVID-19. Rather than treat substance use and addiction as a moral issue, we need to continue to take steps to treat it as a health issue, so that we can get help to those individuals who are suffering.

Bill C-22 would require police to consider other measures for simple possession of drugs, such as diversion to addiction treatment

programs rather than laying charges and necessitating incarceration. In doing so, we would diminish the danger associated with substance abuse by no longer forcing individuals to use drugs in secrecy out of fear of punishment and incarceration. It would prevent a vicious cycle where Canadians incarcerated as a result of drug charges become more likely to recommit the same crime and use again. Instead, pursuing alternatives to incarceration would allow real healing to take place, which is necessary if we are to combat the opioid crisis, which has particularly wreaked tragedy in the privacy of people's homes.

That takes me to my next point. In 2020, the majority of fatal drug overdoses took place in privacy and solitude. By contrast, zero deaths have occurred at supervised consumption or drug overdose prevention sites in B.C. because of medical interventions from staff. When simple drug use no longer needs to be concealed out of fear of criminal prosecution, government programs that provide for safer supply are possible, and we create the space for treatment to rehabilitate those suffering from addiction. This method has shown success in communities across my riding, and they have overwhelming community support.

In Sechelt, the Sunshine Coast's first sanctioned safe consumption site was established last July. There, trained staff provide support, which includes access to naloxone, counselling, overdose response and education, drug checking, and detox treatment options. A couple months ago, an overdose prevention site opened in Squamish. This new site is dedicated to the memory of the late Squamish resident Sarah Jane Thompson, a vocal advocate for harm reduction who tragically died of drug toxicity during a relapse in November.

To sum up, this legislation makes some important improvements to our criminal justice system. It gets rid of unfair laws, which do nothing to make our communities safer, but which pose a massive cost on the public, impact our institutions, and disproportionately impact indigenous and Black Canadians and other marginalized communities. In its place, we will create real opportunities for individuals to get the help they need, while allowing for rehabilitation and reintegration of our communities and create safer communities as a result.

I urge all members to support this important bill.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country will have five minutes for questions and comments when the House next gets back to debate on the question.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

VAISAKHI

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey—Newton, Lib.): [*Member spoke in Punjabi*]

[English]

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to celebrate Vaisakhi, Khalsa Day and Sikh Heritage Month. Khalsa Day and Vaisakhi are very important dates for Sikhs who pay tribute to the birth of Khalsa and the harvest season, respectively.

April is also recognized as Sikh Heritage Month in Canada, where the contributions and accomplishments of Sikh pioneers are celebrated for the way they have positively impacted our country. As we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, Sikh values of hope, universality, rebirth, renewal, goodwill and compassion toward others are principles we can all embrace.

I want to wish everyone celebrating them a very happy Vaisakhi and Khalsa Day.

* * *

● (1400)

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. David Yurdiga (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for too long Alberta's ethical oil and gas sector has been mislabelled as being dirty. It has been singled out as the only sector contributing to climate change and environmental impacts, while foreign oil and gas get a free pass.

Critics claim we need to put an end to Alberta oil and gas while ignoring the reality that more harm is done to the environment by polluting the water we drink and contaminating the fish and lobster we consume. Dozens of municipalities across Canada, such as Montreal and Quebec City, continue to dump raw sewage and untreated wastewater into our nation's waterways.

It is time we get serious about protecting the environment by protecting our waterways and stopping this outdated practice of dumping human waste into the ecosystem. Let us stop the cycle of abuse.

* * *

ORGAN DONATION

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, April is organ donation awareness month. Despite our efforts, registration rates across Canada are dismal. In Ontario, there are over 1,500 people waiting for a life-saving organ transplant. This is their only treatment option and every three days someone will die because they did not get a transplant in time. One donor can save up to eight lives through organ donation and enhance the lives of up to 75 people through the gift of tissue.

Age alone does not disqualify someone from becoming a donor. The oldest organ donor was over 90 years old and the oldest tissue donor was over 100 years old. There is always the potential to be a

Statements by Members

donor, and age should not stop someone from registering. Anyone over the age of 16 can register.

I encourage residents of my riding and across Canada to discuss their intentions with their family and go to beadonor.ca to register.

* * *

[Translation]

BATTLE OF VIMY RIDGE

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commemorate the participation of Quebeckers in one of the most famous military operations of the First World War, the Battle of Vimy Ridge, which took place from April 9 to 12, 1917. It was a resounding victory, but it came at a very high human cost as we lost 3,598 of our own.

I wanted to highlight the outstanding contributions of the French Canadians of the 22nd Battalion. According to historian Carl Pépin, as the only French-speaking unit in the entire British army, the 22nd Battalion had two wars to fight. On the one hand, they were fighting the German enemy, and on the other, they were fighting for recognition of their valour and for everyone's respect. That is a credit to Quebeckers.

We thank the French Canadians and English Canadians who fought at Vimy for their service.

* * *

THE ARTS IN HOCHELAGA

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Hochelaga, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Hochelaga is home to a large community of artists and creators who feed our souls and inspire our thoughts about our society. Today, I pay tribute to the visual artists who uplifted us with their creations during this pandemic.

I am thinking of Garbage Beauty, an art collective that writes poetry on garbage cans and transforms them into works of art; HLY, who beautifies our walls and alleys; and Louise Beaupré Lincourt, who painted one watercolour a day during the entire pandemic for a total of 372 paintings depicting Hochelaga.

Our government has provided direct support for the arts and culture industry with nearly \$1 billion in emergency funding, including a \$500-million fund for Canadian heritage, \$100 million in insurance to get production back up, and \$25 million for national museums and the National Arts Centre.

If we include the Canada emergency wage subsidy, the CERB and CRB, then we are talking about over \$4 billion for the cultural industry and its workers across the country.

Thank you to all of our artists.

Statements by Members

● (1405)

[English]

VAISAKHI

Ms. Jag Sahota (Calgary Skyview, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today Sikhs around the world are celebrating the creation of the Khalsa Panth known as Vaisakhi, by the tenth Guru. The Khalsa Panth was a confederation of sovereign groups committed to a social justice model, humanism and enhancing diversity. It was an early participatory democracy that employed dialogue and reasoned argumentation for consensus building.

The principles taught in the Khalsa are principles that we Sikhs continue live by. As we saw throughout this pandemic in my own community and across Canada, Sikhs opened their kitchens to ensure that our frontline workers had access to food and basic needs during the pandemic and that those most vulnerable were not forgotten and were helped.

From the Conservative Party of Canada, we wish everyone celebrating a very Happy Vaisakhi. Conservative Party *walo aap saraya nu lakh lakh vadia*.

* * *

ORAL HEALTH MONTH

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, April is Oral Health Month and from April 4-10, in recognition of National Dental Hygienist Week, I would like to recognize someone very dear to me. As a restorative dental hygienist, my wife, Homeira, is one of the countless frontline health workers who has bravely served Canadians during the COVID-19 pandemic.

For over 25 years, she has been passionate about her profession and the patients that she is taking care of. In June 2020, when health care restrictions were relaxed, Homeira quickly gowned up and was one of the first people back in the office. She persevered through every lockdown to support her colleagues and to attend to her patients' complex oral health needs.

I am so proud of Homeira and grateful to her and to all frontline workers across Canada who have worked tirelessly through the pandemic despite the grave risk. Let us take a moment to acknowledge all the dental hygienists who play an important role in taking care of our oral health.

I send my love to Homeira.

* * *

HOLIDAY CELEBRATIONS

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is a day to celebrate, reflect and observe. Sikhs across Canada are celebrating Vaisakhi, a celebration of the creation of the Khalsa and the Sikh Articles of Faith. On this day and for the entire month of April, we are also celebrating Sikh Heritage Month and the accomplishments and contributions of Sikh Canadians across the country.

Today, Muslim Canadians will begin a month of fasting, peace and reflection as they observe Ramadan, one of the most sacred times in Islam.

For Hindu Canadian friends, today is the beginning of Chaitra Navaratri, a nine-day celebration remembering the goddess Durga and praying for her protection and for happiness.

As a nation of diversity and inclusion, we are fortunate and blessed to be able to celebrate our traditions and faiths side by side, in peace and harmony. As we celebrate this year, make sure we nurture these cherished Canadian values. Let us remember to celebrate safely.

Vaisakhi diyan lakh lakh Vadhaiyan, Ramadan mubarak, and happy Navaratri.

* * *

RICHMOND CENTRE COMMUNITY

Hon. Alice Wong (Richmond Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, COVID-19 has caused an unspeakable amount of suffering and I offer my sympathies to those who have been affected. We tend to dwell on the negatives, but instead let us reflect on the positives.

My home city of Richmond has consistently posted the lowest per capita COVID case numbers in Metro Vancouver. However, the numbers do not tell the whole story. The story is truly about the vast majority of Richmondites taking responsibility for their health and keeping safe while continuing to function during this terrible pandemic.

Anxiety in these times is high, but we are resilient, adaptive and considerate of others. This speaks to our community as we weather the COVID storm. Just like all storms, this one will pass and Richmond will lead the way.

* * *

● (1410)

[Translation]

INNOVATIVE TECHNOLOGY

Mrs. Élisabeth Brière (Sherbrooke, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Friday, my colleagues, the President of the Treasury Board and the member for Brome—Missisquoi, and I were treated to a virtual tour of IBM Canada's facility in Bromont. It was an opportunity for us to discuss the development of new technology in Quebec and to observe the results of a collaboration between the Université de Sherbrooke and IBM that will benefit the region economically, create good jobs and generate innovative research projects for our students.

The Université de Sherbrooke is known for its work in innovative technology, as evidenced by our recent \$11-million investment in that field.

I want to congratulate the Université de Sherbrooke's Dr. Cossette and Professor Aimez for their hard work and dedication. Their work is proof of the Université de Sherbrooke's leadership in innovative technology in fields such as quantum science, and their partnership with IBM is an indicator of our wonderful region's know-how when it comes to developing the technology of the future.

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are ready for a plan forward, yet only weeks ago the Liberals voted against a Conservative motion to provide a plan to permanently and safely reopen Canada based on science. They played politics, blamed the provinces, fearmongered and did everything they could to cover up their failures and scandals.

Canada deserves better. Canadians deserve a plan and that is what Conservatives are offering. We have a five-point plan that will address the challenges we face, bring back ethical governance, unleash the potential of our nation and ensure we recover from global challenges and Liberal failures. The contrast is clear. While the Liberals plan to reimagine our economy based on flimsy ideology and self-interest, Conservatives will secure our future.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Warren Steinley (Regina—Lewvan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Economic Development had the audacity to release an editorial criticizing the Conservatives of playing political games. The arrogance of the minister and the entire Liberal cabinet is out of control. Between their stalling tactics and refusal to show up to committee meetings, they clearly have no respect for the parliamentary process. It is pretty rich for the minister to state that we are holding up legislation when the Liberals actually shut down Parliament, which resulted in wiping out pre-pandemic pieces of legislation.

Even when the opposition brings up reasonable improvements to flawed Liberal legislation, it is treated as a political game. We agree that there has to be help for businesses and individuals across Canada. Where we disagree is on how to achieve that mandate. We need a safe plan to reopen the economy, a plan to open the borders and a plan to get Canadians back to work. Only the Conservative recovery plan will secure the future for all Canadians, not just Liberal insiders like the Minister of Economic Development's boyfriend.

* * *

MARINE ATLANTIC FERRY SERVICES

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week, after widespread protests from towns and communities in Newfoundland and Labrador, the Marine Atlantic ferry services rolled back fare increases that had been implemented on April 1. People are worried about the cost of living, and the tourism industry is holding out hope that it will be able to rebuild as the pandemic eases. While it is a welcome break from relentless fare increases under a cost-recovery model that even the Prime Minister called unreasonable in 2015, this does nothing to fix the underlying problem.

This vital service was constitutionally mandated when Newfoundland and Labrador joined as a province with Canada over 70 years ago, but the cost-recovery model discourages travellers and visitors, increases food prices and the cost of living and hurts businesses. We need an affordable ferry service between Newfoundland

Statements by Members

and Labrador and Nova Scotia, despite the promise by the Prime Minister and then six of seven Liberal MPs from the province. Six years later, nothing has changed. This needs to be fixed.

* * *

[Translation]

FRANÇOIS GRISÉ

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to a man who was a true pillar of the Saint-Hyacinthe community.

François Grisé, who passed away four days ago, was so much more than a businessman. He was a mentor to the entrepreneurs of Saint-Hyacinthe, especially those with businesses downtown.

Of course, many will remember him for his years running the popular microbrewery Le Bilboquet, at a time when Quebec was hardly a mecca for that sort of thing. He also co-founded the excellent restaurant L'Espègle. He chaired the Société de développement commercial centre-ville Saint-Hyacinthe, our local BIA, and he was a big supporter of Mareiwa Café when it was starting up. He was a dedicated volunteer with many organizations. More than anything, he will be remembered as a man of boundless generosity who was always there for others. He will be sadly missed by the entire community, but his presence is still felt on the streets of downtown Saint-Hyacinthe.

On behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I offer my sincere condolences to Mr. Grisé's family and loved ones.

Thank you, François Grisé.

* * *

● (1415)

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Conservatives stand firmly with Canadian women who have been let down by the Prime Minister and the Liberal government.

There are 1.5 million women who lost their jobs in the first two months of the COVID crisis, and all economic gains made by women over my lifetime have been completely lost during the tenure of the Prime Minister. We know that 500,000 women are still out of work and that young women have suffered three times as many job losses as young men, yet the Liberal government has yet to deliver a plan to Canadians to get our country safely back to work.

Oral Questions

The Conservative leader is the first and only leader to date to put forward a plan to get Canada back on track. We will secure jobs, secure accountability to prevent future Liberal scandals, secure mental health to improve Canadians' well-being, secure Canada with a domestic supply of vaccines and PPE, and secure our economy by responsibly balancing the books over a 10-year period. Women, mothers and families deserve no less.

* * *

ORAL HEALTH MONTH

Mr. Neil Ellis (Bay of Quinte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, April is Oral Health Month in Canada. As we all continue to do our part to keep our communities healthy throughout the pandemic, we must also remember that maintaining our well-being includes protecting our oral health and hygiene. This is why I am pleased to recognize the dental hygienists community in my riding and beyond.

Last week, from April 4 to April 10, was National Dental Hygienists Week. Our dental hygienists know best that taking care of our mouths, teeth and gums benefits our overall well-being. This year, they were creative in taking the celebrations online to spread their oral health and total health message far and wide.

For the dental hygienists community in my riding of Bay of Quinte, and for all its members across the country, we celebrate the professionals who help us smile brightly every day.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

HEALTH

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister made CNN last night. The headline was "Canada's vaccine shortage." Jake Tapper told viewers around the world that the Canadian government had failed.

Will the Prime Minister admit that his failure to secure sufficient vaccines is leading to a catastrophic third wave?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is important that we stay grounded in the facts in these conversations.

Canada is actually third in the G20 in terms of vaccines delivered to people. We are going to continue to work even harder to get more vaccines into Canada and into arms as quickly as possible. That is what this government's focus is.

At the same time, we are supporting the provinces, families and business owners so that we can do the restrictions necessary to get through this third wave. We need to get people vaccinated and we need to get the caseloads down before we are going to start easing restrictions. That is what we are focused on.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it looks like the Prime Minister needs to sit down with Jake Tapper.

For months, the Liberal government's answer to questions about its slow pandemic response has been to compare Canada to the

United States. Canada has now passed the United States in per capita numbers of new COVID cases every day.

How many Canadians are now being infected with COVID-19 variants because of the government's slow and confused rollout of vaccines?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, I think it is really important that we work from facts and an understanding of the science around things.

We know, for example, that the U.K. is ahead of just about everybody else on vaccinations, and yet it maintains very strong restrictions and is facing a very serious third wave.

Vaccinations on their own are not enough to keep us safe. We need to engage in the right kinds of behaviours and do things that the Conservatives are not always good at, like wearing masks, keeping distance and obeying public health rules.

● (1420)

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with regard to facts and science, here is a quote for the Prime Minister: "Because of the current situation in Canada even fully vaccinated travelers may be at risk". The risk that the Centers for Disease Control is referring to is the massive spread of COVID-19 variants in Canada, because of the slow vaccination rates guaranteed by the Prime Minister. "Avoid all travel" is a warning usually reserved for dictatorships. It is now being applied to Canada.

Since the Prime Minister cannot point to the U.S. for bad comparisons anymore, whom is he going to blame for his vaccine failures?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we see, consistently, that the Conservatives never let the facts get in the way of a political attack.

The reality is that this CDC recommendation dates from March, last March, a year ago, recommending that people not travel to Canada or just about any other country outside the United States.

This is what we have had to work with as a world, limiting travel, protecting our citizens and getting them vaccinated. Every step of the way, this government has grounded itself in facts and science, as opposed to the Conservatives, who prefer political arguments and making stuff up.

*Oral Questions**[Translation]*

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister appeared on CNN last night. The story was the vaccine shortage in Canada. The journalist told the whole world that it was a real failure by the Canadian government.

Will the Prime Minister admit that his failure with the vaccines has resulted in a devastating third wave?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, the Conservatives should stick to the facts and reality. We promised to deliver six million vaccine doses before the end of March and we exceeded that amount. More than 11 million doses have been delivered to Canadians just a few weeks later. We are working day and night to get more vaccines for Canadians. At the same time, we must protect ourselves and follow public health guidelines to decrease the number of cases and protect ourselves.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Quebec is vaccinating a lot of people, but it needs more doses if it is to keep up this pace. Yesterday I asked the Prime Minister whether there would be more delays with vaccines, and he assured me that there would not. Today he announced that there will be a delay with the Moderna vaccines.

What happened in the past 24 hours to make the Prime Minister flip-flop?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is quite troubling that the Leader of the Opposition is not telling the truth about a conversation he and I had.

I explained to him that we would receive 44 million doses by the end of June, that we would be getting regular deliveries from Pfizer and that we were still seeing minor delays of one or two days with the Moderna vaccine.

We are working very hard, but the Leader of the Opposition would rather make baseless personal and political attacks. That is disappointing.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to be in the House to congratulate Maxime Laporte, who defended Quebec democracy, and Joseph Faical, who introduced Bill 99 in the Quebec National Assembly. The Quebec Court of Appeal just upheld Bill 99 and, despite the pandemic, there are things that we need to recognize and highlight.

Will the Prime Minister accept the Quebec Court of Appeal's ruling, or will he appeal it?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since the beginning of the pandemic and since we took office, we have always worked hand in hand with our provincial partners. We have always respected the processes in place and provincial jurisdictions.

We will continue to work hand in hand with Quebec to deliver for Quebecers and to protect Quebecers and all Canadians. That is what we will always do.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I did not understand a word he said, but I am sure it was good.

I think that the Minister of Justice said that the federal government was not planning to challenge the court of appeal's ruling. The thing is, Bill 99 and the so-called Clarity Act on federal referendums are profoundly incompatible. It is either-or. There can only be one.

If the government is not challenging this decision, will the Prime Minister repeal the so-called Clarity Act?

● (1425)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are in the middle of a third wave that is extremely worrisome.

While we are all working together to try to help Canadians and address their concerns, the Bloc Québécois cannot resist starting a debate on sovereignty. Our priority right now and for the coming months is to deliver for Canadians and be there for Quebecers to address their priorities, not the Bloc's political priority, which is to stir up trouble.

* * *

HEALTH

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the number of people in ICUs in Quebec and across the country is growing. The COVID-19 variants are causing an urgent crisis, and we are losing the race against them. My question for the Prime Minister is this: What is his plan to vaccinate the entire population as soon as possible?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been working on that plan since last summer.

The plan included negotiating and signing contracts with more vaccine manufacturers than other countries and securing more doses for Canadians than other countries so we could speed up vaccinations.

Everyone can see that it is working. More and more Canadians are being vaccinated. We have received 11 million vaccine doses so far, including five million in the last few weeks alone. We will keep working with the provinces and territories to step up our vaccination efforts.

[English]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are in the middle of a third wave of COVID-19 that is hitting us hard. We are seeing a record number of cases in Ontario, and we are losing the race against the variants.

Oral Questions

When I raised this issue yesterday, the Minister of Health said with pride that it was the federal government sending the tents to the field hospitals in Ontario. That is not a mark of pride; that is a sign of failure. It should never have gotten to this point.

My question is clear. When will the Prime Minister start real action, starting with immediately improving paid sick leave, and stop making excuses?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we approved paid sick leave many, many months ago, and it would be excellent for the leader of the NDP to acknowledge that. Of course, there is more that can be done. We look forward to working with the provinces and territories as they move forward on boosts to paid sick leave.

We will continue to be there for Canadians. We made a simple promise from the very beginning that we would have people's backs, as much as it took and as long as it took, and that is exactly what we are doing. We are continuing to be there to support the provinces and territories and to support families, workers and small businesses, and we will continue to do so.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, moments ago, the Public Health Agency of Canada confirmed that an individual living in Canada experienced rare blood clotting following immunization with the AstraZeneca vaccine. Yesterday, Australia announced that it is suspending use of the AstraZeneca vaccine following new guidance from European regulators.

Will the advice on AstraZeneca usage be changed in Canada? Why or why not?

[Translation]

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Speaker, the hon. minister is currently having connection issues. She will get back to you on this as soon as possible.

• (1430)

[English]

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Mr. Speaker, I have a follow-up question. Is there a parliamentary secretary available?

The Speaker: Do we want to come back and ask both questions at the same time once the technical issue is resolved?

The minister is back. Let us start right from the top. The member for Calgary Nose Hill can ask her question over and we will start from the beginning.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Mr. Speaker, moments ago, the Public Health Agency of Canada confirmed that an individual living in Canada experienced rare blood clotting following immunization with the AstraZeneca vaccine. Yesterday, Australia announced that it is suspending use of the AstraZeneca vaccine following new guidance from European regulators.

Will the advice on AstraZeneca usage be changed in Canada? Why or why not?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I apologize for the technical issues.

As the member opposite knows, all vaccines approved for use in Canada undergo routine and scrupulous attention. All adverse effects are reported through Health Canada. Health Canada monitors that data closely and will not hesitate to change its licensing for use in Canada should there be any risk to Canadians.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that; however, it does not answer the question I asked.

There were reports today that an individual living in Canada experienced rare blood clotting following immunization with the AstraZeneca vaccine. Other countries, including Australia, have announced that they are suspending use.

Given this information, has the minister consulted with her officials? Does she anticipate that advice on AstraZeneca usage will be changed? Why or why not? If so, when will she be providing that advice publicly?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, surely the member opposite is not trying to scare Canadians and imply that Health Canada would not be doing an extremely thorough job, as it always does with any medication or vaccine licensed for use in Canada. Health Canada has been monitoring AstraZeneca, as well as all of the other vaccines used for Canadians, and works closely with the provinces and territories to determine any changes that are necessary.

These vaccines are saving lives and stopping the spread. Is that not the goal the member opposite wants as well?

* * *

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with the support of the Bloc Québécois, the Liberals adopted a motion yesterday at the Standing Committee on National Defence to end the investigation into Justin Trudeau's cover-up of sexual misconduct within the Canadian Armed Forces.

The committee still needs to hear from some key witnesses. What is most surprising is that the Bloc Québécois members decided to support the Liberals on this. They sold their support for a pittance.

What I want to know is this: What did the Liberals give them in exchange for this shameful pact?

The Speaker: Before I recognize the House leader, I would like to remind the hon. member that when asking a question or speaking in the House, he cannot use other members' names. He must refer to other members by their riding name or title in the House.

The hon. Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

Oral Questions

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague knows full well that committees make their own decisions. I object to the comments he just made because they are deeply offensive. I want to stand up for my colleagues in the Bloc Québécois in response to the insinuation that they might have been bought off or some such. These comments from my Conservative colleague are disgraceful. The committee members made the decision they wanted to make at that time. They are responsible for their own decisions, and that is what they decided. My colleague needs to respect that.

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the way the Prime Minister, a self-proclaimed feminist, is dealing with this issue speaks volumes about Liberal priorities when it comes to women. We saw the cavalier way the Prime Minister acted with two of his former female MPs.

I doubt that the majority of the House supports hindering the work of parliamentarians on an issue that affects the safety of our brave soldiers.

What message does this send to the women who are proudly serving in the army?

[*English*]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government respects the work done by our colleagues at the committee. In fact, I have worked with the national defence committee on this matter quite extensively. I appeared at the committee three times for this study alone, and for more than six hours. I have repeatedly stated at each of those appearances, and many times in the House of Commons, that our government, and I personally, will not stand for any type of sexual misconduct and that we will take further action.

I look forward to the recommendations provided by the committee once the study is completed.

* * *

● (1435)

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is what we call part of the Liberal cover-up.

Media are reporting that the defence minister was appeasing China when he threatened to yank funding from the Halifax security forum if organizers did not torpedo the John McCain award to Ms. Tsai Ing-wen, the President of Taiwan. John McCain's daughter Meghan called it "Absolutely pathetic", describing the Liberal government as "a bunch of cowards condoning Chinese genocide."

Why is the defence minister taking his marching orders from the communist regime in Beijing instead of standing up for democracy, human rights and strong female world leaders?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the assertions that the member is making could not be further from the truth. The Halifax International Security Forum is an independent organization, and it makes its own decisions on this matter.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know that the minister and the government could be given an award for having the most phoney feminist credentials. David Mulroney, Canada's former ambassador to China, said the Liberals' move was "A national disgrace. Canada's Feminist Foreign Policy has no room for one of the most courageous, principled and seriously threatened women on the planet."

Will the defence minister guarantee the Halifax security forum will get to keep its funding, and will he support bestowing the John McCain award to the President of Taiwan?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I stated from the beginning, the Halifax International Security Forum is an independent organization, and it makes its own decisions on where the awards need to go. National Defence has supported the international security forum in Halifax for the last 10 years, and once a request is made, it will be considered.

* * *

[*Translation*]

FORESTRY INDUSTRY

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebec's forests are a renewable resource with major economic, energy and green potential. Maximizing this resource could allow us to create 16,000 jobs in Quebec while reducing greenhouse gases.

The federal government is investing crumbs, just \$71 million a year. That is nothing compared to the \$24 billion that has been invested in oil and gas since 2017. At their convention, the Liberals voted to maintain these subsidies for fossil fuels instead of redirecting them to green energy.

Will the government put an end to this oil madness and invest in Quebec's forests?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are supporting the forestry sector across Canada.

In Quebec, we invested in the forest innovation program, which will support research, development and technology transfer across the sector. Last year, we invested in the new strategic partnerships initiative. We also invested in the expanding market opportunities program, which will increase Canada's presence in international wood markets and promote the use of Canadian wood in non-traditional construction to reduce emissions.

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will quickly repeat what I said.

The oil and gas industry got \$24 billion, while the forestry industry got peanuts, a mere \$71 million per year. We are talking about 3,500 new jobs in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean and 16,000 potential new jobs in Quebec as a whole.

Oral Questions

Last week, the Bloc Québécois put forward eight proposals for the forest industry. Now it remains to be seen whether the federal government will step up. We need to support research and innovation and facilitate the production of new bioproducts. We have offered the government a ready-made strategy. Will it take advantage of this opportunity in the upcoming budget?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we support the forestry sector in Quebec.

We announced new investments in Abitibi—Témiscamingue last fall to promote new economic opportunities in the forestry sector for indigenous communities like the Kebaowek First Nation and the Timiskaming First Nation. We announced new investments in Sherbrooke to develop new bioenergy products from our forests. These products would take forestry waste and turn it into biofuel, which would help reduce emissions.

* * *

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at its recent convention, the Liberal Party endorsed the creation of a new universal basic income program. The Liberals have again shown that their priority is not our economic recovery or getting Canadians back to work. They want to reimagine our economy and expand the welfare state. The Parliamentary Budget Officer says the cost would be a staggering \$93 billion a year. Who pays for this? It is ordinary Canadian families, of course.

Will the minister's budget include a universal basic income, yes or no?

• (1440)

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is hard to take lessons from the member about what happened at a party convention when his own party members voted to deny the reality of climate change.

With respect to the issue at hand, from the very beginning of this pandemic our focus has been to ensure that households and businesses remain afloat. We delivered benefits like the Canada emergency response benefit, which has now landed on the kitchen tables of nine million Canadian households.

As we go forward, we will continue to support Canadians to get them through this once-in-a-century emergency. I am glad to pass on to the hon. member that we will have the backs of Canadians, no matter what it takes and as long as it takes.

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, he did not answer my question. The middle of a pandemic is no time to introduce a massive new social program. To pay for universal income, the government would have to increase income taxes by 47%, or triple the GST. This scheme is unaffordable and would discourage Canadians from working. That is why numerous experts and economists have slammed the idea. The Prime Minister should take their advice.

Will the minister's budget include any new permanent spending programs, yes or no?

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is rich of the hon. member to critique the government's economic record, as he was a member of the government that had the worst economic growth rate of any government in Canada's history since the Great Depression. The reality is that because of the measures we put in place, Canadian households have remained afloat—

An hon. member: Answer the question.

Mr. Sean Fraser: —and workers have remained on payrolls.

We are going to move forward with a budget that will continue to fight COVID-19 and set the course for a recovery that Canadians will be very proud of. I will be pleased to share those details with the hon. member on Monday of next week.

An hon. member: Answer the question.

The Speaker: I want to remind hon. members that heckling is not really in the rules. It is actually against the rules in the chamber. It is definitely against the rules and downright rude over the hybrid system, if members are doing it via teleconference or video conference. That is just a reminder, in case any members were wondering.

The hon. member for Carleton.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government with the worst economic growth since the Great Depression is the one right across the aisle right now, and we are not part of that government.

The finance minister said that COVID is a time for epiphanies. The Prime Minister had a strange and, for him, unusual epiphany in his letter to her. He said, "you will avoid creating new permanent spending" in the budget. That is right in the mandate letter.

Will the finance minister honour the Prime Minister's letter and avoid all permanent new spending, yes or no?

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite seems afraid to embrace the idea that public investment can actually support Canadians during their time of need. I point him to the words of the chief economist of the International Monetary Fund, Gita Gopinath, who indicated that it can be not only economically responsible, but fiscally sound at the same time, to make public investments to support Canadians during a time of emergency.

With respect to the epiphanies he seems to be referring to, I remind him that there is nothing radical about trying to fight climate change while we grow the economy, to support women while we grow the economy and to support vulnerable Canadians. I hope he will support the budget at the first instance when he has the opportunity next week.

Oral Questions

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is actually the finance minister who revealed she had an epiphany. I guess we are going to learn what was in that epiphany. We already know what was in her mandate letter.

The Prime Minister's letter said, "you will avoid creating new permanent spending." That is necessary because Canada is currently on trajectory for a massive debt crisis if we continue to borrow at this rate.

Yes or no, will the finance minister honour the Prime Minister's written word to introduce no new permanent spending?

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the hon. member opposite that when we move forward with the budget next week he will see decisions that will both support Canadians during their time of emergency and set the course for a recovery that will ensure Canada will prosper years from now.

I can reassure him all the investments that will be contained in that budget will be fiscally sound and will be supporting the best interests of Canadians, in both the short term and the long term. In the meantime, I would encourage the Conservatives to get with the program and begin to recognize the smart thing to do in a time of emergency can be to invest to support Canadians in their time of need.

* * *

• (1445)

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Doug Ford continues to attack the Franco-Ontarian community, but the collapse of Laurentian University is unprecedented. Laurentian University is the only national institution with a mandate to promote francophone, indigenous and anglophone education. I remember when the Prime Minister chose Laurentian University to host a cabinet meeting.

Why are the Liberals staying silent on this now? Where is the plan to work with the Franco-Ontarian community to preserve and protect this vital institution?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I share my colleague's concern because what is happening at Laurentian University right now is particularly worrisome for the francophone community. That is why my thoughts are with the professors who have been affected, the students and the community. That is also why I have had conversations with the Government of Ontario. I am calling for the Ontario government to come up with a plan to ensure that we have a strong post-secondary institution in northern Ontario.

I will be pleased to work with my colleague to ensure that, as a federal government, we are able to help francophones in Ontario have access to a post-secondary institution.

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, while average Canadians are on the brink of financial collapse, the fortunes of Canada's 44 billionaires have increased by \$63 billion throughout this COVID pandemic. A modest 1% tax on personal wealth over \$20 million would generate \$10 billion a year to help pay for a just COVID recovery.

Will the Liberal government commit to including an ultra-wealth tax in its upcoming budget to ensure the wealthiest among us, those who made the most off this pandemic, finally pay their fair share?

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will not pre-empt announcements that will be shared as part of next week's budget, but I will reassure the member that from the very first time we formed government in 2015 our priority has been to support middle-class and low-income Canadians, and we have not been afraid to ask the wealthiest to pay their fair share.

In fact, the very first thing we did in 2015 was raise taxes on the wealthiest 1% of Canadians and cut them for the middle class. When we put forward the Canada child benefit, it put more money in the pockets of nine out of 10 Canadian families. I hope, unlike in those instances, the NDP will actually support the government as we move forward with a plan that will support Canadian households and businesses so we can transition from this pandemic toward a healthy recovery.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Ya'ara Saks (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians care deeply about their health and the environment. As many of us know, Canada's cornerstone environmental protection law, the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, CEPA, has been critical in reducing air pollution from vehicles, banning asbestos and keeping microbeads out of our water.

Can the Minister of Environment and Climate Change please update this House on how our government is modernizing this critical piece of legislation to protect the health and environment of Canadians?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians need a stronger environmental protection law that confronts 21st century issues with 21st century science. Every Canadian should be able to live their lives free from harmful effects of chemicals.

Oral Questions

Today we tabled Bill C-28, the strengthening environmental protection for a healthier Canada act. Our proposal to strengthen CEPA will help us to better protect the environment, recognize a right to a healthy environment and provide industry with certainty and predictability. Today we will ensure a healthier environment for Canada and for everyone.

* * *

[Translation]

ETHICS

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, just how far are this Prime Minister's Liberals prepared to go to help out their friends? It seems there are no limits.

Under the Liberals, costs for consultants have increased by \$6 billion since 2015. That is \$6 billion of taxpayers' money. This is the highest level of spending on consultants since the late 1990s at least.

Can the Prime Minister tell us how much of that money went into the pockets of his friends, like those at WE Charity?

[English]

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with respect, no funds went from the government toward the WE Charity. The question seems a bit misguided, frankly. The Conservatives seem more focused on trying to create political problems for the government than serving the interests of Canadians.

Canadians should be reassured that from the very beginning of this pandemic we have focused on having their backs and nothing else. As we move forward with a plan to kick-start the economic recovery and continue to support us from a public health point of view, I hope we can count on the Conservatives to support our mission, because that is what Canadians so richly deserve.

● (1450)

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are talking about an additional \$6 billion in contracts awarded to consultants, engineers and lawyers, all on the Canadian taxpayers' dime. According to Kevin Page, the former parliamentary budget officer, these expenditures do nothing to create the kind of economic growth that Canada so desperately needs.

The WE Charity and SNC-Lavalin scandals have proven that the Prime Minister will stop at nothing to help his buddies. He even went as far as asking the first woman justice minister to resign.

Do the Liberal members smell the stink of the sponsorship scandal hovering over the Prime Minister's decisions?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for the opportunity to answer this question.

Unfortunately, I detect a whiff of conspiracy theory in my colleague's question. I am sure that, like me, my colleague is well

aware of the emergency we are facing at this time. We need to focus our energy and seek out talent wherever we can find it so we can invest in Canadians and ensure that, united, we can quickly and decisively get through the health and economic crisis we are experiencing.

* * *

[English]

HEALTH

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, earlier in question period the health minister accused my colleague from Calgary of trying to scare Canadians when she asked a reasonable question about the AstraZeneca vaccine and her question was based on a release from the Public Health Agency.

The Conservatives have been saying that vaccines, rapid tests and information are the key tools in this pandemic and the current government has been late on all three of those tools.

Rather than attack my colleague and evade answering the question, I will ask the Minister of Health again. Will she be asking her officials to review the use of AstraZeneca based on the latest release from the Public Health Agency, yes or no?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every step of the way we see the Conservatives play a dangerous game with Canadians. On the one hand they are asking for rapid tests, on the other hand they are asking for faster vaccines and then using a fear of those very same tools to scare Canadians.

I will not back down from my comments. We have world-class regulators who have one goal in mind, which is to keep Canadians safe. Vaccines save lives and prevent the spread. I hope my colleagues will ensure they encourage their members to get vaccinated when it is their time.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I spoke to the chief of the Pikangikum First Nation in my riding about the urgent need for policing resources in the community. This issue had previously put the health of residents in jeopardy and continues to pose a safety risk for residents.

Chief Owen has told me that RCMP officers would be welcome in the community as an interim measure until an alternative policing solution can be found. However, the Minister of Public Safety has failed to act. Will the minister listen to the chief and mobilize RCMP resources to support the people of Pikangikum?

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, the member's question reveals his complete misunderstanding of the jurisdiction of the Ontario government to provide policing services in that community. I would refer him to the Police Services Act of Ontario.

We are working very closely in support of that community to ensure medical services are being provided and that security exists for the delivery of those services. At the same time, we are supporting the Ontario government to fulfill its responsibility to provide adequate and effective policing services in that community, as it is required to do.

* * *

[Translation]

AEROSPACE INDUSTRY

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Ottawa is paying a high price to compensate Air Canada for its grounded planes. It should have at least as much consideration for the 40,000 Quebecers who build these planes.

Aerospace is our main export sector and the order books are empty. Skilled workers are leaving the sector and expertise is at risk. Federal inaction is destroying what took generations to build. On Monday, will the budget finally include something for aerospace?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last night's announcement is excellent news for Quebec and all Quebecers. As a result of our loans, Air Canada will refund Quebecers' tickets, protect jobs here, and buy parts and planes here in Quebec.

Air Canada will also relaunch the suspended regional routes. This means that there will be flights again in Baie-Comeau, Castlegar, Gaspé, Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine, Mont-Joli, Val-d'Or and Wabush. We made a promise and we are keeping it. This is good news and the Bloc does not like that.

• (1455)

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, what the Bloc especially does not like is confusion. The government is confusing aerospace and air transportation. The answer was about air transportation, but those are two different things.

There are only three places in the world that have the know-how and the industrial infrastructure to manufacture an entire airplane, and the greater Montreal area is one of those places. However, Canada is the only country among the major players that does not have a strategic aerospace policy. Quebec is already punching above its weight internationally, but no one in Ottawa seems to realize that.

Monday is budget day. Will we finally see a smart, comprehensive policy for the aerospace industry, yes or no?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have always been there for the aerospace industry, and we will continue to be there

Oral Questions

for this industry, which provides good, high-paying jobs and represents Canada around the world.

Yesterday's agreement clearly states that Air Canada will have to purchase its parts and planes here, in Quebec. That is in the agreement. I would like to know what part of this agreement the Bloc does not like.

* * *

[English]

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr. Kenny Chiu (Steveston—Richmond East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last year the government promised to help students by engaging in corruption and scandal that led to the catastrophic failure of the Canada student service grant and the resignation of the country's minister of finance.

I would like to find out how the government intends to disappoint and hurt our Canadian students this year.

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to first say the COVID pandemic has impacted all Canadians, certain segments disproportionately, and students are no exception. I want all students to know that our government, under the leadership of this Prime Minister, will be there for them. That is exactly why we came out with the Canada emergency student benefit. That is why we removed interest from Canada student loans, so that they would not be in repayment. I want students to know that we created jobs through the Canada summer jobs program.

We will continue working on their behalf because they deserve it. They are not only the leaders of tomorrow, they are the leaders of today, and this government has their backs.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Doug Shipley (Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we all aware many Canadians are struggling to make ends meet during this pandemic. The Liberal government is failing Canadians and the residents of Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte. My staff have been flooded with complaints from residents who have been denied EI and are unable to access CERB. When an application is made for EI, it triggers a flag with the CRA. This flag prevents further processing of the CERB applications. Many of these applicants have been waiting months without any income.

Can the Prime Minister advise this House and my constituents when he will fix this issue?

Oral Questions

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member that we are absolutely on top of this issue. Obviously we want to make sure, from an integrity point of view, that Canadians are not receiving two benefits at the same time, but we know how hard it is for Canadians to wait to see which benefit they should be getting. We have teams working together with the CRA and ESDC on this. It is not taking the time it did at the beginning when this problem was first identified.

I am happy to provide the member with more information, if he wants. I can assure him this is a top priority for me and my team.

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this month Canadians were hit with a 33% tax increase to the carbon tax. Now media reports suggest that the Liberals are planning to implement a home equity tax. In fact, the CMHC is already studying elimination of the capital gains exemption on principal residences. The last thing that families need is their life savings to be wiped out overnight.

Why are the Liberals increasing taxes on Canadians in the middle of this pandemic?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives refuse to take no for an answer.

The Government of Canada is not looking at charging capital gains tax on primary residences. This is not under consideration by our government. Any suggestion otherwise is false. In fact, we have been working hard to make home ownership more affordable for middle-class Canadians with our first-time home buyer incentive. The Conservatives, time and again, try to suggest otherwise, but they are engaging in falsehoods.

* * *

● (1500)

SENIORS

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that the COVID-19 pandemic has worsened already existing challenges that seniors face around social isolation, which can be harmful both to physical and mental health.

Last year, with help from the new horizons for seniors program, organizations in my riding, such as Tesoc Multicultural Settlement and Community Services, were able to run programs to help with this. Tesoc's program, seniors together, brought together seniors and younger people for online activities, such as yoga classes and meditation as well as intergenerational discussions and art activities.

Could the Minister of Seniors tell us why it is so important to support the mental health of Canadian seniors during the pandemic and beyond, and about further actions the government is taking?

Hon. Deb Schulte (Minister of Seniors, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague from Scarborough Centre is right. As a result of the pandemic, seniors have experienced significant negative impacts. To help combat the isolation they have faced during the pandemic,

we invested millions more into the new horizons for seniors program. In total, we have funded 5,000 community support projects across the country during the pandemic to help seniors stay connected and supported.

I want to thank the organizations, like those in my colleague's riding, that stepped up to serve seniors with projects during this extraordinarily challenging time. Together, we can make a difference in the lives of seniors. I look forward to the opposition supporting Bill C-14 to get it through to the other place as soon as possible.

* * *

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fisheries minister has told Maritime fishing families that lobster fishing by indigenous communities under the moderate livelihood will follow existing seasons, regulations and enforcement rules, all set by DFO. The Liberal MP for Sydney—Victoria has said that this is wrong, that the fisheries minister's announcement is only an interim measure for this one year and that first nations will eventually be allowed, by the Liberal government, to set their own seasons and rules.

Who is right?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we recognize that first nations have a right to a moderate livelihood fishery. This was affirmed by the Supreme Court of Canada. The measures that we have put in place for this year are flexible and allow fishers to get out on the water right now, as we work toward longer term agreements.

These are ongoing negotiations with first nations communities. I look forward to having agreements in place.

Mr. Chris d'Entremont (West Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me be sure that Canadians understand this. The Liberal MP for Sydney—Victoria was correct when he said that the minister's pronouncement was only an interim measure. Clarity is extremely important here.

Is the minister telling us that flexible, moderate livelihood plans will be established by each first nation outside existing lobster seasons and will not be enforced by DFO after this interim plan is done?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my hon. colleagues to please stop spreading malicious rumours, basically.

These are ongoing negotiations we are having with first nations communities so we can get to a long-term agreement. First nations have a Supreme Court-affirmed right to a moderate livelihood fishery. We are working with them to make sure they are able to exercise that right.

In the interim, we have put measures in place that allow the moderate livelihood fishery to take place this year.

* * *

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence was informed of the workplace violence at the CFB Valcartier fire department a year ago. An internal disclosure investigation has been requested, but there has been no co-operation from National Defence.

Can the minister tell us more about these cases of workplace violence?

• (1505)

[English]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we take all allegations of harassment very seriously. I was not aware of that particular issue. However, I will look into it and get back to the member.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Yvan Baker (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the current pandemic has reminded us how important our environment is for protecting the health of families in my riding of Etobicoke Centre and across Canada.

This morning, the government introduced a bill that will provide greater protection from toxic substances.

Can the Minister of Environment and Climate Change explain to the House and Canadians how his new bill will help keep our communities healthy?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Etobicoke Centre for his question.

We have kept our promise to strengthen the Canadian Environmental Protection Act and implement measures that protect Canadians from toxic substances. Our bill will help us better protect the environment, recognize the right to a healthy environment, and much more.

Together, we will make Canada healthier for our families and communities.

Oral Questions

[English]

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Indigenous Services Canada has taken up to two years to process applications for Indian status, while a Canadian passport is processed within 16 weeks. Status cards are necessary for first nations people to access health supports, including vaccinations. If the process is so complicated that it can take over two years to figure it out, there is something wrong with the system. I have a constituent who has been waiting for over three years. This is unacceptable and this is systemic racism.

When will the Liberals stop hiding behind the bureaucracy and talking points and actually fix it?

Hon. Marc Miller (Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member will know that this government has made significant investments in accelerating the processing times in and around status. The cases can vary from one person to another. If the member has any particular case she would like to advance, the ministry would be more than happy to look at it and pass it onto my team.

* * *

FINANCE

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, GP): Mr. Speaker, the pandemic has made it clear that the financial security of millions of Canadians is hanging by a thread. The economy and the systems supporting it are not working for everyone. The wealth of Canadian billionaires sky-rocketed during the pandemic, while millions, including children and people with disabilities, still live below the poverty line.

For months, the government has been making promises that no Canadian will be left behind, but these promises feel empty when we see a refusal to hike the capital gains tax and reticence to impose a significant wealth tax.

Will the upcoming budget be a pathway to a fair and more prosperous Canada for all or will the government continue to allow corporations and their shareholders to build back better on the backs of Canadians?

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the hon. member for her advocacy for Canada's most vulnerable. While I will not pre-empt the decisions that will be outlined in the upcoming budget, I will reassure her that from the very first day we formed government, our focus has been to support middle-class and low-income Canadians.

The very first thing we did when we formed government was raise taxes on the 1% so we could cut taxes for the middle class. When we advanced the Canada child benefit, we put more money in the pocket in nine out of 10 Canadian families and stopped sending cheques to millionaires.

Government Orders

The pandemic has shown that we need to continue to support the vulnerable, and Canadians can rest assured that we will have their backs as long as it takes, no matter what it takes.

* * *

[*Translation*]

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION IN FRENCH

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties, and if you seek it, I believe you will find unanimous consent for the following motion:

That the House express its concern about the closure of 28 French language programs and the layoff of some 100 professors at Laurentian University in Sudbury;

That it reiterates its solidarity with the Franco-Ontarian community; and

That it recalls the essential role of higher education in French for the vitality of the Franco-Canadian and Acadian communities.

● (1510)

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

I hear none. The House has heard the terms of the motion. All those opposed to the motion will please say nay.

(Motion agreed to)

[*English*]

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. As you know, there has been a fair bit of election speculation on the Hill lately and the pandemic gives rise to legitimate questions about the advisability of an election. The procedure and House affairs committee has released a report with a recommendation that speaks directly to that issue.

As such, I am hoping that if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent on the floor for the following motion: That notwithstanding any standing order, special order or usual practice of the House, at the expiry of the time provided for Private Members' Business later today, the House revert back to the rubric motions for the purpose of considering a motion to concur in the 12th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, presented on Friday, February 26, and at the conclusion of the time provided for debate or when no member rises to speak, whichever is earlier, all questions necessary to dispose of the motion shall be put without further debate or amendment, provided that if a recorded division is requested, it shall stand deferred until the conclusion of Oral Questions at the next sitting day.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

Mr. Paul Manly: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. There have been discussions among the parties and if you seek it, I believe you will find unanimous consent for the following motion: That notwithstanding any standing order, special order or usual practice of the House, until Wednesday, June 23, independent members and members of non-recognized parties be allowed to ask a total of eight questions per week during Oral Questions, including two on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays and one on Wednesdays and Fridays, it being understood that these questions do not impact the amount of oral questions already shared among recognized parties.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

ECONOMIC STATEMENT IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2020

The House resumed from April 12 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 third time and passed.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Carleton has four minutes for questions.

Questions and comments, the hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-14 is something that has been around now for quite a while. In fact, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance talked about the economic statement in November. The bill was introduced for the first time in December. Members started debating it, and a few weeks ago it took shaming the Conservative Party to ultimately allow the bill to get through second reading.

Could the member indicate on behalf of the Conservative Party how long it is going to take for the Conservative Party to recognize the benefits to Canadians through this legislation and allow this legislation to come to a vote?

● (1515)

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all we need to know is what the Liberals plan to do with the \$600-billion increase to the debt limit. They want to increase the debt limit to \$1.8 trillion from the current \$1.2 trillion. To put it in perspective, our national debt was only \$600 billion a year and a half ago, so they basically want to take the debt to triple what it was not so long ago. That is what the bill does. It allows them to do that, and they think they have no obligation to tell Canadians what they are going to spend all that borrowed money on or how it is ever going to be paid back.

Government Orders

The second thing we want to know before passing the bill is how the government is going to avoid leading us straight into a debt crisis. We now have a total public and private debt-to-GDP ratio of almost 400%, the second highest in the G7, higher than 41 of the 45 biggest debt crises in the last century, twice our traditional average and by far a record for our country. This is an enormous debt ratio that we have. We have now ticked all five boxes of leading indicators for a forthcoming debt crisis, and the government comes here with a bill to increase the debt further, by another \$600 billion, and expects us to ram the bill through on short notice. We are not going to do that.

Mr. Eric Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know my constituents in Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry always appreciate the member for Carleton's interventions here in the House. He spoke a lot, and rightfully so, about the government's intention to try to rush this through. The size of the deficit and the size of the debt limit increase in the Borrowing Authority Act, which will get to \$1.8 trillion, warrant time and warrant scrutiny in the House.

The member is very well known for his expertise on financial matters, so I would like him to take some time and speak to the risks in the long term. With all these amounts of money being borrowed for so long, what could it mean to our Canadian economy, both short- and long-term?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, that was a tough question, but a fair question. I want to thank my neighbouring member just to the south, who is very well respected as a former mayor. He was actually quite an old man when he became mayor, 22 years old, and here he is, serving on the floor of Parliament. The community loves him, and with good reason. He asks an important question.

When we have too much debt, we can “debtionate”, and we are becoming a “debtonation”. Our debt is 400% of GDP. We have a \$2.2-trillion economy with \$8.6 trillion of household, corporate and government debt. That is a ratio that we have never seen before in this country, and it has increased by almost one-third just in the last five years alone. The only reason we have been able to get away with this much debt is that interest rates have been supernaturally low for an unusually long period of time, and more recently have been driven further by the Bank of Canada printing cheap money and pumping it into the system. However, eventually that comes to an end. If rates rise before debts go down, then we will have a debt crisis.

Now is the time to stave that off by replacing our credit card economy with a paycheque economy.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today to Bill C-14, the economic statement that was introduced last fall. As has been noted by a number of speakers, there is a little irony to the debate today on this bill, because it has been superseded by a federal budget that will be introduced next week.

I have to point out for the record that it has been over two years since the last budget was presented by the government, and that is a record, but not a record of which any government ought to be proud. Every G7 country and every province and territory in Canada tabled a budget last year. When there is no budget present-

ed by a government in Parliament, that constitutes a fundamental breach of accountability to the Canadian people and to Parliament.

When I was first privileged to be elected to this House some 12 years ago, one of the first things I learned was that one of the prime responsibilities of a parliamentarian is to scrutinize the spending of government. That is what we are sent here by our constituents to do. When a budget is not presented by a federal government, that is a fundamental violation of that core responsibility we hold to the people who elected us.

Having said that, this bill does give me a chance to raise certain critical issues that I believe Canadians wanted expressed back in the fall, when this financial statement and this bill were introduced, and as they want to see addressed in the upcoming budget. I am going to speak to several of these priorities that not only are priorities to the people of Vancouver Kingsway, but reflect the aspirations and needs of people across this country, in every single community.

It will not surprise my colleagues to hear me, as health critic, start off with some core health issues that I believe this upcoming budget needs to address and that the statement does not address in any real, meaningful way. It has been noted many times throughout the COVID pandemic that while this crisis has created many problems, it has also exposed many other problems of a serious and long-standing character. One of them is Canada's long-standing crisis in long-term care.

Recently, the Canadian Institute for Health Information published data that reveals Canada has the worst record of all developed countries when it comes to COVID-19 deaths in long-term care homes. This follows previous reports that showed Canada's death rate in seniors congregate settings is the highest among OECD states. That is a matter of international shame. The data also reveals that many provinces and territories were slow to act and that steps could have been taken to avoid many of the deaths that occurred. The data internationally highlights that many other countries were better prepared for a potential outbreak of infectious disease and dedicated more resources and funding to this sector.

With notable exceptions, such as the province I come from, British Columbia, the CIHI report notes that the lessons learned from the first wave of the pandemic did not lead to changes in outcomes during the second wave last fall, resulting in a larger number of outbreaks, infections and deaths. This is inexcusable. It means that there were many deaths of Canadian seniors that could have and should have been avoided.

Government Orders

Certain provinces did take early and effective steps to address the long-standing issues in long-term care. Again, the NDP government in British Columbia was one such leader, taking timely action to expand resources to staff, prohibit working between multiple sites and raise standards of care. This leadership is borne out by the data, which shows that B.C. had the best numbers of all comparable jurisdictions. However, the crisis in long-term care, and the urgent need for resources and legislative change, is a national one. Seniors have a right to proper care in every province and territory, not just those fortunate enough to reside in select provinces that are responding to the problems.

The upcoming budget provides a timely and powerful moment to deal with the NDP's repeated call for urgent federal action to establish binding national standards in Canada's long-term care sector backed up by federal funding tied to meeting those standards.

● (1520)

These include very critical factors like meeting minimum hours of care, which I note recently has been described as a minimum of six hours of care for every senior in long-term care. We need patient-aide ratios that allow people who work in these homes to be able to give the kind of quality care they are trained to do and so desperately want to provide, and we need decent working conditions for all staff. It has been said that the conditions of work are the conditions of care. We must ensure that this skilled work performed by skilled workers, predominantly women, by the way, often racialized and historically undervalued, is finally recognized for the essential public health care it is, and paid accordingly.

Speaking of public health care, we finally must address the problems in for-profit delivery. It is time we built a long-term care sector that is built on non-profit delivery, preferably through our public health care system and the non-profit sector. The data is overwhelming, long-standing and clear that for-profit care reduces standards of care, because it is obvious it diverts money to shareholders and profit that ought to be going directly to our seniors, and it incentivizes cost-cutting. That is borne out in the fact that, generally speaking, the death rate, infection rate and poor standards of care are higher in for-profit delivery systems.

National problems require national solutions. It is time our federal government acted. Our Canadian seniors deserve it.

I also want to state that another long-standing problem that has been profoundly revealed to all Canadians as a serious failure of public policy for decades has been revealed for all to see, and that is Canada's lack of domestic capacity for producing vaccines and, indeed, most essential medicines. Some of my colleagues may remember that just a summer or two ago we faced a serious shortage of EpiPens in this country, and we were only weeks away from having Canadians, particularly young Canadians, left without this life-saving medication.

Clearly, this has been one of the key problems behind Canada's painfully slow vaccine rollout, but it is not limited to pandemic vaccines. Our lack of Canadian production capacity is felt across many therapeutics, including numerous life-saving drugs Canadians rely on that routinely face crises in availability. This situation reveals how vulnerable Canadians are to the multinational private drug industry and indeed foreign governments in a time of crisis.

Of course, that was not always the case. For seven decades, Canada was home to Connaught Labs, a Canadian publicly owned enterprise that was one of the world's leading medicine and vaccine producers. Connaught Medical Research Laboratories was a non-commercial public health entity established in Toronto in 1914 to produce the diphtheria antitoxin.

It expanded significantly after the discovery of insulin by Canadians at the University of Toronto in 1921 and became a leading manufacturer and distributor of insulin at cost in Canada and overseas. Its non-commercial mandate mediated commercial interests and kept medicine accessible to millions of people who otherwise could not have afforded it. It also contributed to some of the key medical breakthroughs of the 20th century, including insulin, penicillin and the polio vaccine.

In 1972, Connaught was purchased by the Canada Development Corporation, a federally owned corporation charged with developing and maintaining Canadian-controlled companies through a mixture of public and private investment. Connaught provided vaccines to Canadians at cost, manufactured them here in our country, and sold vaccines to other countries at affordable prices. It operated without government financial support. It even made profits, which it reinvested in medical research. This was a fabulous example of public enterprise.

Despite this remarkable record, Connaught was privatized in 1986 by the Mulroney Conservatives for purely ideological reasons. The Liberals share squarely in the blame for this appalling, short-sighted public policy debacle that has left Canadians vulnerable in 2021. Despite being in power for 19 years after the privatization, 15 years in a majority government when they could have done anything they wanted to do, the Liberals never lifted a finger to re-establish public medicine production in Canada, so when they turn to Canadians and say that we cannot produce vaccines fast enough in Canada because we do not have the production capacity, Canadians have every right to look them squarely in the eye and ask them why they let them down.

● (1525)

Why did the successive Conservative and Liberal federal governments let Canadians down and leave us in this vulnerable position where we are dependent on a handful of multinational vaccine producers situated in other countries of the world for our essential life-saving vaccines? That is the result of the public policy decisions of the Liberals and Conservatives up to now, and Canadians need to hold them accountable for it.

Government Orders

Never again must Canadians be left in such a vulnerable position. As a G7 country, we deserve to be self-sufficient in all essential medications and vaccines as a public health priority of the highest order, so I am looking to the budget next week, and I would point out that this economic statement makes no mention of the establishment of a public drug manufacturer in Canada. By doing that, we could leverage public research done in Canada's universities, where, by the way, most of the new molecules and research for new pharmaceuticals actually comes from, and turn those into innovative medicines at a reasonable cost for the public good and not for private profit.

As we stand at the 100th anniversary of the discovery of insulin in Canada by Canadians, let us honour that legacy by building our Canadian medicine capacity. We have done it before. Let us do it again. I would like to see that in the budget next week or hear from my Liberal colleagues as to why they do not think it is a good idea.

Turning to another core foundational issue, the Liberals have been in power for six years now. That is long enough to be measured by their record. When they came into office in 2015, this country was facing a serious housing crisis. They have had six years to deal with it. Where is the affordable housing? The reality is that the crisis today is worse than it was prior to them taking office. Young Canadians across this country have no hope of purchasing any housing, and there are millions of Canadians in precarious housing who cannot live in dignified secure housing, whether rented or owned.

In my view, housing is a fundamental human right and a core foundational need. It is key to individual health and self-realization. It is also a foundation of health, as it is a central component of the social determinants that are so essential to keeping Canadians healthy. Housing should be available to every Canadian. It is simply unacceptable that a country as wealthy as Canada is unable to provide every citizen with the opportunity to own their own home. This is especially the case when we consider how large Canada is, how much land we have and how small our population is. Real estate is not just a commodity. It is a necessity.

I believe homelessness and precarious housing are social scourges that ought to shame us as a society, but homelessness and precarious housing are neither inevitable nor unsolvable. With enough political commitment and economic resources, there is simply no reason why a wealthy G7 nation such as Canada ought not to be able to ensure that every citizen can live in an affordable, secure and decent home.

Clearly, the present situation is a result of decades of poor policies at every level of government, federal, provincial and municipal. I believe there are a number of contributors to this calamity. These include a federal government that has been largely absent from the housing file since the late eighties, a lack of public investment in affordable housing of all types, extremely lax laws that permit extensive foreign capital into our communities that destabilizes domestic housing prices, and a misguided belief that the private sector development industry can and will provide affordable housing. All of these have contributed to a disastrous situation where people who have sacrificed enormously and done everything right cannot even purchase a modest home in the communities in which they live and work.

• (1530)

I believe we need a multipronged approach to address this unacceptable situation, and we will be keeping a keen eye on the budget coming up to see if these suggestions are contained in that budget. I think this requires a national program with federal leadership and harnessing local creativity and innovation. Most importantly, it involves public enterprise.

Solutions include strong and effective curbs on foreign capital investments in residential real estate, particularly in overheated local markets where the cost of housing bears no relationship whatsoever to the average income or wages earned by people in that community. If anybody is looking for any proof of the destabilizing impact of foreign capital, they only have to look to a place like the Lower Mainland where houses are going for \$2 million, \$3 million, \$4 million and \$5 million, and 98% of the people who work here cannot afford those houses. Who is buying them? It is certainly not people in our communities.

We need tax incentives that promote the construction of affordable rental buildings, not just market rental buildings, but affordable rental buildings. We must ensure that all developments over a certain size include a minimum number of truly affordable units owned, perhaps, by the municipalities in perpetuity, like they do in Vienna.

We must create an ambitious national co-op housing program, targeted at building 500,000 units of housing over the next 10 years. This could be a modern version of the extremely successful program of the 1970s and 1980s with expanded targets and with an ironclad commitment to the principle of tying rent to income, say no more than 30%. While I know that co-operative living is not for everyone, it does represent a demonstrated successful model that houses people from varied family situations across all age limits and socio-economic categories and permits security of tenure, affordable housing and ability to age in place.

Vancouver Kingsway has many of these wonderful communities still in operation, and I believe this concept can be harnessed to house a new generation of Canadians. Let us see if next week the Liberal government has the creativity to bring in a strong national co-op housing program.

We need to implement each of the suggestions in the recovery for all campaign's initiatives. I think every parliamentarian has likely received this, which contains excellent suggestions for federal policy on things that they can do in their jurisdiction. We need an effective national housing strategy act, the appointment of a federal housing advocate and members of a national housing council with teeth.

Government Orders

In the end, secure, dignified housing represents a foundational, core need for people without which their ability to participate meaningfully in society or to reach their potential is seriously impaired. It must be a priority of the first order. I wish I could say that this is regarded as such by the current Liberal government, but its lack of meaningful progress to date on this critical file leaves me with no other conclusion than that they are not prepared to allocate the kinds of resources or policies that are truly needed to adequately address this crisis.

Now I know that Liberals will stand up in this House and say it is a priority for them, but I ask them once again to show me the housing. After six years in office, can they show me where the tens of thousands of affordable housing units are that could and should have been built in the last six years. They cannot. They will make all sorts of weak excuses like housing takes time. I would remind them after World War II, the Government of Canada built 300,000 units of affordable housing for returning soldiers in 36 months. That is what a government committed to housing can and will do.

I urge the present government to make the creation, building and expansion of affordable housing of all types as a matter of prime political priority in the upcoming budget. After all, making sure everyone in our community has appropriate housing is the responsibility of us all.

Finally, I want to say a word about climate change. There are few issues that are existential in nature in politics. The climate crisis facing our planet is one of those. The IPCC has repeatedly stated that we have less than 10 years to take meaningful action and reverse the calamitous impacts that will occur if we do not do so. I would note that carbon emissions have gone up over the course of the government's tenure since 2015. In fact, since the early 1990s, despite repeated pledges to reduce carbon emissions by such or such a date, no government has ever hit them. This must change—

• (1535)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Unfortunately the hon. member's time is up. I did try to provide him with a signal.

We will continue with questions and comments. The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I really admire the commitment from this member regarding affordable housing, specifically when it comes co-operative housing. I would agree with him that co-operative housing is an excellent model to drive affordability into communities. Although it is not the only solution, as affordability in terms of housing could be everything from rent geared to one's income all the way up to affordable mortgages. Whatever we do, it needs to be a holistic approach.

When we look at how this stuff actually gets implemented, there is a certain responsibility for us to acknowledge the fact that provincial jurisdiction covers the actual construction and building. We can put as much money as we want towards affordable housing, but the federal government has no jurisdiction over actual building, building permits and planning.

What is the member's response to how we could do more to assist?

• (1540)

Mr. Don Davies: Madam Speaker, I agree with my hon. colleague. I do believe that providing affordable housing for Canadians is going to take the co-operation all three levels of government. We once did it.

There used to be two core mandates of the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation in this country. The first, of course, was to insure mortgages, which it still does. The second was to build affordable housing.

The federal government, as the senior level of government in terms of tax revenue, has an important role to play in helping finance with the provinces, and sometimes with the municipalities that could provide the land base, and join together to build projects.

That is exactly what they did with the federal national co-op program in the 1970s and 1980s. By working together with federal government financing, combined with monies contributed by the provinces and municipalities providing land, the three governments, together, ensured that we built tens of thousands of co-operative housing units across this country. We should replicate that again today—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith.

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Madam Speaker, I agree with the member that co-operative housing is an excellent model that we need to go back to and fund.

One of the things the member will know from his riding, and I know from my riding, is that there is a disproportionate number of indigenous people who are homeless. We also know that poverty and the lack of adequate housing is the number one reason why indigenous children are seized by social service agencies and taken away from their families.

I would like to ask the hon. member, who did not mention indigenous urban housing, if he would support a national strategy for indigenous urban housing, a strategy for indigenous people, created by indigenous people, with the plans in their hands?

Mr. Don Davies: Madam Speaker, I did not separate or single out any particular group in Canada because housing is a core foundational need for every single resident here.

It is so important to recognize the core responsibility the federal government has towards indigenous peoples in this country. My hon. colleague is absolutely right about the state of inadequate housing, both on reserve and off reserve, and in urban areas for indigenous people. It is I believe, a matter of international shame, and it kind of answers the previous question asked by a Liberal member as to what the federal role is.

Government Orders

The federal government has a core responsibility to indigenous peoples as a matter of the Constitution. I would like to see significant and timely investments to make sure every single indigenous person, Métis and Inuit in this country has access to secure, dignified housing. That is not just a matter of economics or a social contract, it is a matter of constitutional duty. It is time we addressed that.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Vancouver Kingsway for shining a light on the vulnerabilities Canada faces because of our inability to access vaccines and other key drugs, and a solution to that problem, as well as our vulnerabilities in long-term care and the solution to that problem being to take profit out of long-term care.

I wonder if the member shares the doubt that the budget will actually provide concrete measures to work on these problems, when the Prime Minister issued a mandate letter to the Minister of Finance saying there could be no new permanent spending programs.

Mr. Don Davies: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for the excellent work he does both in Parliament and in representing the people of his riding. Of course, he is quite right.

I do not think I am being cynical by pointing out that successive Liberal and Conservative governments have allowed these structural, chronic problems to develop and have been well warned about them. If we take the long-term care sector, there have been untold reports that warned every level of government of the serious problems in the long-term care sector, yet no action.

The housing crisis did not develop last week or last month. This has been developing over years. Have we seen any responsive program from the federal government? No, we have not. In terms of vaccine production, I point out that in 1986 the Conservatives privatized Connaught Labs. The Liberals let it happen and did nothing about it.

The structural problems we see today will not be addressed unless we have a federal government that is willing to invest in structural solutions, and I do not see any indication by the Liberals that they intend to do so.

• (1545)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member might find this a little hard to believe, but it is true. During the early nineties, I was in the north end debating with the New Democrats and other political parties, but I want to emphasize the New Democrats. They were advocating that the federal government should not have a role in housing and that it was a provincial jurisdiction. I opposed that adamantly back then. Today, we have a Prime Minister who has put in place the first national housing strategy and tied to it billions of dollars. We have come so far on the housing file at the national level.

The member talks about capacity for vaccines, and again we have invested with Canadian companies to ensure that we will have

that capacity. Would he not agree that is a positive step forward in a relatively short period of time?

Mr. Don Davies: Madam Speaker, I think there is a fundamental difference in philosophy between the Liberals and the New Democrats. The Liberals continue to cling to the notion that the solutions to all problems in this country will come from the private sector. New Democrats believe in a strong private sector, but also a strong public sector engaged in public enterprise.

I think the current government giving half a billion dollars to Sanofi Pasteur and hoping that this private company will deliver vaccines and vaccine security to Canadians will prove to be very misguided and ultimately a poor policy decision. The only way we will control and make sure that we have vaccine and medicine production in Canada for Canadians is if we do it through a Crown corporation. That is the lesson of Connaught Labs. That is why we are calling for a public enterprise, a public drug manufacturer, and not giving money to the private sector, which of course could take that money with no real guarantees they would use that in Canada.

In fact, that is how we got in this position. The Mulroney government thought the private sector would give Canadians pharmaceuticals at affordable prices. That did not happen.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I would ask my friend again to provide his thoughts. When we talk about public versus private, would he agree that the public and private sectors can work for the common good?

Mr. Don Davies: Madam Speaker, I would agree very much. I think there are a lot of products and services that are best delivered by the private sector. For some it makes sense to have public and private collaboration, but others, of course, require public enterprise.

For instance, we can talk about our health care system. Right in the Canada Health Act, it says our health care system must be publicly administered: not privately administered, not jointly administered but publicly administered. That is why Canadians are so proud of one of the best health care systems in the world. That is why I am so disappointed to see the Liberals vote against public pharmacare and public dental care, and refuse to expand our public health care system in this country. I do not know what they are waiting for.

They have been promising that since 1997, and it has been three decades for child care, pharmacare and dental care. The only way that Canadians are going to get that is if they elect a federal New Democratic government. I am going to invite them to do so in the upcoming election.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today on behalf of the Bloc Québécois to speak to Bill C-14, which would implement certain provisions of the November 30, 2020, economic statement and other measures.

It is rather unusual that we are still talking about the economic statement on April 13, when a budget is being announced on Monday. That is part of the delays inherent to this type of parliamentary process, and we need to live with it.

Government Orders

Our position is no secret. As the Bloc Québécois said some time ago, our party is in favour of the bill, but not enthusiastically so. This bill does not reinvent the wheel, as the saying goes, but our position is clear: We will support any initiative that seeks to support Quebecers. In that respect, the bill contains a number of interesting measures that we think are good, but there are others that we need to approach with caution.

For instance, we are in favour of eliminating interest on student and apprentice loans for the 2021-22 fiscal year. Students deserve help. This will impact almost 1.4 million borrowers outside Quebec. However, let us not forget that Quebec has its own student loan program. We must absolutely ensure that Quebec youth receive prorated compensation based on the number of post-secondary students. I was in school for a long time. I left university in 2018 at the age of 30 when I completed my Ph.D., and I am well aware of this reality. It is important to compensate students and to help them. I recently gave an interview to the Saint-Hyacinthe Cégep student organization in my riding. I spoke to them about this issue, and they most definitely understood it. In many ways, they probably understand it better than all of us, because it is their everyday reality.

I do, however, want to talk about the industries that were left out of this economic statement. I touched on them earlier during question period, and I also signed an open letter in today's edition of *Le Journal de Montréal* on the aerospace industry, which was left out of this economic statement and the throne speech. I sincerely hope that the industry will be mentioned in Monday's budget, since now is the time to act.

When the late Jean Lapierre sat in the House, he said that the aerospace industry was to Quebec what the automotive industry was to Ontario. He was right, because the aerospace industry is a strategic industry. I want to emphasize the word "strategic". Although the government often overlooks the industry's importance, greater Montreal is the third-largest aerospace hub in the world, behind Seattle, with Boeing, and Toulouse, with Airbus. There are just three places in the world that have all of the parts and components to build an entire aircraft from nose to tail, and Quebec is one of those places. We are proud of that.

Quebec's aerospace industry consists of 220 companies, including 200 SMEs, and represents over 40,000 direct jobs and 100,000 indirect jobs. It is Quebec's primary export sector. That is why I called it a strategic industry. With annual sales of more than \$15 billion, this sector alone accounts for about half of Canada's aerospace business. For instance, our industry manufactures the best airplane in the world, which causes the least pollution and replaces the cabin air in flight. Our researchers are even envisioning a zero-emission plane. Considering the environmental challenges that have been plaguing us for so long and that are increasingly the focus of public debate, is that not where we should be headed in the 21st century? This sector is a real R and D hotbed. It would be truly irresponsible to ignore it.

• (1550)

There is no end to the stats and figures I could share to show how much the aerospace sector contributes to Quebec's reputation and, by extension, to our pride. However, with that pride come serious concerns, and not just because of the health crisis.

Ottawa's lack of vision and political will have undermined the aerospace sector for many years, and the pandemic has only exacerbated this precarious situation, as it has in so many other cases. Take health transfers, for example. The needs were there before the pandemic, the population is aging, the costs are skyrocketing and the provinces need to hire staff, but the money stays in Ottawa.

In aerospace, it is more or less the same thing. The pandemic is making the ups and downs more intense, but it did not create the problem. As everyone knows, the COVID-19 pandemic has grounded planes. Maintenance operations are limited, and orders for new aircraft are way down, not to say non-existent. Obviously this has repercussions on the technicians, who are being pushed into the construction industry just to make ends meet. As a result, we could lose their expertise and the ability to bounce back post-COVID.

The federal government constantly urges us to look to the post-COVID future. However, it is time to walk the talk, because federal inaction could destroy in a few months what it took generations to build. The sector is suffering and is worried about Ottawa's wait-and-see approach. It is worried that, by holding back, Ottawa is condemning 20,000 people to lose their jobs in the next 18 months. It is worried to even think that that may be what Ottawa secretly wants. Dear colleagues, silence speaks volumes, and the continuing silence is condemning an entire sector, its know-how and its local expertise. Every day, the Achilles heel of our aerospace sector grows, and the injury gets worse. This sector is becoming increasingly vulnerable and obvious prey for foreign investors. Why are we not taking action?

Targeted financial assistance to the most vulnerable sectors is necessary. Yes, we were in favour of certain measures, and we even suggested several others. We helped improve them and made many suggestions to enhance the assistance programs in general. However, specific aid for the sectors that are most in trouble is necessary, and that includes the aerospace sector. It is imperative that the next federal budget allocate the required funds.

This is something the Bloc Québécois has been working on for a long time, but the majority needs to understand exactly what we are talking about. The throne speech completely ignored the very existence of this key industry, but I remember questioning the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, the Minister of Transport and the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry about it repeatedly. Each of them spouted the governing majority's lines about how Ottawa is working very hard for the "air" sector. That is the same kind of answer I got again earlier today, in question period. I asked the government a question about support for the aerospace industry, and I got an answer about yesterday's announcement regarding aid for Air Canada.

There is a long way to go. We recognize that it is unrealistic to expect people to understand what an aerospace policy is, if they do not even understand what the aerospace industry consists of.

It is not complicated. Air transportation includes commercial, diplomatic and leisure flights. In short, it involves planes and buying tickets. The aerospace industry includes the SMEs that maintain, build and recycle parts, and it is also an absolutely remarkable research and development cluster. Is it now clear that they are not the same thing? Of course there is a link between the two, and that is the order book, but the two sectors are not the same. They are not synonymous, and the government needs to stop claiming that they are.

This dissonance, this disconnect between reality and the Liberals' perception of it, makes it abundantly clear that they do not understand what we are talking about at all. As my party's aerospace critic in this chamber, I will say that there is no question financial support is needed, and that is what the Bloc Québécois is calling for.

• (1555)

When Ontario needs help for the auto industry, it gets it. When the west needs help for the oil industry, it gets it. We are asking the federal government to make sure its recovery plan does not neglect this brilliant but struggling sector. This is consistent with the long-standing position we share with the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers and Unifor. We want to make some good come of the public health crisis by developing a genuine aerospace policy. Our sovereignty and our ability to preserve this iconic industry are at stake.

To draft the kind of aerospace policy I am talking about, we need a permanent round table that includes Ottawa, Quebec, the industry and unions. Ottawa has already done this for the auto industry, so there is no need to reinvent the wheel. It is not that complicated. However, there are quite a few issues to work on.

Last fall, I gave a speech about the aerospace industry. There are lots of things we can do. We can initiate a green shift. We also need a policy on parts recycling. Quebec has expertise in that area. It can be done.

Greening conditions need to be attached to the financial assistance. We are in favour of providing financial assistance, but not without conditions. The industry we want to support must adhere to certain conditions, and greening is one of them. A Quebec company invented one of the most environmentally friendly airplanes in the world. Going green will pay off for us.

Government Orders

We also need to look at maintenance policies, liquidity provision, loans for buyers, a military procurement policy, and support for R and D, which is extremely important in this field. I will explain how important this is, and not only in Quebec. European researchers have invented a heart valve based on airplane parts. This shows how advanced aerospace R and D is around the world. Of course, there is a workforce training policy.

Various elements should be combined to create a coherent program that recognizes the aerospace sector as its own ecosystem. Quebec has had an aerospace policy for about 20 years. However, our ability to act is obviously limited, as there are things that a province cannot do.

Among all the countries that have a major aerospace industry, Canada is the only one that does not have a policy framework supporting its development. This needs to end. There needs to be a policy. We have to prevent this slow-motion suicide.

If Ottawa does not take action, then perhaps we should consider giving Quebec the freedom to be the sole architect of this long-awaited reaction. I said "perhaps", but of course I said it with some assurance. It is a rhetorical question, but I already know the answer.

To illustrate what I mean, I will share the symbolic example of Bombardier. Often there is a misconception that aerospace starts and ends with Bombardier. It is certainly the flagship, but it is not the only company that works in this field. In fact, there are 220 companies that work in this field. I know that the construction, maintenance and all the rest does not come from Bombardier alone, but I will provide the following example nonetheless.

In February, I expressed my sincere solidarity with the 1,600 workers who were laid off by Bombardier, while denouncing once again Ottawa's inability to support the sector hard hit by the pandemic. Among the positions that were cut, 700 were in Montreal and several were connected to the Global business jet, for which the interior finishes were done in the Montreal area. Added to this sad loss are the 2,500 jobs, mostly in Quebec, that were cut by the company in summer 2020.

As a parliamentarian, I have a duty to oppose the direction that Ottawa is forcing the provinces, and especially Quebec, to take with the aerospace industry. Here are some examples illustrating how we are headed in the wrong direction. Bombardier sold its transportation division, exited the A220 program and, forsaken by the government, made a painful decision to sell its C Series to Airbus.

We do need to help our sector, but there are some conditions. In light of the size of this industry, Ottawa must provide certain guarantees that it will protect the independence of the aerospace industry, on top of providing assistance. This money must be put towards the workers and innovation, not the executives. The industry must remain in Quebec. That can be done.

Government Orders

• (1600)

When the government has an agreement with a company to which it is providing assistance, it can tell that company not to give pay raises to its seniors executives with that money and to keep its headquarters here. That can be done. If we were in a parliament, in a country and in a government that had even the slightest understanding of economic nationalism, then we would not have to explain it today.

I would also like to talk about another industry, the cultural industry. I am disappointed that this industry has also been completely ignored in the economic statement. Ottawa needs to support Quebec's efforts to revive the performing arts in a way that is predictable and safe for the various stakeholders in the creative industry, because culture is very important to us. At a time where nearly one in two performing artists are thinking about leaving the industry for good, the prospect of being able to carefully begin working again is timely. We cannot stand idly by while those who so eloquently and beautifully express the voice of the Quebec nation are silenced forever. That is unacceptable.

Ottawa must help this industry recover by supporting performance venues, ensuring spectators can attend safely and taking Quebec creators' distinct reality into account. Urgent action is crucial to ensuring the post-pandemic existence of the performing arts. This industry must survive. Ottawa cannot stand idly by while a mass exodus of our artists and artisans, devastated by over a year of inactivity, uncertainty about the future and financial hardship, looms. Quebec authorized performing arts venues to reopen as of March 26, even in red zones, and the Bloc Québécois has put six emergency proposals to the Trudeau government.

Madam Speaker, I would like to know if I have time to go over them.

• (1605)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): You have another two minutes and 50 seconds.

However, I must remind the member not to use the Prime Minister's name.

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Madam Speaker, I will probably not have time to describe each of the proposals in detail. However, if my colleagues on all sides of the House are genuinely interested in the Bloc Québécois's proposals, I can go over them quickly.

First, we need a flexible and special stimulus fund for performance venues, theatres, festivals and museums to help them adapt to the pandemic and meet their various needs.

Second, we need a temporary support program for creators to finance initiatives that allow artists to start creating, rehearsing and performing again, despite the current context, including social distancing.

Third, we must maintain grants to festivals and events, and compensate for the loss of own-source revenue, such as ticket sales and sponsorships.

Fourth, we must provide a refundable tax credit to performing arts consumers equivalent to 20% of tickets and admission fees.

Fifth, we are proposing that the Prime Minister's government follow the Quebec premier's lead and provide compensation for losses incurred at the box office due to compliance with social distancing measures.

Sixth, we must renew federal support programs for artists forced to adapt to new delivery platforms during the pandemic and make the criteria more accessible.

I thank the House for its attention and I would be pleased to answer my colleagues' questions. The government must now walk the talk. This economic update, which we are discussing several months later, must give way to real measures in next Monday's budget.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to make sure the member is not intentionally misleading the House when he talks about support for our aerospace industry. The government has been there to support the aerospace industry. Winnipeg has a very strong and healthy aerospace industry. We know how very important that industry is to Quebec. I hear this all the time from Liberal members of Parliament from Montreal.

Even Unifor talked about the importance of the wage subsidy program. Does the member not recognize that this program supported the aerospace industry? That is just one program, and we are talking millions of dollars. Does he not recognize that type of support?

[Translation]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Madam Speaker, your colleague certainly recognizes that the wage subsidy that we supported and which we even came up with, for the most part, did help these sectors. However, as I was saying earlier, there is a need for specific assistance for all industries.

I would also add that we definitely need general programs, but there is also a need for specific assistance when an industry is struggling more than others. What I am seeing in the case of the aerospace industry is that its workers are being forced into the construction industry to make ends meet. This is a serious situation that the wage subsidy, despite all its merits, has not been able to address or rectify.

I entirely share my colleague's concerns that the House may be misled. I would not want members of the House to believe that they have truly helped the aerospace industry.

• (1610)

[*English*]

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Speaker, I urge the member to be careful in the way he talks about Alberta's energy industry given the oversized contribution and benefit it has provided to Quebec, including in its manufacturing sector and aerospace sector. I urge him to consider that when he talks about Alberta's energy industry.

My question, though, is very much focused on the massive borrowing limit increase. I am very concerned that about \$180 billion in spending is unaccounted for.

I am curious to get the member's thoughts on this. Is he, too, concerned about the massive disparity between promised spending and the increase to the national borrowing limit?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Madam Speaker, of course I share all of the opposition parties' concerns.

As a Quebecker, I look at the government's spending habits and the sometimes reckless way it spends its money. I have the same fears and that is why there needs to be constant monitoring.

As we know, the Liberal government does not like the committees that monitor its actions, but I do hope that as opposition parties, we will be able to work together to monitor the government's actions and spending as closely as possible.

[*English*]

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Madam Speaker, we have seen multiple polls now that have told us that three-quarters of Canadians, regardless of party, support the idea of taxing the ultra rich. I am wondering whether the member supports such a proposal. If so, does he have any feedback to share on how that might stimulate the economy?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Madam Speaker, in principle and out of sympathy, I say absolutely.

Of course, the NDP's motions often include other aspects. Although they may have included such things as taxing the ultra rich, they also included others that encroached and infringed on provincial jurisdictions. That is why the Bloc Québécois voted against those motions.

That said, the billionaires and others have to contribute more and that is why the Bloc Québécois has been working hard on clamping down on tax havens, including when it comes to the wage subsidy and the assistance program. It is outrageous that ultra-rich businesses that are not paying their fair share of taxes can turn around and profit from taxpayers' money. That is why, out of sympathy, I agree, provided Quebec's jurisdictions are respected.

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. He spoke about the federal government's deal with Air Canada, worth nearly \$6 billion.

There were some conditions to this agreement, one of which is that passengers must get refunds for their plane tickets, which is a

Government Orders

good thing. The Bloc Québécois has been calling for this on behalf of our constituents for many months. Another condition is that the airline must restore regional routes to places like Mont-Joli, Wabush, Baie-Comeau, Gaspé and Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine. We are now hearing that service will not be restored, but the federal government did say that it would contribute to a solution in Quebec and that it would not give even more money to the big airlines like Air Canada.

I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on the federal government's decision.

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

I think that it falls short in every way. Ticket refunds are all well and good, but it is important to remember that tickets could be a lot more expensive as of next year.

That being said, regional service is very important. Unfortunately, we are talking about an agreement with just one carrier, which does not completely remedy the situation. The agreement will no doubt also be good for the aerospace industry because it involves orders for Airbus A-220 aircraft. It is good that the agreement includes orders for these aircraft, but unfortunately, in the beginning, 45 of these aircraft were supposed to be ordered, but the terms of the agreement only include 33 aircraft.

• (1615)

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, BQ): Madam Speaker, I want to commend my colleague. I found his comments about the needs of Quebec very interesting.

I would like him to talk more about the cultural industry. He said that the government needs to take urgent action to help the cultural and tourism industries, and that the government now needs to focus on the hardest hit economic sectors. An upturn is in sight. Now, I would like him to talk more about the sectors that need urgent action.

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague, who is an advocate for culture and who could undoubtedly answer this question better than I can. She is a real expert on the subject. She is an actor and singer, and she represents a riding that unfortunately lost Félix Leclerc, one of the greatest singers in the history of Quebec, maybe even the greatest.

Many things will have to be done to help the industry, and the six proposals I outlined are all about that. Indeed, the situation is such that gatherings are often a vehicle for culture, unlike sitting in front of Netflix.

Government Orders

For a time, we needed to find ways to be entertained. However, in the end, we are all anxiously waiting because life in society means getting together and all of us being together. For that reason, when numbers must be limited and we must observe physical distancing, when sponsorships are lost, when ticket sales are down, we again need targeted proposals. We must understand that general programs are not the only solution and that we also need targeted programs.

M. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Madam Speaker, my question is about policies.

My colleague did a good job of explaining what a policy is, but how should support programs for an industry that invests in innovation for a decade and a half be structured? We are not talking about a COVID-19 program diverted to support Air Canada; we are talking about an assistance program.

How can the government create an assistance program for an industry that needs it for 15 years?

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Madam Speaker, obviously what we need is a policy.

In many ways, we needed a policy even without the COVID-19 situation. It was essential before that. I shared some examples earlier: greening, recycling, maintenance, liquidity support, loans and support for research and development. All these things are part of a whole policy, but it all starts with a vision. We have to understand that it is an ecosystem. We have to understand that it is a strategic industry. Financial assistance is important, but it is not enough on its own.

[*English*]

Hon. Tim Uppal (Edmonton Mill Woods, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Lethbridge.

Since today is Vaisakhi, I want to start by wishing all Sikhs across Canada and around the world a very happy Vaisakhi. This is an opportunity to recognize the generations of Sikhs who have contributed to building this great nation, Sikhs who today are on the front lines fighting this pandemic, Sikhs serving in Canada's military and Sikhs who continue to support their fellow Canadian through Seva or a duty of selfless service.

[*Member spoke in Punjabi*]

[*English*]

I am honoured to rise in the House today to debate Bill C-14 on behalf of my constituents of Edmonton Mill Woods.

The bill has some aspects with which we agree. It would provide more support to those who need it during this pandemic and it would top up the Canada child benefit, which was in the platform of the leader of the Conservative Party. The bill would also fix the gaps in the second version of the rent relief legislation, a mistake that could have been prevented if we were afforded more time to properly examine the bill before it was rushed through the first time.

Throughout this pandemic, the Conservatives have proudly supported programs to help Canadians who have been the hardest hit.

However, I do have concerns surrounding the increased debt with which we will be saddling our children's future. The last part of the bill would amend the Borrowing Authority Act to significantly increase the borrowing limit of the federal government, which I cannot support.

One of the things I have been hearing the most from my constituents throughout this pandemic is their concern about the state of Canada's economy and the impact COVID-19 spending has had on our federal deficit. The parliamentary budget officer estimates the government ran a deficit of about \$363.4 billion in the 2020-21 fiscal year and will be running another massive deficit this year.

How will the government pay for all of this stimulus spending? The answer is found in part 7 of the bill where the government would raise the upper limit on the borrowing authority by 56.8%, from \$1.1 trillion to \$1.8 trillion. However, \$700 billion is far beyond what the government needs to fund all the emergency programs, the stimulus and even additional spending promises. This is another \$700 billion that will be left to our children and future generations to pay.

Spending to protect and support Canadians who have been hit hard by this pandemic was the right thing to do, and the Conservatives supported it, but we cannot pass unsustainable debt on to future generations.

I would ask members to apply this scenario to real life. If I went home to my wife tonight and said that I was going to ask the bank tomorrow to increase our credit limit by 56%, she would probably want to know why, and my bank would want some type of plan as to how I would repay it. However, the Liberal government is asking us, as MPs, and the bank of the Canadian taxpayer to trust it with another \$700 billion without a plan. That is completely backward. We need to see a plan for the spending.

It is worth noting that the \$700 billion increase in the maximum borrowing limit that the bill proposes is vastly beyond what is needed for all the emergency programs and stimulus suggested to date. This leaves the question: To which ineffective pet projects is this money really going to? Perhaps this provides the leeway needed for the universal basic income program, or the UBI program, that the Liberals passed at their convention this past weekend, a big step toward their plan of reimagining Canada's economy. This would require the Liberals to increase personal income taxes by almost 50% and triple the GST. The simple fact is that this kind of risky and unknown experiment will leave millions more Canadians behind.

The reason we are in this position of borrowing more money is because of the Liberal's mismanagement and failures during this pandemic over this last year.

• (1620)

Right now Americans are seeing businesses open, restaurant patios busy and fans returning to watch in-person NHL, NBA and MLB games. Canadians on the other hand are seeing businesses close again, workers losing their jobs again or having their hours cut again, and the mental health crisis continues to drag on. That is the real-world result of the Liberals' failures during this pandemic, especially on vaccines.

We should be focused on a plan to secure jobs and get our country back to work. On this side of the House, we know that every Canadian deserves the security and dignity that comes with a secure, stable and well-paying job. We know our economic recovery should create opportunity in all sectors of the economy and all parts of the country, not just in areas where the Liberals find political success in sectors they support or by giving handouts to politically powerful corporations with inside access to the Prime Minister's Office. We know that only paycheques will reduce Canada's debt, put food on Canadian's tables, roofs over their heads and tax dollars into schools, hospitals and roads.

That is the reality of this and it is the crossroads about which our Conservative leader has talked. The two paths before us could not be more different. One veers off into the unknown, with more risky shutdowns and unfunded, unknown and untested changes that will leave millions more Canadians behind.

The other is a path of the Liberals' reimagined economy, where an Ottawa-knows-best approach picks and chooses which jobs Canadians should have and in what sector or region. It is a path where the connected few get richer while working families get left behind; a path where the budget does not balance itself but where sky-high deficits and burdensome debt will have to be paid for by some means of new income for the government, meaning higher taxes and possibly taxing the capital gains on personal property, as some Liberals have proposed.

Our Conservative team is offering a path of security and certainty that will safely secure our future and deliver us to a Canada where those who have struggled the most throughout this pandemic get back to work. It offers a Canada where manufacturing at home is bolstered, where wages go up and where the dream so many Canadian families have of affording a better life with their children can be realized.

Bill C-14 would increase the upper limit on the borrowing authority by \$700 billion without a plan. The Liberal government has no plan for that spending, no plan for Canada's economic recovery and no fiscal anchor to keep our country's finances afloat. Again, while I agree with some parts of the bill that would directly help those who are struggling throughout this pandemic, I simply cannot be in favour of increasing the government's credit card limit by 60%, especially without a plan for the spending.

• (1625)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, this is the ongoing theme with the Conservatives, talking about this last part of the bill that they just cannot seem to come to terms with and therefore cannot vote in favour of any of these measures for Canadians. The reality is, and what this member neglected

Government Orders

to mention in his comments, that this is not about borrowing the money; it is about changing the limit of what one can borrow.

In fact, this is a quote from the parliamentary budget officer, and I hope the member listens carefully, "Even though the borrowing authority can be increased, it does not grant authority to the government to spend. They have to seek spending through separate bills." Therefore, increasing the limit does not mean we can actually spend the money. Why would the Conservatives come in here and generate this false narrative?

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Speaker, the member is asking me and other MPs to trust him that the Liberals are going to increase the spending but they are not actually use it.

Maybe the member could commit to us, on behalf of the government, that if the Liberals are going to increase it, they will not actually use it, or, if they are going to use it, to at least present a plan. That is part of the problem.

If the Liberals say they are increasing it but are not going to use it, fine, tell us that, or if they are going to increase it and use it, which I believe is what they are planning to do, then they should present a plan and tell us how they are going to use that money.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his speech. The government has made many announcements, but each time it cannot provide us with any details regarding how this or that measure will work. What does my colleague think of the government's approach, which involves making nice announcements but never providing any concrete plans or details?

• (1630)

[*English*]

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Speaker, the member says the Liberals have made many announcements but the results just are not there.

That is most pronounced in the vaccine procurement problem, where they made many announcements, and Canadians feel that they have heard we are getting millions of vaccines but as of right now, we are behind many other countries with our vaccine plan. America is opening up. The U.K. is announcing opening up. It is because they have the vaccines and have vaccinated much of their population, where Canada is still sitting at about 2%.

Again, as the member has said, the Liberals have made all these announcements, but the plan is not there and they have not followed through. Announcements do not help. We actually have to have plans and details. That is part of the problem with this bill. The details for the spending are just not there.

Government Orders

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, one of the things I have observed that the Liberals like to talk about is how much money they have spent. It is tens of billions, hundreds of billions of dollars just rolling out the door. The Liberals spend and spend, and then they tell Canadians how successful they are in looking after them because they have spent x dollars.

However, since when is spending the measure of good governance? Since when is spending the measure that we use to know whether or not the Liberals are making decisions on behalf of Canadians that are actually helpful? What measure would be better?

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Speaker, the member is absolutely right. Just talking about spending and giving out numbers does not actually help.

What would be better is telling Canadians about results, and to have results-based spending. A part of getting to that solution would be to have the Auditor General look at that spending. The Auditor General and her team could look at it and let us know if the spending has hit the targets it intended to.

Unfortunately, the Liberal government has not even funded the Auditor General's office properly for the Auditor General to do those audits. It is unbelievable that any corporation, any organization would increase its spending and decrease the number of its audits. That is the problem. We need to be able to have more transparency, to open up the books and see what that spending is doing. Let us see the results of that spending, not just the amount of the spending.

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, the current government seems to wear federal debt as a badge of honour. It is bizarre and quite troubling. In the party opposite they love to brag about how much money they have spent, as my hon. colleague has pointed out. They do not so much enjoy talking about the outcome, however, and perhaps that is because the outcome is abysmal.

We will take, for example, the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities. The Minister of Infrastructure and Communities was recently reviewed by the Parliamentary Budget Officer, and he confirmed that tens of billions of dollars have rolled out the door in the name of infrastructure projects, and yet the minister is not able to show proof for 9,000 projects. They just disappeared. We have no idea where these projects were fulfilled. We have no idea where they are in their current standing, but we know that billions of dollars rolled out the door. That is unthinkable. That is a scandal of tremendous magnitude.

More borrowing does not equal good governance, as much as the party opposite would like us to believe that. As the official opposition we have supported every single spending measure put forward by them in order to ensure Canadians were rightly taken care of. After all, I do believe that if government policies are what robbed Canadians of their livelihood, then government should also step in and provide for those individuals, because they lost their job at no fault of their own.

However, it is wrong to simply look at the dollars that are being pushed out as some sort of measure of success rather than evaluat-

ing the outcome, and the outcome and benefit to Canadians that the government has offered is abysmal. It is embarrassing.

Throughout the pandemic, we have worked with the government to grant specific support measures to Canadians, but at times even our good faith has been put to the test, for example, when the Prime Minister tried to get away with unlimited taxing and spending for up to two years. It is unbelievable. When we have sought clarity from the Liberals, whether it was on spending, vaccines, unethical behaviour, the reason for proroguing Parliament this fall or the sexual misconduct allegations that are taking place within the CAF, we have consistently been silenced. We have been met with deflections, non-answers, filibusters and more secrecy.

Members will forgive me if I am a little skeptical when the government asks to expand the debt ceiling and to take a line of credit for over \$660 billion. I have to take a step back, ask some very good questions and point out some very good things that need to be considered.

I referred a moment ago to the lack of transparency around infrastructure spending, but the reality is that this is just the tip of the iceberg. The Parliamentary Budget Officer has said again and again that the current government operates with great secrecy. When the Minister of Finance was questioned at committee about the purpose for this inordinate and unprecedented amount of money that is being proposed to borrow, the minister directed the members to look at a publicly available chart. Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, this so-called "chart" existed, but there were no expenditures attached to it or the intent of those expenditures. I have a suggestion. Perhaps if they are going to ask to spend this amount of money, they should have a chart available. A pie chart or Excel sheet is not that difficult. However, borrowing money is not the issue. The matter at hand is much greater than dollars. It has to do with the very ethical standard the government sets for itself and the way it conducts itself on behalf of Canadians.

Canadians are looking for a way back to normalcy. They want to start earning a paycheck, rather than collecting a government cheque, so I ask where the plan is. Where is the plan? Where is the leadership? Where is good governance? Throwing money at a problem does not fix it. Money does not equate to outcomes; strategy equates to outcomes, and the current government loves to brag about how much money it is spending, how much it plans to borrow and the amount of debt it intends to take on, but this type of scheme is very short-lived and incredibly detrimental to Canadians.

● (1635)

In fact, Canadians know that the only way the government can bring in money is through taxation. That is it, full stop. Money spent is not a measuring stick for success, but if we want to look at lowering unemployment rates or if we want to look at the growth of our GDP, those are great measures, so let us do that. Oh, wait. That is not positive news.

Government Orders

When I think of Canada's future, I am optimistic nevertheless. Want to know why I am optimistic? It is not because of the government at the helm. I am optimistic because of the very Canadians who live in this country and steward its great resources. I am optimistic because of the men and women who call this nation home who are incredibly entrepreneurial, who are not afraid to take a risk, who are excited about working and getting this country back into shape. The only thing we are missing is a leader who sees this potential.

Speaking of potential, let me mention that it is incredibly sad that the government has offered nothing to the oil and gas sector. In fact, it has gone so far as to demonize the sector here in Canada and support the sector in other countries where there are no human rights protections, where there are no environmental protections and where there certainly is no revenue generated for us. The government would rather support places like Saudi Arabia than develop our own sector. It is sad.

The Liberals just had their policy convention. Many of the resolutions that were brought forward would certainly be applauded by last century's socialist leaders. It is hard to imagine the price tag of things like pharmacare and national basic income, but at the end of the day, Canadians are the ones who have to foot the bill. In fact, the Parliamentary Budget Officer calculated that a Liberal universal basic income would mean a 47% across-the-board increase in personal income tax. That means if someone sees \$1,000 come off their cheque right now every month, they would be seeing \$1,470 come off their paycheque then. That is a lot of money. That is the thing about government spending. It always costs the taxpayer. It always costs the Canadian worker because when those sorts of socialist policies are put in place, taxes have to come up. When taxes come up, it creates an environment that is unfriendly to businesses. Then those businesses actually leave the country. When they leave the country their jobs go with them and when the jobs go with them, the unemployment rate goes up. It is an incredibly detrimental place to put our country.

The Prime Minister often speaks of building back better and creating a more equal society. With this plan of unending spending and historic borrowing he will, in fact, create a more equal society. No doubt about it, we will be more equally poor. Is that really the Canada we want? Margaret Thatcher was asked about her policies when she was the prime minister in the U.K. She said, "what the honourable member is saying is that he would rather the poor were poorer, provided that the rich were less rich." That is the policy of the government. It would rather that the poor are poorer, as long as the rich are less rich. That is not the Canada that the citizens of this great nation want. That is not the Canada that I can support because greater things are possible, because Canadians are capable of great things. Canadians need a prime minister who sees the solution for what it is, and it is not the government. It is the people. It is Canadians who are the problem solvers, the solution makers and the wealth generators. Canadian workers are the ones who will get Canada back on track.

In 1921, architect John A. Pearson commissioned the following scripture to be engraved over the west window of the Peace Tower in West Block: "Where there is no vision, the people perish". Right now, Canadians are looking for a leader with vision. They want to

see a leader who has a plan, a strategy to restore this country to the powerhouse nation that it can be and has always been intended to be. The answer is Canadians. The solution right now is a leader who has vision to see the answer.

• (1640)

Mr. Darrell Samson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as is often the case with the opposition, it is negativity and negativity. In her speech the member made reference to the prorogation of Parliament. I would like to share with her that I am very proud to have been prorogued because we were in a crisis such as had not been seen since 1918. We needed to reset. We needed to refocus our plans to support Canadians.

Let me share with her and all Canadians the reason the Harper government prorogued in 2008. That was so it would not have to face a vote of confidence as it would have lost the minority government.

Let us talk about 2013, when the Harper Conservatives prorogued so that they would avoid the Senate expense scandal of the Conservative government. What are her comments on that?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Before I go to the response, the hon. member for Battle River—Crowfoot has a point of order.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Madam Speaker, I would note, as has been referenced a number of times today, that the member was not wearing a House of Commons approved headset. In light of the challenges with interpretation and ensuring that people can be heard in both our official languages, I would urge that to be remedied.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to thank the hon. member for raising that point of order. I want to double-check whether or not the interpretation heard the question. Again, this is a health and safety issue for the interpreters, so before we entertain whether that question will be answered, I want to double-check whether or not the question was understood in both official languages.

I believe the question was answered, therefore I will go to the answer of the hon. member for Lethbridge.

• (1645)

Ms. Rachael Harder: Madam Speaker, the member referred to my speech as being full of "negativity". Only a Liberal would say that me talking about the potential and ability of Canadians as the solution would call that negativity. Why? Why would the Liberals call that negativity? They would call that negativity because they want Canadians to be reliant on the government, and because they want to be able to control people. They do not want Canadians to be free thinkers. They do not want Canadians to be ingenious. They do not want Canadians to be problem solvers, solution makers or independent wealth creators. They want Canadians to remain reliant on the government. When I talk about Canadians being the solution, and when I talk about the incredible potential that we have in our country, the members opposite refer to it as negativity.

Madam Speaker, that question was a very lengthy question and you are cutting me off inappropriately right now.

Government Orders

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I would remind the member that we had stopped the time and I looked at the time to see when I would ask for the next question.

The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands has a point of order.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, it is an egregious act in the House to suggest that the Chair occupant is not treating the House in a fair and impartial manner. I strongly, through you, encourage the member to retract that comment. I know it put you in an awkward position because you happen to be sitting there right now, but it is extremely unbecoming of a member of the House to make the suggestion that the occupant of the Chair is not being impartial and fair. I would ask the member to withdraw that comment immediately.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Does the hon. member wish to withdraw her comment?

Ms. Rachael Harder: Madam Speaker, I withdraw the comment, but I would ask that the House observe the clock and that equal time be granted for an answer as was given to the question.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to again remind the member that I am very mindful of the clock. Unfortunately, the time does go by very quickly. Five minutes for questions and comments does not last very long, and we want to get in as many questions as we can during the time allotted.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Madam Speaker, the time allotted for questions goes by very quickly.

I would still like to ask my colleague a question. She said the federal government does not provide assistance to the oil and gas sector, but it seems to me that that is false. In the midst of the pandemic, the federal government gave the sector billions of dollars, including nearly \$2 billion to clean up orphan wells. Millions of dollars have been given to the largest greenhouse gases emitters to reduce their methane emissions. I think they have been helped enough.

Does my colleague not think that this pandemic presents a good opportunity to reinvent ourselves, to move forward with the energy transition and invest in green energy, rather than continuing to subsidize outdated energy sources, including oil and gas companies?

[*English*]

Ms. Rachael Harder: Madam Speaker, let me be clear. The oil and gas energy sector within Canada is not asking for handouts from the government. It is simply asking for the right to exist as an industry, to develop the natural resources that exist here in our country and to do so in a way that looks after the environment, creates great-paying jobs and treats people with dignity and respect. That is what the industry is asking for. Simultaneously, that is what I am asking for and my colleagues are advocating for. That is the bare minimum the current government could do for the industry. It does not want handouts.

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Speaker, let me first congratulate my friend and colleague on her recent engagement and on an excellent speech.

My question very much has to do with the spin we hear from the government on a regular basis that somehow the Conservatives are holding up getting these benefits to Canadians.

My friend and colleague talked about prorogation. This is really the third time that aspects of this bill are even being addressed. I would ask her to comment on that.

• (1650)

Ms. Rachael Harder: Madam Speaker, the member asked me to comment with respect to prorogation. This place was prorogued at the end of August. The reason for that is unknown. We were told there would be great promises and a plan coming. We are still waiting. The only conclusion I can draw as to the reason for that prorogation is that we were in the middle of a study on the Prime Minister giving \$500 million to his favourite friends at the WE Charity Foundation, which seemed inappropriate. We were researching that and coming close to finding an answer when, poof, the House was prorogued.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to clarify that we double-checked the time. The question was one minute and eight seconds in length when I called on the hon. member, and by the time she had finished it was one minute and six seconds, so I would again ask her to be judicious in her comments to the Chair.

[*Translation*]

Order. It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill, Health; the hon. member for Vancouver East, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship; the hon. member for Kenora, Tourism Industry.

[*English*]

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to address the government's financial and economic response to the pandemic as we are doing in the debate on Bill C-14. Obviously the pandemic caught the world by surprise, not just folks in Canada following up on the 2019 election.

What became clear very quickly was that, without an appropriate public health response, medical systems around the world were overwhelmed. People were dying because they could not get access to care as there were simply too many people who needed care all at the same time. That meant that in order to prevent the rapid spread of the coronavirus and to keep people safe, there had to be a serious reduction in economic activity because people largely had to stay home.

Government Orders

That has been responsible for enormous costs, not just here in Canada but around the world, and governments around the world are facing similar kinds of financial stress that the federal government here in Canada and provincial governments across the country, regardless of political stripe, are also facing. The NDP government in B.C., and Conservative and Liberal governments right across the country, are all facing significant financial strife, just as so many governments around the world are, because that is the nature of the situation we are in. The question is how are we going to deal with this?

It has been very interesting to listen to the debate today. I have to say that I am having trouble squaring some of the claims made by my Conservative colleagues. On one hand, they are very quick to point out that the pandemic relief measures, whether the Canada emergency wage subsidy or the Canada emergency response benefit, now the Canada recovery benefit, or a number of programs brought in to help Canadians cope with the financial stresses of public health measures, passed with unanimous consent, which means that the Conservatives also supported those measures. They are very quick to say they supported those measures and endorsed that spending, but on the other hand they want to have their cake and eat it, too. They want to say that all of this spending has to be curtailed, but that they should get credit for the spending when it is happening. It is a bit of an incoherent message, frankly. I am at a bit of a loss as to how to explain it. I do not think it has been adequately explained.

What I do know is that, if we take them at their word, they want to roll back pandemic support spending. This seems to be a pretty clear implication of their attacks on spending in the pandemic. Even earlier today, in question period, they asked about access to various EI benefits that are part of the spending package they are apparently opposed to even though they supported it. One starts to get a sense of the incoherence that I am trying to get at as I bounce around. I am trying to capture what I have heard of the Conservative position here today.

As long as we continue to need these kinds of public health measures in place and there is a corresponding reduction in economic activity, that cost has to be borne one way or another. It can either be borne on the public books or privately. The question that we face as a country, which we faced at the beginning of the pandemic and we still face, is this: Who pays for that? This is the kind of decision that the NDP tends to support and that we certainly supported through this pandemic. It is the right approach.

New Democrats do not agree with the Liberals on all of the details, but the debt that has been caused by the drastic effects on the economy ought to be borne collectively by Canadians together through their government, rather than being put haphazardly on the backs of individual Canadians who would be affected differently, depending on whether they were financially vulnerable prior to the pandemic. Many seniors, people living with disabilities and others, such as students, for instance, were already vulnerable. If they were put in a position where they had to bear that privately and could not, they would then end up in default or homeless, or worse.

• (1655)

That is one scenario. That scenario also includes Canadians who, by virtue of the industry they happen to work in, may have had very successful careers and were able to provide for their families, but who, because they happen to work in an industry that was severely affected by the pandemic as opposed to another, might incur serious costs and find themselves without a home. That is what things look like if we do not have a serious and significant public spending package. It is one way things could have been dealt with.

The other way to do it was to say that this is not anybody's fault, that no one deserves to be ruined by the pandemic. In fact, the pandemic has shown how connected and interdependent we all are and how much we already rely on each other, despite the fictions of radical individualism that drive certain ways of thinking about the economy. The fact is that we do all rely on each other, and the pandemic has really shown that.

The other way to respond to the pandemic, which I am glad Canada largely chose, was to bear the costs of this together and make sure that Canadians are not left out in the cold by virtue of the industry they happen to work in or their financial position prior to the pandemic.

We need to think deeply about how we are going to pay for this big bill, and not just what has been spent already in the pandemic, but the very real cost we will have to continue to incur, as governments across the world will also continue to incur, in order to get us to a full economic recovery. There is that question.

What I want to highlight here is the fact that whether we chose the collective model or not, the cost to the economy was going to be there. It is a question of who is going to bear it. As we move forward, the other things that do not show are the economic effects and the cost of all the private bankruptcies, with people losing their homes. All the things that would have happened had there not been a meaningful financial public response do not show up on the ledger. It is hard to quantify what did not happen.

It can also be hard to quantify, although many people have done a lot of work over the years to quantify it, the cost of homelessness and poverty for people who, because they do not have a home, end up in emergency rooms and end up struggling with addiction. They end up overrepresented in the justice system and have many more interactions there than people normally would because they are poor and do not have the resources that many other Canadians enjoy. Those things all have a price tag as well. They are harder to quantify, but researchers over the years have done a good job of showing that when we invest in people in the long term, we can save money.

Government Orders

In one moment, we were forced into massive public expenditure by our circumstances, and I think there was a will and sense of solidarity that enabled that kind of expenditure. However, we are going to need more of it going forward. This is a moment for Canadians to realize the extent to which we can actually save money in the long term if we make the right investments now and if we continue to make those investments on an ongoing basis.

There is therefore one question: How do we pay for these things? Well, when I look at where the country has been and where it has been going over the last 20 or 30 years, this issue is not new to the pandemic. As much as the Conservatives want to rail against the prevailing tax rate, the fact of the matter is that the corporate tax rate has gone from 28% in the year 2000 to just 15% today. One of the huge emerging industries over that time period has been on the Internet. It is the digital economy, with Facebook, Netflix and Amazon. Quite frankly, some of these economic monsters, which did not exist 20 years ago, do not pay any meaningful taxes here in Canada.

To some, the idea is that the wealth does not exist for us to make these prudent investments, to recognize the dignity of humanity and to allow people to live a decent life, with a roof over their heads and enough money in their pockets to go to the local grocery store and fill their fridge. However, that wealth is there.

● (1700)

Canadian taxpayers, or Canadian “citizens” is frankly a better word, would be saving more money in the long term because we would be spending less on some of the main line budget items. What are some of the huge budget lines? Whether it is the federal government or more particularly provincial governments, where the real costs of not making these investments are borne, what are some of the biggest items? It is health and justice. Those are some of the biggest items.

We have an opportunity here to do more at the federal level, which is something we do not see in this economic update. We are missing an opportunity again. We just had a vote on the legislation that could create a framework for pharmacare in Canada, which is an opportunity to save money. It is going to be more money on the federal ledger, but overall we know from many studies conducted that Canadians are paying more for their prescription drugs than it would cost to have a national pharmacare plan. We know that from the commission the government just had. We know it from the Parliamentary Budget Officer. We know it from a report that was published in the Canadian Medical Association Journal back in 2014 I think it was.

We know this all over the place, and it is no coincidence that Canada does not have a national pharmacare plan and we pay among the highest rates. This is another example where an upfront investment and a rearrangement of the way we pay for things between governments could actually issue in real savings.

We know the sticker price of a guaranteed annual income appears high, but we also know we already do this in many ways. We do it with a guaranteed income supplement for seniors. It is not good enough. Too many of our seniors who depend on the GIS are living in poverty. They are legislated into poverty by the GIS rate that this House and the government accountable to it set.

We already do a fair bit of that. We do it through the universal child benefit. We have many ways in which we are already supplementing the income of many Canadians. The marginal cost of getting there is something that could be bearable if we could have a real conversation about how much the wealthy pay. The wealthiest in Canada have already increased their wealth by \$37 billion during the pandemic. It is just ridiculous to say the money is not out there and these are not things we can do.

There is a lot of opportunity when we talk about investment we make in recovery to help create jobs, and to create jobs in a new lower carbon economy that actually helps Canada meet its climate change commitments and try to avert a climate catastrophe, which is also going to be very expensive.

We hear a lot from the Conservatives about how they think they are these great fiscal managers, but the policy ideas they are presenting to respond to the pandemic are either those of the Liberals, because they say they supported all this stuff so we should give them the credit, or they do not want to do it. They need to just be honest about what tree they are actually barking up. Is it the “get rid of these programs in order to balance the books immediately” tree or is it something else? What are the kinds of supports they want to provide? Put the ideas on the table.

The NDP has lots of ideas about what we could do. We hear a lot of the negativity from the Conservatives, but we do not actually hear a lot of the positive proposals for what they would do differently. Here in Manitoba, I was astounded when the provincial budget came out this week and the Conservatives here in Manitoba chose to cut property taxes to accelerate the timeline on which they were reducing property taxes. As if that was going to help anybody with the pandemic.

Again they are screaming about how much debt and deficit there is. They are asking the federal government for more money, although they are not flowing that money out to people during the pandemic, which is partly why their popularity here in Manitoba has tanked. They have been doing a bad job, and what they come up with is to further reduce revenue in a way designed to help the people who already have more money and more resources than others. It is a completely bogus way to try to respond to a pandemic.

● (1705)

Now, that is not to say that everything has been done right in the House. One of the real frustrations for the New Democrats is that while, yes, the Liberals are willing to spend, they do not put the kinds of checks and balances in place that need to be there, because they are not willing to take on the wealthy and the well-connected. This is not just about what the tax rate is. It is also about the details for program spending.

Government Orders

When we look at the Canada emergency wage subsidy, for example, we see this very clearly. First of all, the Liberals proposed a 10% wage subsidy, which was not going to be enough. It was a bad enough idea that it precipitated a joint letter from the labour movement, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business and the NDP, which is not something we see every day. They called for a 75% wage subsidy.

When we moved forward, the New Democrats were quick to say that we needed to have rules in place right away to make sure the companies that ended up doing well overall in the first year of the pandemic were not able to keep their wage subsidy money and could not pay dividends to their shareholders and bonuses to their CEOs based on profits if they were receiving money under the Canada emergency wage subsidy. This was something that many other jurisdictions did when they brought in similar programs in their own countries. It was a key component of getting the wage subsidy right, but the Liberals failed to get it right because it involved standing up to some of the more powerful people in the country. I am not talking about people who are powerful in the democratic sphere, but people who are powerful in the economy.

We saw that again with the WE Charity fiasco. Instead of running more money through the Canada summer jobs program, a successful student employment program that goes back decades, the Liberals decided it would be better to invent a whole new program with, it just so happens, buddies of the government and particularly an organization that the daughter of the previous finance minister was working for.

With these kinds of things, the Liberals ended up giving a lot of public spending, which could have been good and could have been in the public interest, a really bad name. They mismanaged it because the culture of entitlement endemic in the Liberal Party and the Liberal government got in the way of good implementation, which is quite frustrating.

We need to have a conversation in Canada, which the NDP has been trying to lead, about how the wealthy pay their fair share after decades of tax cuts. We cannot kid ourselves. Taxes have not been going up on the wealthiest Canadians and the biggest corporations. They have been going down significantly. They still have options to shunt their earnings out of Canada and into tax havens located across the world so that they are not paying their fair share. We ought to have seen action on that from the government by now but we have not.

There are ways to pay for these things, and real savings can be accrued if we make these investments. If we do not make these investments in the context of the pandemic, then costs are not going to disappear. They are just going to be put on the shoulders of individual Canadians already struggling to figure out how to live their lives in this new, unsettling and challenging context. Then they will have even more to worry about when it comes to paying their rent or mortgage.

That is not the right approach. We needed to support people, and we will need to support people a lot more. This is not government supporting people with some father-knows-best attitude. This is people electing representatives to work on things they want, like more accessible prescription drugs and more affordable prescription

drugs. They elect people they trust to set up a system that can deliver that appropriately. It is like making sure that we are not paying for homelessness through emergency rooms and the justice system, and that we are doing it up front by investing in housing, putting roofs over people's heads and allowing them to live a decent life despite the fact that they may not have a lot of personal wealth. Those are the things we are talking about.

This is a really important debate. I wish we could have had this debate without a pandemic forcing it upon us, but these are some of the things that I hope Canadians are keeping in mind as they listen to the debate at home.

• (1710)

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague talked about all of the good things we have done and the challenges that all of us as a country are going to be facing in the future. However, I want to ask about pharmacare in particular, which the Liberals care very much about, and the challenges of it that face us all. I know my colleague supports it as well.

I would like to hear suggestions from the member on how we can move that agenda along, given that it is going to require the provinces and territories to work with us. What are his suggestions to try to move the agenda on pharmacare along?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, the member may well have been a member when the Liberals first committed to this and ran on it in 1997, and I think she may well have been a member ever since. I certainly think that in that time the Liberals ought to have come up with some of their own good ideas on how to advance this agenda much further than it has already.

For me, I think if the federal government signals a willingness to put that money on the table and requests a meeting with the premiers, that would be a good start, as would moving forward with a legislative framework for that. We have an example already in the Canada Health Act and non-legislative examples in the Canada health accords, where there are a lot of models for interprovincial and federal co-operation on important issues of health. Typically it has been when the federal government has signalled a willingness to actually spend the money that provinces come to the table, so we are waiting on the government for that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to say that none of our colleagues in the House agree with what our Conservative colleague said in her speech.

I know full well, my esteemed New Democrat colleague, that paid sick leave and pharmacare are very important. These topics were discussed at your convention this past weekend. These issues are fundamental to your party, and we respect that.

My question is the following. What does the member think about the Liberal government's desire to impose national standards on CHSLDs?

Government Orders

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I remind the member that he is to address his questions and comments through the Chair and not directly to the member.

The hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, I am sorry, but I was not listening to the interpretation. I do not know what “CHSLD” stands for. Would it be possible for my colleague to quickly clarify it for me?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Since time is limited, I would like to ensure that the member's response will be brief.

Could the hon. member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles clarify?

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Yes, Madam Speaker. By CHSLD we mean the long-term care centres for seniors.

The Liberal government plans to impose national standards on senior care homes when that is a provincial jurisdiction—

• (1715)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona for a brief response.

[*English*]

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, we would like to see the federal government work with the provinces to establish national standards. That is certain. However, with that collaboration, there has to be a table where the provinces are working with the federal government to determine what those standards are. I believe that Canadian provinces should be able to come to the table and land on minimum standards that anyone could expect to have in their care, wherever they live in the country, whether it is in Quebec or elsewhere.

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I had the opportunity last week to connect with Lembi Buchanan and other volunteers with the Disability Tax Fairness Campaign, and they identified all the ways in which the disability tax credit leaves so many disabled Canadians out, by definition of the eligibility for the disability tax credit.

The government has put a paltry \$600 out during this pandemic. Would the member care to comment on what it would mean for Canadians across the country for his proposal of a guaranteed basic livable income of \$2,200 for people living with disabilities to come through?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, when we talk about the hidden costs of not investing in people, I think one of the things that is important to know is that there are all sorts of people who are trying to access the disability tax credit. The rules are convoluted and sometimes changing. Without changing on paper, they change in their interpretation. Those things can be very hard to access, and they benefit predominantly the people who already have the most income because they are the ones who pay the most taxes within the disability community.

Policing all of that has a bureaucratic cost that could be spent actually supporting people living with disabilities, not legislating them into poverty with the kinds of rates we see with provincial and

federal disability programs across the country. That relief from financial stress would also allow us to unlock the potential of people living with disabilities in Canada who have a lot to offer, but many spend most of their days struggling with the challenges of poverty instead of being able to contribute their time and talent to other things.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I wonder if the member could elaborate on the impression New Democrats often leave that we have billionaires running around the country. I do not know how many there are, but there seems to be a lot according to the numbers from the New Democrats.

When he talks about a wealth tax, what percentage would be on individuals versus corporations? Often corporations are owned in part by large pension plans, union organizations and so forth. Can he comment as to whether he is talking about that group of people also?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, the wealth tax we propose is on fortunes over \$20 million. That does not affect a lot of people in my riding. I do not think it affects a lot of people in the riding of Winnipeg North, but it does affect a lot of folks at the top who have been getting a pretty good ride for the last 20 or 30 years seeing their tax rates go down.

We are talking about going after a smaller number of people within Canada to have them pay a proportionately larger share of the overall tab similar to the way they used to. It is not as if this is unprecedented. The rate of taxation the NDP is proposing today is less than what it was in the immediate post-war period.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member was talking about basic income. As he knows, and as has been brought up by various people in the House, there is a growing movement to study basic income to see how it could be implemented in a country like Canada. We have heard a lot from the Conservatives that this would call for x billion dollars, but they never seem to talk about the savings that might come from the fact that a number of different programs could be amalgamated into this one single concept.

I wonder if the member would take the opportunity to address some of what I see as falsehoods, as they relate to only talking about the costs without talking about the savings and the value added for the people who could be recipients.

• (1720)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, obviously there are some opportunities for savings. It is important to say there is a lot more to poverty than income. We cannot get rid of poverty without solving the income problem, and a guaranteed annual income can help with that, but accessing affordable housing will continue to be an issue.

Government Orders

To the extent that people are sometimes living in poverty because they are dealing with addictions or mental health issues, that is where support is still required. People will not be able to afford any kind of expenses, such as a vehicle, on a guaranteed annual income, so we need to continue to invest in public transportation. These are all things we still have to do, but there are real savings that can be realized, such as some bureaucratic savings. Also, we have to account for the revenue that comes back when people who do not have money get more and spend it in their local economy.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the short time I have to speak on Bill C-14. I do want to address a couple of things.

First, Parliament still reigns supreme in the approval of spending powers. It has been that way since Parliament existed, and it is still that way today, for now. What is important about that, and the reason I bring it up is that we have seen over the course of this pandemic, and it has been a heck of a year, certain plays made by the government to try to seize control and seize power.

We saw it at the beginning of the pandemic, in March 2020, when the Liberals introduced a piece of legislation that would have given them unfettered control over the Treasury, and the ability to tax and spend up until 2022. If it were not for that push-back from the opposition, all opposition parties, and particularly Canadians, I would hate to see what type of position we would have been in today.

The other thing we saw, and it really speaks to the cynicism we have in some cases dealing with the government and what it is trying to push forward in legislation, particularly spending legislation, is that last fall we effectively had four hours to approve a \$54-billion spending bill after the government put a time allocation on it.

I know the previous speaker, the member for Elmwood—Transcona, spoke about this, but we have all played our part in ensuring that Canadians get the benefits as a result of this pandemic. We have all been there, Conservatives, NDP, Greens and Liberals, as well as the Bloc, to make sure that Canadians have the supports they need.

When it became clear that this was an increasing public health crisis and that public health advice needed to be followed, it meant that many businesses had to be shut down, and this affected not just businesses but also the people they employed. All of those things had to happen. Those supports were needed.

In many cases, as members will recall, those supports fell way short of what was needed. It should be no surprise to anybody in this House, and no surprise to anybody who is watching, that there are a lot of regional differences that exist in this country. There is a differing of opinions. It is still okay to have that.

Much of what I was bringing to this House and what I was bringing to ministers at the time was precisely what I was hearing from my constituents, whether it was from the business community or individuals, of just how short some of these programs were. There is the case of Tony and Anna Gillespie, for example, who own a taekwon do studio in my riding. They just started their business last year. Even up to this point, they have not been able to access some of those benefits.

The Canada emergency wage subsidy is an example. When the government introduced that as legislation, it came in at 10%. It was the opposition parties, and I emphasize the plural because it was not just the Conservatives, and individual MPs who were telling the government that that 10% was woefully inadequate. We saw that subsequently bumped up to 75% as a result.

What I am speaking to more broadly is that many of these programs were either too restrictive or too prescriptive at the time. It was important for us to make sure that the government was aware of that. In many cases it moved, and in some cases, as is the case with Tony and Anne Gillespie, the government has not moved far enough.

* * *

• (1725)

UNITED NATIONS DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES ACT

BILL C-15—NOTICE OF TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to advise that an agreement could not be reached under the provisions of Standing Orders 78(1) or 78(2) with respect to the second reading stage of Bill C-15, an act respecting the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Under the provisions of Standing Order 78(3), I give notice that a minister of the Crown will propose at the next sitting a motion to allot a specific number of days or hours for the consideration and disposal of proceedings at the said stage of the bill.

* * *

ECONOMIC STATEMENT IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2020

The House resumed 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 third time and passed.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): The hammer drops once again, Madam Speaker.

In the time that I have left, and there is not much of it, I want to talk about what the bill proposes. We can support many aspects of it. In fact, we did support it through committee and several suggestions were made at committee. However, it is disturbing that the debt ceiling is going to be raised over \$600 billion. When we think of where we were a year and a half ago, the overall debt in the country was \$600 billion. We are now looking at \$1.83 trillion in debt, and that is concerning.

Private Members' Business

I know it is awfully difficult for people to understand the magnitude of what we are going to be facing with respect to deficits. We know right now that we are at \$343 billion roughly. Hopefully, we will find out on Monday with the budget exactly where we are. That combined with the actual debt, which today stands at \$1.2 trillion, is quite concerning.

Again, I am not discounting the fact that Canadians have needed the help, but we have been focused a lot over the last year on the expense side of the ledger. Many of the measures that have been implemented have been there to support Canadians, but there is a reason we continue to be in what is seemingly a never-ending pandemic scenario, and that is because of the failure of the government to procure vaccines and to ensure there is enough vaccine distribution for Canadians.

This amount of deficit, the increased spending, is going to continue, but at some point we really have to start turning our minds to the revenue side of the ledger and how we are going to pay for this. Make no mistake that, yes, government has supported Canadians and has taken on a hefty burden of that debt, but at some point it will have to be paid back.

Two things happen: Taxes go up and services go down. That is just a fact of life, and I think most Canadians would understand that, but we have to focus on what an economic recovery looks like.

Economic recovery has to include every part, every sector, every region and every individual of the country. It is not some reimagined or imaginary economy. Canada will have to rely on the power of our businesses. We will have to rely on the people who are employed in those businesses, the products they produce and ensure we are competitive both domestically and internationally. We need to create an air of investor confidence both here, domestically, and for foreign investment as well. When I talk about every sector of our economy having to fire on all cylinders to pay for the debt and deficit situation we are in, that includes every sector of our economy, including our natural resource sector. These are the important things we are going to have to eventually turn our minds to.

When I talk to people, I ask them how much is too much when it comes to that. I think of my former life as a firefighter and the salary that a firefighter, a nurse and all those occupations make. If they pay 40% income tax right now, how much is too much to pay for this unless we get our economy going again? Is 50%, 60% or so on too much? Is raising the GST 5%, 6% or so on too much? What about home equity taxes? Is taking the capital gains and paying the equity that people have built into their home going to be too much at that point? We know that the government has looked at it. We know that CMHC has proposed a study on this through the University of British Columbia.

A former finance minister stood up in the House and guaranteed Canadians something. I asked him many times whether he would implement a home equity tax. He said no. He is no longer here. Maybe the Prime Minister has found the path of least resistance, because we know that is a low-hanging fruit opportunity for them as well.

These are the types of things that should be on the minds of Canadians when it comes to the government proposal, through leg-

islation, to raise debt ceilings, incurring more and more debt and deficits. Eventually, somebody will have to pay for this. Canadians are not naive. They know that money does not grow with fairy dust or grow on trees. They know that eventually somebody will have to pay for this.

• (1730)

Of course, to create this booming economy coming out of this recession where nobody is left behind, it is in terms of those sectors and regions around the country to create the tax revenue, both from a corporate tax standpoint where the businesses are making money to pay those taxes, and from the individuals who are gainfully employed paying those taxes, which is going to become critical to the success of our economic recovery.

I just wanted to make those points, and that Parliament reigns supreme still. We have the oversight of government spending, and that has to be maintained. Fortunately, for all Canadians, we have been in a minority situation where we have been able to highlight some of the inefficiencies of this government in the past. I fear that if a majority situation were to happen, Canadians would be worse off. So, we are going to provide an alternative to Canadians. We are going to talk about the economy. We are going to secure our future. We are going to make sure that every Canadian succeeds coming out of this pandemic.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Barrie—Innisfil will have five minutes for questions and comments when the House next gets back to debate on the question.

It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*Translation*]

CANADA LABOUR CODE

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-220, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code (bereavement leave), as reported (with amendments) from the committee.

The Deputy Speaker: There being no motions at report stage, the House will now proceed, without debate, to the putting of the question on the motion to concur in the bill at report stage.

[*English*]

Mr. Matt Jeneroux (Edmonton Riverbend, CPC) moved that the bill, as amended, be concurred in at report stage.

The Deputy Speaker: Members will know that if members of a recognized party present in the House wish to request either a recorded division or that the motion be adopted on division, I invite them to rise and indicate so to the Chair.

I see the hon. member for Flamborough—Glanbrook on his feet.

Private Members' Business

Mr. David Sweet: Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions between all parties, and I think if you seek it you will find unanimous consent to pass Bill C-220 at report stage and move immediately to third reading.

The Deputy Speaker: I therefore declare the motion carried.

When shall the bill be read the third time? By leave, now?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux moved that the bill be read the third time and passed.

He said: Mr. Speaker, we made it. We are finally at third reading. I have to say this has been quite a remarkable journey.

I want to start with a huge thanks to so many people who have helped along the way. These include my friend and consistent champion of this legislation, the hon. member for Mount Royal, who has worked extremely hard to make this a reality, and the Minister of Labour, who has been incredibly accessible throughout this fight and really is personally committed to seeing better bereavement supports in this country.

I also want to thank the member for Beaches—East York for agreeing to a trade with a member from across the aisle so that we could continue to move this legislation at lightning speed through the House of Commons, and the entire HUMA committee, chaired by the member for Charlottetown, at which I testified. Together we made a better bill.

I also want to thank my seconder on this, the member for Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon; my friend who spoke so passionately on this at second reading, the member for Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry; my friend from the New Democrat caucus, the member for Elmwood—Transcona, who let me bend his ear on these amendments; the member for Thérèse-De Blainville for her support from the very beginning; and of course the House leaders from all parties, especially the government House leader, who has consistently helped to support this bill moving forward.

Our stakeholder community has also been amazing through this process and is always quick to drop everything to meet on short notice. Specifically I give huge thanks to the Canadian Cancer Society and the Canadian Grief Alliance, both of which testified at committee with me; the Canadian Hospice Palliative Care Association, the MS Society of Canada, the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada, the Alberta Hospice Palliative Care Association, and particularly Kristi Puchbauer, who first came to me with the idea that we needed to do better.

I am going to keep the rest of my comments brief, as Canadians have unfortunately had to face much hardship and loss in the past year, and this bill has given so many a chance at hope.

Amendments to this bill would allow Canadians whose workplace falls under the Canada Labour Code 10 days off work following the death of a family member. This amendment allows more workers time to grieve before returning to work, including those who have used the compassionate care leave program. I also believe this extra time off would be especially helpful for workers after a sudden death in the family.

Ultimately, this amended bill would help more Canadians. Again, I thank the Minister of Labour for her collaborative approach to making this change happen. The pandemic has made clear that we need to do some things differently, and bereavement support is one area where we can do better for Canadians.

We just saw New Zealand extend its bereavement laws to parents who have suffered a miscarriage. Imagine that. These are important steps, and I hope passing our bill means we will see further policy changes on bereavement supports in the future.

I truly hope that we can continue in what I think has been inspiring to so many Canadians: Parliament can work. I hear regularly that the non-partisanship we have all collectively shown is inspiring more young people to consider politics and to consider getting involved in the policy process.

I thank my colleagues from all parties again for their continued fight, their support and feedback on this bill. It has truly been an amazing honour to see our bill get to this stage: one step closer to helping millions of grieving Canadian families.

● (1735)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be honest, I have not quite given this legislation the attention that it perhaps deserves.

Countries such as New Zealand are taking huge steps forward in making sure that when people are going through times of bereavement, they are particularly covered. I appreciate the member's candid approach when talking about how he was able to get bipartisan support from all sides of the House.

I am wondering if the member could highlight, for people who are watching, what his bill seeks to address, in terms of timelines and improving upon the circumstances for those who are going through the process.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Mr. Speaker, the scope of the bill originated as compassionate care leave, something that was near and dear to many members in the House of Commons.

That is where we were in second reading, after going through the committee stage, and, honestly, with support from the member for Mount Royal and the Minister of Labour, we were able to amend this bill to allow for 10 days of bereavement after the death of a loved one.

Initially we were looking at three weeks after the death of a loved one, which would only apply to a caregiver. What we decided to do, again with support from the Minister of Labour and the member for Mount Royal, was to expand that to 10 days past the death of a loved one, so essentially the agreement is for two weeks.

It is not just for people who have taken compassionate care leave. It is for any individual who has suffered the death of a family member or a loved one.

Private Members' Business

• (1740)

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in the second reading, I wanted to acknowledge just how critically important the care and compassion are that this legislation could provide for grieving families.

I do not want to open up the debate in any way beyond directly asking the question. Would this also include families that would be grieving miscarriages?

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Mr. Speaker, that is a key question that came up throughout the conversation of the debate. According to the department, there is already, within the policy declaration, opportunity to expand this legislation within the department. It is not specifically written in our legislation, and that is perhaps an opportunity for either an improvement to our legislation, or maybe the member would like to bring forward another private member's bill specifically on that. In seeing what New Zealand did, that is the right direction. It certainly has a lot of support from a lot of the stakeholder community, and if we are serious about bereavement supports, that would be a logical next step.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, could the member comment on the amendments that were brought forward? In response to a previous question I asked, he said the length of time was changed, but I am curious if he can speak to the amendments and how they were brought forward to committee, because I noticed that it does change the Canada Labour Code. Is there any implication to the federal government or to the public purse in this legislation?

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Mr. Speaker, I look forward to sitting down with the member for Kingston and the Islands and having a further chat about some of these amendments. He is absolutely right. What we cannot do as private members, and I know he knows this as well, is impact the public purse whatsoever. We cannot impact EI benefits. We cannot push for the government to spend more money. As private members, all we can do is move forward policy legislation.

The conversations the minister is engaged in with her cabinet in terms of what the opportunities are to expand EI are, again, what the future of this could go to. Unfortunately, we cannot do that as private members.

Speaking to how the amendments came forward, that is actually a fascinating backstory to the bill. This is the first time, from my understanding, that at a committee there was a joint Liberal and Conservative amendment put forward. It was brought forward by me and the member for Mount Royal, and it passed unanimously at committee. Again, that commitment to non-partisanship on this issue has really been the tremendous backstory that we have seen throughout the debate on the bill.

The Deputy Speaker: I neglected to see that there was a member with his hand raised on the board, so I probably should have done it differently with that last question. There was enough time remaining, so I am going to give time to the hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona to pose a question.

The hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member touched on the question of the EI compassionate

care leave. I am wondering whether, in his negotiations with the government, he has any kind of update for the House in terms of what they may be planning to do to complement these changes to the Canada Labour Code, if they pass, to ensure that people can take this time and be able to access their employment insurance benefits at the same time so that it is not only people who already have the resources to afford that time away from work who can benefit from this expanded bereavement leave.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Mr. Speaker, that really has been the key question all along, about getting that next step, the EI benefits, to follow the bereavement leave. The member for Elmwood—Transcona has been supportive throughout this process and has also asked those key questions throughout in trying to get this to the next stage. I have no updates on my end, unfortunately. I hope we will see something soon, if not in the budget, but I hope we will be able to move that more quickly. The member is right that it is a logical next step that needs to happen, EI supports to follow along the bereavement supports.

• (1745)

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague for Edmonton Riverbend has been absolutely exemplary in terms of this private member's bill. When people watch question period, they often get a very false sense of what politicians do, who we are and the way law-making works. This bill is a tremendous example of how people can cross party lines, work together and create a good piece of legislation. It is an important testament to how committees of the House work. It is an important testament to how the Minister of Labour and the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour can work with a member who sponsored a private bill, and how people from all parties can combine to improve that bill.

I want to thank the member for Edmonton Riverbend because he never made this a bill about himself. He never made this a Conservative bill. He made this a Canadian bill.

I want to thank the Minister of Labour who worked so closely with us, in terms of understanding that when a private member's bill comes to Parliament, members should not reject it because it comes from somebody from a different party, but rather should work with that member to see how we can create better legislation.

I also want to thank the member for Elmwood—Transcona, who has been a constant champion of this issue and who is always a pleasure to work with.

[*Translation*]

I would also like to thank the member for Thérèse-De Blainville, a colleague with whom we can always work to improve legislation.

Today, we are studying a good bill, one that will meet the needs of Canadians across the country.

Private Members' Business

[English]

The member's original bill talked about caregivers. Especially during this pandemic, we have all seen the heroic role of caregivers who, after seeing family members become sick with COVID, have taken care of them in a way that puts themselves at risk. We have seen people take caregiving leave for years to help family members with cancer, heart conditions or other illnesses that are profoundly difficult to deal with. These people are heroes. The idea that our current law would send them right back to work, in the week when the person who they were caring for died, seems heartless. The member listened to groups across the country who said people need more time when a loved one we are taking care of dies. People not only need to plan a funeral or, if one is Jewish, to perhaps have a shiva, but to take care of the will and consoling other loved ones like children who, maybe for the first time, have experienced death. People need more time psychologically to deal with this before going back to work.

After speaking to the Minister of Labour, she and I agreed that this was an incredible idea, but it should apply to more Canadians. People who have been on bereavement leave up until now have five days, three of which are paid and two of which are unpaid, to deal with a death of an immediate family member. That is not enough. When somebody who is so close to a person passes away, that person needs more than five days to deal with all of the things surrounding death.

My dad passed away last year after having COVID and then having a stroke. For the first time in my life, I had to deal with things like going with my mom to purchase a burial plot, to arrange a funeral, to make sure that my brother who is in Toronto could get back to Montreal for the funeral, to make sure that the will was notarized and in a place that we could access, and to deal with bank accounts and all kinds of things. While I am not really in a job where I can take time off, it would always be nice to know that I could. I sympathize so much with those incredible groups that the member for Edmonton Riverbend brought to the committee to talk about this issue.

When someone has a sudden death in the family or while taking care of a loved one, they need more time. The end result was that we talked to the member for Edmonton Riverbend and we talked to our colleagues in the other parties. What we decided is that everyone should get 10 days, whether for loss of an immediate family member under bereavement leave or whether someone was on compassionate care leave or leave related to critical illness in terms of taking care of someone. Everybody should get those 10 days.

● (1750)

The HUMA did excellent work. Everyone talked to one another and everyone collaborated. Our chairman, the member for Charlottetown, did a fantastic job chairing the meeting and we were able to bring a bill to Parliament that deserves unanimous support. It is a bill that should get to the Senate as quickly as possible and it is one that should be adopted by this Parliament before it finishes, whenever that happens.

I am in strong support of getting the bill to the Senate as soon as possible. Again, I want to thank all the members who restored my faith in the way Parliament can work.

[Translation]

Once again, I would like to thank my colleague from Thérèse-De Blainville, my colleague from Elmwood—Transcona, the member for Charlottetown and especially the member for Edmonton Riverbend, who did an extraordinary job with this bill.

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to reiterate that my party, the Bloc Québécois, will support Bill C-220.

I was not able to listen to the colleagues who spoke before me, but I think the bill's sponsor had two goals in mind. First of all, the bill is meant to recognize workers who take compassionate care leave to care for a loved one, under either employment insurance or the Canada Labour Code. Second, and most importantly, the bill makes it possible for workers to keep their jobs when they have to miss work to take care of someone.

Pursuant to the Canada Labour Code, workers have access to 28 weeks of compassionate care leave. Through the EI program, eligible workers can take 26 weeks of compassionate care leave. In both cases, workers can access these leaves only if the person they are caring for is expected to die in the near future.

In these situations, people often provide care for weeks at a time and sometimes provide end-of-life care. In some cases, the person receiving care may die long before the end of the leave. The rules of the Canada Labour Code are clear and require the individual to return to work after the death of the person receiving care.

Imagine someone who has had to support a sick family member and even drained all their savings doing it. This often happens to family caregivers, if I can use that as a general term. They give their time to support a loved one, which is very demanding, but as soon as the loved one dies, they are forced to go back to work. We do not think anyone should be forced into that situation. The change proposed in the bill is intended to ensure that each of those caregivers is granted additional leave to give them time to grieve without losing their jobs.

The member who introduced the bill had an opportunity to appear before the committee, and I think he also raised this issue in his own province. With the amendment we proposed, we set a new bar by increasing bereavement leave to 10 days, while of course setting out a time frame to bring the agreements in line with the Canada Labour Code. This proves that we value workers who go back to work and ensures that there is no arbitrary treatment and no layoffs or dismissals when the worker has to go back to work following the death of the sick person they were caring for. We changed the number of weeks and days that will be allowed.

Private Members' Business

● (1755)

We also had a chance to hear from another witness whose name I cannot remember. We spoke about bereavement. It is true that this is something we do not talk about a lot in our society, but the grieving period is very important. It is a period we must go through, so it should happen under the best possible conditions.

It is important that we make sure caregivers have this 10-day leave in the event of a death. It will give them time to make all the funeral arrangements, but it will also give them time for themselves, time to process what happened. That will be allowed, and no one will have to wonder whether they need to return to work early. Caregivers will be able to decide how much time they need before going back to work, depending on their situation.

That was the objective of this bill, which did not require major legislative amendments to the Canada Labour Code. However, deciding to change the rules is an important change for all those concerned, so I invite all parliamentarians to support it.

I believe that we, the committee members, dealt with this bill very efficiently after it passed at second reading. We studied it quickly and came back with a recommendation that is entirely favourable.

I also want to talk about what is going on with caregivers. Even though we raise awareness about this during national caregiver week, we tend to forget that, in Canada alone, 30% of the workforce are caregivers, which is quite a lot. The majority of these caregivers—54% in Canada and even more, 58%, in Quebec—are women.

These people are family members and friends. They decide to give their time to support someone and, as I said earlier, that takes a lot of energy.

We could take a more comprehensive look at the rules around compassionate care leave and how those rules are written, but I think the main purpose of the member's bill was not to change the number of weeks of leave, but to improve conditions for grieving caregivers. We needed to fix things so that people were not forced to return to work as soon as the loved one died, and that is what we have done. This bill will improve the situation by amending the Canada Labour Code.

The important thing to remember is that the caregiver will keep their job if the sick person dies, and they may need a few extra weeks, even if they have not used up all the weeks they were given. There is no way of knowing if or when the sick person will die. We hope it will not happen, but often it does.

The pandemic has highlighted this reality and given us an opportunity to debate the issue of caregivers. We have been able to look at how these people who are being asked to do so much, who generously give their time and want to help others, might need to be supported through various other programs. During the pandemic, we saw how difficult it was for them to manage.

Even though this is a modest contribution that we as parliamentarians can make to improve the Canada Labour Code, I should note that for the person who came to testify at committee, it was one more step in the right direction, a way of recognizing that care-

givers also need time to care for themselves and to properly mourn their loss with dignity, just as they cared for people with dignity.

● (1800)

I may not have used all of my speaking time, but I just wanted to make it clear that it is important to unanimously support this bill to amend the Canada Labour Code.

[English]

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, work is what makes the world go around. Work produces buildings, buses, tools, a great meal at a restaurant or a concert. These are all ways that people improve the world around them. It is work that clothes and feeds children and takes care of our elders, whether it is in the home or in personal care homes. However, there can be a tendency to value work, particularly paid work, to the point where we forget about other important things in life, like the relationships we have or the effect of the loss of a loved one in the case of Bill C-220.

It is a lesson that the pandemic has very much taught us when we consider some of the culture around going to work when sick, for instance, in the pandemic. We have a tendency to put paid work up on such a high pedestal that other important things like not spreading a virus to members of our communities suddenly do not get the priority they should. As a society, we sometimes have a tendency to put paid work on such a high pedestal that we neglect the other important things in life, whether it is the health of our friends and colleagues in the workplace or ensuring that our colleagues, friends and ourselves take the time we need to grieve in the event of losing somebody really important.

The great virtue of this bill is that it creates a little more space for that kind of humanity to enter into the Canadian economy, to recognize that work is very important and paid work is also very important, but there are other important things in a human life that need to be given their proper due with the time it takes to give them that due. We heard some examples earlier in the debate of the kinds of tasks that have to be accomplished, the kind of work that needs to be done when we lose loved ones as well as the importance of taking the time to grieve and appreciate both the loss of loved ones and the gift they gave in their time with us.

That is why New Democrats are quite pleased and proud to support this initiative. We look forward to follow-up from the government to ensure that the employment insurance compassionate care leave is modified appropriately to ensure that this gift of time for those who have suffered loss is not just a gift for the wealthy, those who can afford it and those who already have the resources to take the extra time without worrying about their rent or putting meals on the table. That is why following up on those employment insurance reforms is going to be very important.

I hope that some of the non-partisanship around this issue, which recognizes the need to take a step back from a sometimes frantic work culture to recognize important things about the human experience, might equally be applied to an effort to get 10 legislated days of paid sick leave for Canadian workers in the same spirit of recognizing that sometimes paid work is not the most important thing. Even though it continues to be important, it is not always the most important thing, and our economic structure has to allow for people to take that time out.

I look forward to this kind of non-partisan co-operation and collaboration and some leadership from government when it comes to the EI sickness benefit, which currently is only 15 weeks. The House of Commons has stated its intention very clearly on a number of occasions, including once by unanimous consent, that the period ought to be expanded to 50 weeks. It was a campaign commitment of the government to expand it to 26 weeks. We need to move forward with that.

What we have seen in the context of this bill is what it can look like when parties come to the table in good faith, recognize some of these things and try to move the ball forward. We wish to see that same spirit of collaboration and swift passage when it comes to other important reforms that may not be particularly about bereavement, but are part and parcel of what I take to be the most important insight behind this, which is that, yes, paid work is important, but it is not the only thing that is important.

• (1805)

We need an economy that recognizes those other things that are important, and we need to give some space and room to those things so people can live a life that recognizes the importance of all those other things and the kinds of work that happen in our society that are not paid but are nevertheless very important to people's lives and to the communities we all live in.

It is in that spirit that New Democrats have collaborated in order to have this bill go as far as it can under the existing rules of Parliament and to try to get it through as quickly as we can so this change might take effect before this Parliament expires.

Ms. Emmanuela Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am thankful for the opportunity to speak on this very important bill. Bill C-220, an act that would amend the Labour Code regarding compassionate care leave is one that, if passed, would make a major difference for so many Canadians at one of the most difficult moments of their lives.

Most Canadians have been a situation where they have lost a loved one or have experienced grief due to the loss of a loved one. Anyone who has experienced knows there is no way of getting

Private Members' Business

around certain things. At the very moment one loses someone so important to them, who has likely been a major part of their life for so long, one has to take care of arrangements one hopes one would never have to make.

It goes without saying that work is the last thing on one's mind when they are going through the death of a family member. There is no way to be productive when one is experiencing such a loss, at least not so soon, and yet grieving employees often return to work before they are ready. Doing so only has a negative impact on their work performance, productivity and careers. We are talking about absences, career interruptions and unplanned resignations.

Our government can do more to support grieving employees. One thing we can do is provide time off so that employees can deal with the stress of losing a loved one. Bill C-220 could provide more time. In fact, this piece of legislation was strong in the beginning and is even stronger now with the amendments that have been adopted.

What is compassionate care leave? Allow me to explain. Compassionate care leave is unpaid leave under part III of the Canada Labour Code that allows an employee to take up to 28 weeks of leave within a 52-week period to provide care and support to a family member who has a serious medical condition with a significant risk of death within a 26-week period, as attested to in a medical certificate.

Employees on compassionate care leave could also be eligible for corresponding employment insurance compassionate care benefits for up to 26 weeks. Currently, compassionate care leave as well as corresponding employment insurance benefits end on the last day of the week in which the person being cared for dies.

• (1810)

[*Translation*]

Our government recognizes that we have a role to play in providing workers in federally regulated workplaces with the support they need following the death of a family member.

The government provides this assistance mainly under part III of the Canada Labour Code, which provides for a number of types of leave and other support measures for employees.

For example, part III of the code provides for up to five days of bereavement leave, including three paid days for employees who have completed three consecutive months of continuous employment. This leave may be taken during the period that begins on the day on which the death occurs and ends six weeks after the latest of the days on which any funeral, burial or memorial service of that immediate family member occurs.

Next, there is personal leave of up to five days, including three paid days for employees who have completed three consecutive months of continuous employment. It can be taken for various reasons, particularly in case of an emergency, such as the death of family member.

Private Members' Business

There is also up to 17 weeks of leave without pay for medical reasons if the employee is unable to work for health reasons, including psychological trauma or stress caused by the death of a family member.

[*English*]

Also, there is a right to request flexible work arrangements, which allows employees to request a change to the terms and conditions of their employment related to the number of hours they work, their work schedule and the location of their work. Employees who have completed six months of continuous employment with an employer are entitled to make this request.

Let us get back to Bill C-220 and its amendments.

Bill C-220, an act to amend the Canada Labour Code with regard to bereavement leave, is now stronger and more equitable, and that is thanks to some important amendments. These amendments were recently passed at the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. The amended Bill C-220 would extend bereavement leave by five days, for a total of 10 days, as opposed to extending compassionate care leave, as the bill was originally drafted. This would ensure that all federally regulated employees can get additional time off if they lose a loved one, regardless of whether they are on leave at the time.

The adopted amendments also ensure that a broader group of employees would be entitled to take bereavement leave. Employees on compassionate care leave or leave related to critical illness who are caring for a non-immediate family member who passes away would also be entitled to the 10 days of bereavement leave. This secondary amendment was necessary because those employees concurrently only take bereavement leave when it pertains to an immediate family member. This is not the case for compassionate care leave or leave related to critical illness. The definition of “family member” under bereavement leave does not include non-immediate family members, whereas under compassionate care leave and leave related to critical illness it does. Without the adopted amendment, employees who take compassionate care leave or leave related to critical illness in respect of a non-immediate family member who passes away would not be entitled to bereavement leave.

As amended, Bill C-220 would support all employees in dealing with the loss of a family member, not only those who are on compassionate care leave. This is in line with the government's commitment to provide leave for those who need it most. No Canadian should have to choose between grieving the loss of a loved one and working.

We are very pleased that the amendments were accepted, as they make Bill C-220 more equitable and more consistent in how the government supports employees who experience the death of a loved one.

• (1815)

[*Translation*]

Thanks to the amendments we adopted, Bill C-220 will give federally regulated private sector employees who lose a loved one

more time off to grieve and attend to practicalities, such as making funeral arrangements and sharing the news with family and friends.

[*English*]

This is why it is really great to see that all parties seem to be in support of this bill. Like my colleague before me, I am very happy that our Conservative colleague who came forward with this bill did so in such a non-partisan fashion. I am glad that all parliamentarians are working together to make sure Canadians can properly grieve, have the chance to grieve when they need to, and not be negatively impacted in the workplace.

[*Translation*]

With that, I invite my colleagues to vote in favour of Bill C-220 as amended so we can support Canadian workers from coast to coast to coast.

[*English*]

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege for me to have the opportunity to participate in this debate. This is my sixth year as the member of Parliament representing the great people of Nepean, and in these six years, only a few times have I seen members of all political parties, belonging to various political spectrums and with different ideologies, come together to work as one collaborative team. We did so to produce this legislative product, and I am so privileged to participate in the debate today.

We all agree that losing someone we love is very difficult, to say the least. Time is necessary for grieving and for taking care of things such as planning a funeral and contacting banks and service providers. Having to deal with all of this can make things even more difficult, especially if one has to think about returning to work. To quote Kelly Masotti, vice-president of advocacy for the Canadian Cancer Society, “Imagine being a caregiver every day to your loved one, managing their day-to-day care and, following their passing, being expected to return to work immediately afterwards”. She also said, “Family members, potential recipients of compassionate care leave, may need support as they grieve the loss of a loved one and try to manage numerous strains and stresses on their mental health.”

It is our responsibility as the government to continuously work to make sure that our labour standards reflect our country's evolving workplaces. It is our responsibility to provide workers with the support they need when they need it.

With its adopted amendments, Bill C-220 now has the potential to provide workers with more of the support they need when they lose someone they love, and we are not the only ones to think so. To quote Ms. Masotti one more time, “The proposed bill does just that. It amends the existing framework to better meet the needs of Canadians, to be more practical and to address grief and bereavement.” Moreover, as Mr. Paul Adams from the Canadian Grief Alliance said, Bill C-220, “will create a right for a significantly large number of Canadians to a more generous period to grieve, to collect themselves and to rejoin the world of work.”

In recent years, the government has made several changes to the Canada Labour Code to modernize labour standards. Some of these changes include improving existing leaves and introducing new ones to better support grieving workers. Part III of the Canada Labour Code now provides for a number of leaves that employees can use following the death of a family member. For example, we increased bereavement leave from three to five days. An employee can take this leave during the period that begins on the day on which the death occurs. The right to this leave ends six weeks after the latest of the days on which any funeral, burial or memorial service of the immediate family member occurs. The first three days of leave must be paid if the employee has completed three continuous months of employment. All employees are entitled to five unpaid days of bereavement leave, regardless of their length of service.

● (1820)

We also introduced a new personal leave of up to five days, of which three days are paid for employees with three months of continuous employment. The employee can take this personal leave for various reasons, including in the event of an urgent situation such as the death of a family member.

Finally, employees have access to an unpaid medical leave of up to 17 weeks. The employee can take this leave if he or she is unable to work due to health reasons, including psychological trauma or stress resulting from the death of a family member. We made all these changes to make sure that federally regulated private sector employees have access to a robust and modern set of labour standards.

As for employment insurance, since 2015 we have made substantial legislative changes to better support families. We made changes to make EI benefits for caregivers more flexible, inclusive and easier to access. We also amended the Canada Labour Code in order to ensure that employees have access to job-protected leave when they avail themselves of the enhanced EI benefits.

In 2017, we introduced a benefit that allows eligible family caregivers to receive up to 15 weeks of income support to provide care for an adult family member who is critically ill or injured. In addition, immediate and extended family members of children who are critically ill now have access to up to 35 weeks of benefits that were previously available only to parents.

There is also the compassionate care benefit, which provides up to 26 weeks of benefits to individuals who are away from work to care for or support a family member who has a serious medical condition with a significant risk of death in the next 26 weeks.

As I said earlier, it is our responsibility as the Government of Canada to continuously work to make sure that our employment insurance benefits and labour standards reflect our country's evolving workplaces. To do so, we have always worked with all of our partners.

The bill before us today represents an opportunity for all of us together to provide workers with the support they need when they need it. Now Canadian workers need this bill to pass. For over a year now, too many Canadians have been losing loved ones to COVID-19. Too many Canadians have been grieving, while at the

Private Members' Business

same time trying to deal with the economic hardship and all of the practical business that comes along with that.

We are making sure that all federally regulated employees can get additional time off in the event they lose a loved one, regardless of whether they are on leave at the time of death.

● (1825)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank all of the members who have spoken today. It certainly is rewarding to see so many people from across the aisle not just work in the bipartisan fashion we have seen through this piece of legislation, but be extremely complimentary of each other in their ability to do that. I think it was the member for Elmwood—Transcona who said in his remarks that he hopes that it serves as an opportunity to see beyond partisan lines sometimes so that we can continue in the spirit of moving legislation forward like this.

It is an honour for me to add some remarks to this piece of legislation as well, particularly with what has been going on over the last year with COVID-19. I lost my father-in-law in the late fall of 2020. Losing a loved one is incredibly difficult right now, given the circumstances, if that person is in the hospital suddenly toward the end of their life. It truly has been a struggle and there is not a better time for a piece of legislation like this to come forward than right now, given everything that has been happening.

I think that we can all agree that workers who experience the loss of a loved one can feel shock and grief in addition to having their well-being and effectiveness at work impacted. Quite often the amount of time that people are expected to receive off, or are expected to rebound in, after the loss of a loved one is extremely short, in terms of what is expected of people and based on what we know that people get. We can all agree that more time is quite often needed.

I would point out that our government has taken steps to ensure that workers who experience a tragic event have supports in place for them. We brought in a number of leaves and other protections for employees in federally regulated workplaces, as some of my colleagues have said, following the death of a family member. These included extending the bereavement leave to five days and introducing five days for personal leave. Of course that is with respect to federally regulated workplaces.

That is one of the unique circumstances that the federal government finds itself in. Through acts of Parliament, we are responsible for so many people who work for the federal government: for making sure they are given the resources that they need from a human resources perspective and from a support perspective. We are also responsible for putting forward and implementing legislation that impacts people who are beyond the scope of being directly employed by the federal government.

Adjournment Proceedings

Although the measures that I just mentioned were brought into place by the federal government, this piece of legislation seeks to fill a huge gap in terms of the workplace outside of and beyond the federal government. To that end, I applaud the member for bringing forward this piece of legislation.

The efforts that we did introduce together, collectively, were the recent changes provided the right to a request for flexible work arrangements in the existing 17 weeks of unpaid medical leave. These demonstrate our commitment, in my opinion, to protecting Canadian workers when they experience a tragedy. However, as I indicated, there is still more work to be done, and it is for that reason that the government supports Bill C-220, an act to amend the Canada Labour Code (bereavement leave).

The amendments that have been spoken about today help to ensure that caregivers who have suffered a loss have more time to grieve and focus on practical necessities, such as funeral planning.

● (1830)

I mentioned earlier that in the fall of last year, my father-in-law passed away. It was not sudden. It was several months coming, but nonetheless, the planning and everything one needs to do at that time can truly become overwhelming. Therefore, it becomes extremely important to make sure that time is given and people have the resources they need in order to go through that process without worrying about what it means to their employment.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands will have four minutes remaining in time for his remarks when the House next gets back to debate on the question.

[*Translation*]

The time provided for the consideration of Private Members' Business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[*English*]

HEALTH

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was watching a CTV panel of journalists, I believe it was in February, and the host asked one of the journalists if they thought it was a strategic error that the government did not do more to ramp up domestic manufacturing capacity for COVID-19 vaccines on either the mRNA or viral vector-based platforms. The answer from the journalist was very simple. They said, "Yes, absolutely." However, that is water under the bridge, and here we are.

I think all parliamentarians would share my concern that we do not have an adequate vaccine supply in Canada right now. The government can put forward all sorts of talking points, but the reality is that we do not have adequate supply at this moment, so we have to ask how we can move forward. There was news today that the latest shipment of Moderna is once again delayed, and it may be delayed again next week. That vaccine is very important, being an

mRNA vaccine, given that the government has advised against giving the AstraZeneca vaccine to those under the age of 55. Supply is an issue.

Also, the Australians today said that they would not be using the AstraZeneca vaccine in their vaccination program against COVID, and the Americans just announced a pause on using the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. At the same time, we have heard reports that the European Union is undertaking potential export restrictions on vaccines and India may consider the same.

Of course, countries around the world are all scrambling to find vaccines, and Canada does not have domestic manufacturing capacity at this moment, so it really becomes a question of how we shore up our ability to procure vaccines from other countries. The government has not been clear on how the confluence of all of these factors is going to affect Canadian supply in the coming weeks. That will really have deadly consequences if there is no clarity on that. The targets change from week to week. Moderna today is a perfect example of that.

The government has not been forthcoming on the question of assurances from our main export partners, and I have a few questions. Has the European Union provided written exemptions to Canada, as it has for other countries? I am talking about a written exemption, not an assurance over the phone, or a wink and a nod, that we would be exempt from export restrictions of vaccines. Has the government also obtained any sort of written assurance from the United States of potential additional doses of vaccines from that country? As well, has the government received written assurances from the Government of India?

I am looking for a very simple response. I hope the answer to all three questions is yes, but we certainly need some assurance, given that the government has not secured domestic manufacturing capacity, that we will be able to get those vaccines in a week's time.

● (1835)

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague opposite for her work as opposition critic on the health file and for raising what is the most important issue facing our country at the moment; that is, procuring enough vaccines for all Canadians.

I would like to begin where my colleague opposite began, which is to point out that the domestic manufacturing of vaccines has hardly been a silver bullet for any country. We just need to ask Australia and look at the problems it is dealing with right now.

On the specific issue of the Moderna shipment that was delayed, if my information is correct, it was delayed by about 24 hours. We did receive 150,000 Moderna vaccines today. I would just like to make those two points right off the bat.

The issue my colleague opposite is raising more particularly is with respect to the European Union and where things are with the export restrictions. I am happy to provide some further details with respect to that.

The question of whether Canada has a written exemption is a bit misleading. The only countries in the world that have been put on an exemption lists are low-income countries. There is not a single high-income country on the planet that has received an exemption.

What we have received, as I stated several times in the House and I am happy to repeat it again, are consistent assurances have been received by the both the Prime Minister, from the President of the European Commission, as well as the Minister of International Trade, who received several very strong assurances from her counterparts in both countries in the EU from which we are receiving shipments of vaccines.

I would also point out that these are not just verbal assurances that people can set aside. The proof is really in the pudding. We have received all the export authorizations for which we have ever asked. They have been consistent and timely. Our shipments have not been delayed by these new export restrictions to date, and we have not had any issues in that regard. When there have been some small delays in receiving shipments, which is behind us we hope, they were on the side of the manufacturers because the companies had problems with production.

With the short amount of time I have left, I would like to say this. As much as I am deeply engaged with the file for vaccine procurement and know it is of concern to Canadians, I would point out that Canada is now number three among the G20 countries in total vaccination coverage and is number two among G20 countries in vaccinations per capita, per day, behind only the United States. The United States has indeed vaccinated more people than any other country in the entire world, and I know that is very impressive. Certainly it has had a very strong vaccination rollout campaign, but the reality is that even today the daily death rate in the United States is still three times higher than Canada on a per capita basis. Therefore, we also need to be very careful in our comparisons.

The Government of Canada has taken extraordinary measures to protect Canadians. Their health and security is the number one concern of this government. We are in the middle of a third wave at the moment, and that is obviously very concerning to all of us, so it is important to ensure we continue to focus on what really matters, which is Canadians.

I would like to ask my colleague opposite if she has changed her position since seeing the very disastrous effects of this third wave, and maybe regrets, in some way—

• (1840)

The Deputy Speaker: The time allocated for the hon. member has expired.

The hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary said, “domestic manufacturing...has hardly been a silver bullet” in addressing the vaccine shortage. That is really shocking. Then she referenced Australia, which closed its borders early in-

Adjournment Proceedings

stead of suggesting that closing the border was racist or xenophobic. Does she honestly believe Canada's domestic manufacturing capacity is adequate to deal with the vaccine shortage? She might want to retract that statement. It was a little alarming, perhaps misleading and promotes a lot of fear, as her party has been doing on this issue.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Mr. Speaker, I think the only fear that is being promoted is that by the opposition. The actual fact is that a lot of countries that do have domestic manufacturing also need to import vaccines. That was the point I was making.

I noticed that my colleague opposite did not answer the question. She signed a letter urging MLAs in Alberta to go back on lockdown restrictions that are protecting the health and safety of Albertans.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: There are no points of order in adjournment debate. We have a few seconds left for the hon. parliamentary secretary, and we will let her finish up.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Mr. Speaker, as I said, the health and safety of Canadians has been the Government of Canada's top priority. I really hope that the member opposite agrees and that she retracts her previous signature to a letter urging a provincial government to remove their lockdown restrictions in order to protect their safety.

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the COVID-19 pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on global travel and migration.

Canada's immigration system came to a grinding halt. Families awaiting reunification, as well as workers, students, caregivers and refugees alike are all deeply impacted. My office continues to hear from an increasing number of frustrated PR applicants who have been in limbo for months, with their applications marked as “complete”, but still processing and awaiting finalization.

These applications have far exceeded the expected processing time. To make matters worse, many of their supporting documents, such as medical documents, have expired as a direct result of the delays.

Similarly, prospective Canadians who have gone through the full process of having their PR application approved are prevented from coming to Canada because their previously approved certificates of permanent residence are also expiring, and they find themselves without a home in their country of origin and unable to make a new one in Canada.

The deputy minister of immigration advised committee members that the department is undertaking a process of individually reaching out to each person whose CoPR has expired and asking if they are still interested in coming to Canada, before taking next steps to renew their CoPR. She herself indicated that this is “labour-intensive.”

Adjournment Proceedings

Instead of re-processing applications that have already gone through all the steps of being approved for PR, I am calling on the government to automatically renew and honour CoPRs that have expired. I am further urging the government to take the unprecedented step to automatically renew or extend the deadline for other documents that may have expired over the course of the pandemic.

As well, the travel restrictions for CoPRs issued after March 18, 2020, need to be removed so that people can get on with coming to Canada and putting down roots. This would not only reduce the frustrations and uncertainty experienced by the applicants, it would also decrease the demand on IRCC, allowing for IRCC resources to be better used on other application streams struggling with processing delays.

Other immigration streams such as migrant students and workers are also being punished through no fault of their own. As their work or student permits expire, many find themselves out of status. For workers with an employer-specific work permit, they are particularly hard hit. Immigration status precarity makes workers more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Many caregivers, for example, due to COVID, are now required to work and live in their employer's home. This isolation elevates the risks of abuse experienced by the caregivers.

I have talked to caregivers who were infected with COVID by their employer without their employer informing them that they were COVID-positive. One caregiver was even fired after she got COVID from her employer. Some have lost their jobs because their employers were also impacted by the loss of income.

This interrupted time in the caregivers' employment also penalizes caregivers in their eligibility to meet the two-year work requirement in order to apply for PR and to reunite with their families. With the delays, they risk having their children age out, which means they cannot be part of the PR application.

Action needs to be taken to honour the work of caregivers. They all deserve landed status now.

On processing delays for caregivers, it is startling to learn that caregiver PR applications went from nearly 2,000 in January alone down to only a scant total of six since March. It means that thousands of applications are sitting in the mailrooms gathering dust.

There also is a tenfold increase, from 38 days in February 2020 to 344 days in January 2021, for caregivers to just get an acknowledgement of receipt for their PR application. This further reinforces the fact that processing caregiver applications is not a priority for the government.

This needs to be dealt with. I would note that when the interim program closed, there was a stark reduction in caregiver applications. The barriers for caregivers to meet the eligibility criteria are significant, and it is time for change.

We need to step up and do better.

• (1845)

Mr. Peter Schiefke (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am thankful for the chance to address the question from the hon. member. Let me say, to begin, that as the newly appointed parlia-

mentary secretary for Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, I very much look forward to working with the hon. member in the coming weeks and months.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a challenging time for everyone. To protect the health and safety of Canadians, Canada has had to take necessary measures that have had an effect on immigration. However, in terms of restoring operations and increasing application processing capacity, we have made significant gains since last spring. In fact, IRCC has introduced measures to support the processing of permanent resident applications, including spouse or common-law partner sponsorship applications, and is providing applicants additional time to provide documents. Family reunification continues to be a priority for this government. It is key to Canada's future, and we know that, especially as we work to recover from COVID-19. It is important for families to be together in this difficult time, and we are reuniting families by allocating additional resources, streamlining our processes and moving paper applications to digital.

Last year, we introduced a pilot project aimed at digitizing spousal applications. This will allow officers in Canada and abroad to remotely process spousal applications faster and more efficiently. Just last month, we expanded our case processing centre in Sydney and added 62 new staff, who will be primarily assigned to family class applications.

In September, to speed up processing and reduce the wait for couples to reunite in Canada, we increased the number of decision-makers on spousal applications by 66%—

The Deputy Speaker: I will ask the parliamentary secretary to hold for a moment. We seem to have lost his audio. We will try to get it back.

• (1850)

Mr. Peter Schiefke: Can you hear me now, Mr. Speaker?

The Deputy Speaker: Yes. We have the audio back now. Perhaps the member could pick it up from the last three sentences. We will carry on, and we will not take away from his time.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Adjournment Proceedings

Mr. Peter Schiefke: Mr. Speaker, in September, to speed up processing and reduce the wait for couples to reunite in Canada, we increased the number of decision-makers on spousal applications by 66% to reach the goal of nearly 49,000 application decisions by the end of 2020. In fact, no spousal or common-law permanent resident application that is in progress will be closed or refused because of document delays resulting from pandemic-related closures.

As the hon. member is aware, to better support families in Canada, the government has updated its rules to make it easier for immediate family members of Canadian citizens and permanent residents to travel to Canada while respecting all public health protocols and measures, including quarantine. Immediate family members no longer have to prove that they are coming for an essential, non-discretionary purpose. Provided they are admissible, people coming to join their immediate family members need only prove that they are staying in the country for at least 15 days and have a valid passport and travel document. Extended family members are eligible to travel to Canada as long as they meet the criteria and get authorization from IRCC, and this includes people in exclusive long-term committed relationships and their dependent children, as well as adult children, grandchildren and grandparents.

There has been extremely high interest in these two family-related exemptions to travel, and in cases where applications are complete, we are not only meeting our 14-day processing service standard, but exceeding it, with 80% of applications processed within five business days. So far, 35,000 extended and 26,000 immediate family applications have been processed. That is over 60,000 families who are together once again.

We will continue to find innovative and compassionate ways to reunite families, always informed by the advice of our public health experts, who remind us that COVID-19 is still very much a risk to the health and safety of Canadians.

The government has been efficient and nimble in the area of processing and has developed virtual landings and virtual citizenship ceremonies. Canada is the first country in the world to offer online citizenship testing. This will serve us well as we continue to welcome newcomers and strengthen Canada through immigration.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Speaker, I want to say congratulations to the parliamentary secretary. I look forward to working with him.

I have to say, though, that caregivers deserve landed status now. To create better efficiencies for IRCC, what the government can do to free up resources is simply automatically renew and provide extensions of current work permits, study permits, visitor visas, expired PR documents, expired certificates of PR and so on. This would save time and resources for IRCC so that it can get on with doing other work that is so urgently needed. The streams the parliamentary secretary talked about in terms of some work being done, I appreciate that, but there is so much work that needs to be done, and the issues that I highlighted earlier are some of those that continue to be outstanding.

On the issue around reunification for family members, the government should suspend paragraph 179(b) so that those who want to bring their loved ones here to be with them while their PR applications are being processed under the spousal sponsorship application would be able to do so.

I urge the government to take action so that we can truly create a system that meets the needs of the community, allows for loved ones to reunite and ensures that caregivers and temporary foreign workers are treated appropriately and fairly.

Mr. Peter Schiefke: Mr. Speaker, in our operations and processing, we have made significant progress, and we are going to continue to work to better serve Canadians and the loved ones they are trying to reunite with.

We have introduced measures to streamline the processing of permanent resident applications, including spouse or common-law partnership applications, and provided applicants additional time to provide documents if need be, if they are faced with challenges due to local COVID-19 restrictions. We introduced a pilot to digitize spousal applications so officers in Canada and abroad can process them remotely, and we increased the number of decision-makers on spousal applications in Canada to reduce couples' wait time. In addition, we have developed virtual landings, citizenship ceremonies and citizenship testing.

We are on track to return to our pre-pandemic processing times, and we will continue to reunite families based on advice from public health experts. I look forward to working with my hon. colleague to move this forward in the most efficient way possible.

• (1855)

TOURISM INDUSTRY

Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk today about the tourism communities in the riding of Kenora.

We know that many tourism communities have been very hard hit by COVID-19, and my riding is no exception. The livelihoods of many tourist outfitters, camp and hotel owners and guides, as well as businesses such as restaurants and retail stores, are all reliant on visitors from outside of our region. Canadian tourism operators have already lost a full summer season due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and even if the government is able to meet its vaccination targets, it appears that another season, or at least the majority of another season, will be behind us before the majority of Canadians has access to a vaccine.

Adjournment Proceedings

We know it is not the case in many other countries, including the United States. I note this as important, because in the Kenora region we rely a lot on tourists from the United States. Many of our regular visitors to the region have already received their first dose of the vaccine, or in some cases are fully vaccinated, so tourism operators in the Kenora riding are very reasonable in hoping that they will soon be able to safely welcome American clients back to their facilities. They are reasonable in hoping that large-scale vaccinations will bring an end to increased restrictions here in Canada and will allow our economy to reopen, so that is why I have been pressing for some clarity and some transparency from the government on when and under what circumstances we can expect to be in a position where those hopes can turn into a reality.

Above all else, these businesses are truly looking for clarity on whether they will have a season this year. I have heard from so many people who say to me that if they are losing another season they just need to know. Obviously, they would prefer not to lose another season and they would love to be able to operate, but their main concern right now is clarity. If they are losing another season or the majority of another season, they hope they can have clear information from the government that will allow them to plan ahead and make the adjustments necessary for that.

We need to have answers to questions such as whether fully vaccinated foreign nationals will be exempt from quarantine restrictions. We need to know how many Canadians must be vaccinated before restrictions can be lifted for our citizens, and we need to know what additional health and safety measures businesses might have to put in place to be able to safely operate this summer. There are many questions along those themes that need to be answered.

In November, I asked the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance if she could provide any details on the modelling, projections, public health advice or benchmarks that could help answer some of those questions. Unfortunately, she was not able to provide that information at the time. I put forward this question once again in question period not long ago and also did not receive a response. I am not saying that every cabinet minister should have this answer off the top of their head, but the government does have access to public health advice and public health experts who are guiding these decisions, and what we need is transparency from the government on how it is making plans based off of that information.

That is why I am asking, once again, if anyone on the government side can answer any of the questions that I have outlined based on the public health advice that they are following.

Mr. Terry Sheehan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages (FedNor), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to respond to the comments made earlier by the hon. member for Kenora regarding the very important tourism sector.

Our government understands how hard hit the tourism sector has been by COVID-19. That is why, since the very beginning of the pandemic, we have been there for the people in the small and medium-sized businesses that make up this vital sector of our economy.

From the very beginning, we have used every tool available to us to support people in businesses who have been deeply impacted by COVID-19. Thanks to our actions, we have introduced programs

like the Canada emergency response benefit, the Canada emergency business account, the business credit account program, the Canada emergency wage subsidy, the Canada emergency rent subsidy and the regional relief and recovery fund. Taken together, these programs have helped provide \$10 billion of assistance for this very important tourism industry. That is \$10 billion to help people survive the crisis, help tourism operators protect jobs and stay in business.

Ten billion is a very big number, so let me break that down further and just focus on the regional relief and recovery fund, the RRRF. To date, the RRRF has provided more than 3,700 tourism businesses and organizations support. In northern Ontario alone, we have helped over 300 businesses stay afloat during this unprecedented crisis. We know that this crisis is not done yet and that is why we will continue to be there for Canadians at home and at work. As we announced in the economic statement in the fall, we have increased the total RRRF funding to more than \$2 billion, of which 25% will go to the tourism industry.

We have also introduced another very important measure, the highly affected sectors credit availability program, which provides guaranteed loans from the government that are low interest and up to \$1 million for businesses in the hardest hit sectors, like tourism and hospitality.

As we move forward and look toward the end of this historic challenge, we will continue to introduce new measures and adapt existing ones to ensure we are there for Canadians when they need us the most. We will continue to work with our partners on all levels to gather evidence, data and guidance to ensure we keep Canadians safe. We will continue to help our businesses meet the challenges of COVID-19 and be ready for the recovery once it comes.

We are fortunate enough to live in the most beautiful country in the world and Canada's tourism operators help us show off this incredible asset. We are looking forward to the day when it is safe to travel again, but until then Canadians know that we have their backs.

● (1900)

Mr. Eric Melillo: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments from the parliamentary secretary, but unfortunately they once again did not answer my questions.

We know that public health officials and experts are guiding a lot of the decisions on safe reopening but, what I am asking for is transparency from the government. We are asking for clear answers based on the public health advice it is getting on how we might be able to work toward a safe reopening.

In fairness, I originally asked this question five months ago and then again just a few weeks back. The government really has had plenty of time to do its homework, to check with its departments and to figure out some answers on this. If it does not have the answers right now, could someone on that side of the House please start asking these questions and report back to the House? It is very important for the tourism sector, as I am sure the member knows, and this information is badly needed.

Mr. Terry Sheehan: Mr. Speaker, these are very difficult times for all businesses. I know they are especially difficult for tourism operators in northern Ontario. Many of these tourism operators depend on the U.S. market to thrive.

Since the start of the pandemic, we provided financial support to businesses, organizations and communities in northern Ontario. Through the RRRF alone, we have provided businesses and not-for-profit organizations across northern Ontario with more than \$70 million.

Adjournment Proceedings

As noted, Bill C-14, which is being debated in the House, has millions and millions of more dollars contained within it to support the tourism industry. I would encourage the hon. member opposite in this virtual House to support Bill C-14 and encourage the Conservative caucus to also get on board, because it has been many months where that money has not been able to get through the system without the Conservatives supporting it.

Again, I encourage the member to have the Conservative caucus pass Bill C-14 expeditiously, so we can unlock the millions and millions of dollars of support for the tourism sector, including businesses, organizations and communities across northern Ontario.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:04 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Tuesday, April 13, 2021

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Strengthening Environmental Protection for a Healthier Canada Act	
Mr. Wilkinson	5471
Bill C-28. Introduction and first reading	5471
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	5471
Committees of the House	
Environment and Sustainable Development	
Mr. Scarpaleggia	5471
Health	
Mr. McKinnon	5471
Foreign Influence Registry Act	
Mr. Chiu	5471
Bill C-282. Introduction and first reading	5471
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	5472
Fight Against Food Waste Act	
Ms. Blaney (North Island—Powell River)	5472
Bill C-283. Introduction and first reading	5472
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	5472
Department of Industry Act	
Mrs. McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)	5472
Bill C-284. Introduction and first reading	5472
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	5472
Committees of the House	
Industry, Science and Technology	
Mr. Nater	5472
Motion for concurrence	5472
Petitions	
Human Rights	
Mr. Dubourg	5473
Fortress Real Developments	
Mr. Shipley	5473
COVID-19	
Ms. May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)	5473
Pefferlaw	
Mr. Davidson	5473
Yemen	
Mr. Boulерice	5473
Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship	
Mr. Boulерice	5474
Sex Selection	
Mrs. Wagantall	5474

Human Rights	
Mr. Genuis	5474
Ethiopia	
Mr. Genuis	5474
Human Organ Trafficking	
Mr. Genuis	5474
Conversion Therapy	
Mr. Genuis	5474
Human Rights	
Mr. Manly	5474
Health	
Mr. Manly	5475
Anchorage	
Mr. MacGregor	5475
Questions on the Order Paper	
Mr. Lamoureux	5475

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Criminal Code	
Bill C-22. Second reading	5475
Mr. Anandasangaree	5475
Mr. MacGregor	5476
Ms. Dancho	5477
Ms. Gaudreau	5477
Mr. Erskine-Smith	5477
Ms. McPherson	5479
Mrs. Atwin	5479
Ms. Sgro	5479
Mrs. Stubbs	5479
Ms. Bendayan	5482
Ms. Chabot	5482
Mr. Kurek	5483
Mr. Blois	5484
Mr. Angus	5484
Ms. Chabot	5485
Mr. Blois	5485
Mr. Steinley	5486
Ms. McPherson	5487
Mr. Trudel	5487
Ms. Sgro	5487
Ms. Harder	5488
Mr. Angus	5488
Mr. Sloan	5489
Mr. Calkins	5489
Mr. Gerretsen	5490
Mr. Boulерice	5490
Mr. Sweet	5491

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Committees of the House

Industry, Science and Technology

(On the Order: Committee Reports):	5491
Mr. Gerretsen	5491
Motion	5491
(Order discharged and motion agreed to)	5491

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Criminal Code

Bill C-22. Second reading	5491
Mr. Vidal	5491
Mr. Gerretsen	5493
Ms. Gaudreau	5493
Mr. MacGregor	5493
Mr. Bagnell	5494
Mr. Champoux	5495
Ms. McPherson	5495
Mr. Van Bynen	5496
Mr. Sloan	5497
Mr. Paul-Hus	5498
Mr. Boulerice	5499
Mr. Brassard	5499
Mr. Manly	5499
Mr. Sloan	5500
Mr. Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)	5500
Mr. MacGregor	5501
Mr. Virani	5502
Mr. Trudel	5502
Mr. Virani	5502
Ms. McPherson	5504
Mr. Trudel	5504
Ms. May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)	5505
Mr. Weiler	5505

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Vaisakhi

Mr. Dhaliwal	5507
--------------	------

The Environment

Mr. Yurdiga	5507
-------------	------

Organ Donation

Ms. Damoff	5507
------------	------

Battle of Vimy Ridge

Mr. Desilets	5507
--------------	------

The Arts in Hochelaga

Ms. Martinez Ferrada	5507
----------------------	------

Vaisakhi

Ms. Sahota (Calgary Skyview)	5508
------------------------------	------

Oral Health Month

Mr. Jowhari	5508
-------------	------

Holiday Celebrations

Mr. Sarai	5508
-----------	------

Richmond Centre Community

Mrs. Wong	5508
-----------	------

Innovative Technology

Mrs. Brière	5508
-------------	------

The Economy

Mr. Kurek	5509
-----------	------

The Economy

Mr. Steinley	5509
--------------	------

Marine Atlantic Ferry Services

Mr. Harris	5509
------------	------

François Grisé

Mr. Savard-Tremblay	5509
---------------------	------

The Economy

Ms. Dancho	5509
------------	------

Oral Health Month

Mr. Ellis	5510
-----------	------

ORAL QUESTIONS

Health

Mr. O'Toole	5510
Mr. Trudeau	5510
Mr. O'Toole	5510
Mr. Trudeau	5510
Mr. O'Toole	5510
Mr. Trudeau	5510
Mr. O'Toole	5511
Mr. Trudeau	5511
Mr. O'Toole	5511
Mr. Trudeau	5511

Justice

Mr. Blanchet	5511
Mr. Trudeau	5511
Mr. Blanchet	5511
Mr. Trudeau	5511

Health

Mr. Singh	5511
Mr. Trudeau	5511
Mr. Singh	5511
Mr. Trudeau	5512
Ms. Rempel Garner	5512
Ms. Hajdu	5512
Ms. Rempel Garner	5512
Ms. Hajdu	5512

National Defence

Mr. Martel	5512
Mr. Rodriguez	5513
Mr. Martel	5513
Mr. Sajjan	5513

Foreign Affairs			
Mr. Bezan	5513	Mr. Hussen	5518
Mr. Sajjan	5513	Seniors	
Mr. Bezan	5513	Mrs. Zahid	5518
Mr. Sajjan	5513	Mrs. Schulte	5518
Forestry Industry		Fisheries and Oceans	
Mr. Simard	5513	Mr. Williamson	5518
Mr. O'Regan	5513	Mrs. Jordan	5518
Mr. Simard	5513	Mr. d'Entremont	5518
Mr. O'Regan	5514	Mrs. Jordan	5518
The Economy		National Defence	
Mr. Fast	5514	Mr. Gourde	5519
Mr. Fraser	5514	Mr. Sajjan	5519
Mr. Fast	5514	The Environment	
Mr. Fraser	5514	Mr. Baker	5519
Mr. Poilievre	5514	Mr. Wilkinson	5519
Mr. Fraser	5514	Indigenous Affairs	
Mr. Poilievre	5515	Ms. Blaney (North Island—Powell River)	5519
Mr. Fraser	5515	Mr. Miller	5519
Official Languages		Finance	
Mr. Angus	5515	Mrs. Atwin	5519
Ms. Joly	5515	Mr. Fraser	5519
The Economy		Post-Secondary Education in French	
Mr. Green	5515	Mr. Beaulieu	5520
Mr. Fraser	5515	Motion	5520
The Environment		(Motion agreed to)	5520
Ms. Saks	5515		
Mr. Wilkinson	5515		
Ethics			
Mr. Berthold	5516		
Mr. Fraser	5516		
Mr. Berthold	5516		
Mr. Duclos	5516		
Health			
Mr. O'Toole	5516		
Ms. Hajdu	5516		
Public Safety			
Mr. Melillo	5516		
Mr. Blair	5517		
Aerospace Industry			
Mr. Savard-Tremblay	5517		
Mr. Rodriguez	5517		
Mr. Savard-Tremblay	5517		
Mr. Rodriguez	5517		
Post-Secondary Education			
Mr. Chiu	5517		
Ms. Chagger	5517		
Employment Insurance			
Mr. Shipley	5517		
Ms. Qualtrough	5518		
Taxation			
Mr. Waugh	5518		

GOVERNMENT ORDERS			
Economic Statement Implementation Act, 2020			
Bill C-14. Third reading	5520		
Mr. Lamoureux	5520		
Mr. Poilievre	5520		
Mr. Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)	5521		
Mr. Davies	5521		
Mr. Gerretsen	5524		
Mr. Manly	5524		
Mr. Garrison	5525		
Mr. Lamoureux	5525		
Mr. Savard-Tremblay	5525		
Mr. Lamoureux	5528		
Mr. Kurek	5529		
Ms. Blaney (North Island—Powell River)	5529		
Ms. Michaud	5529		
Mrs. Desbiens	5529		
Mr. Uppal	5530		
Mr. Gerretsen	5531		
Ms. PaUZé	5531		
Ms. Harder	5532		
Ms. Harder	5532		
Mr. Samson	5533		
Ms. Michaud	5534		
Mr. Kurek	5534		
Mr. Blaikie	5534		

Ms. Sgro	5537	Mr. Gerretsen	5541
Mr. Desilets	5537	Mr. Green	5542
Mr. Desilets	5538	Mr. Gerretsen	5542
Mr. Green	5538	Mr. Blaikie	5542
Mr. Lamoureux	5538	Mr. Housefather	5542
Mr. Gerretsen	5538	Ms. Chabot	5543
Mr. Brassard	5539	Mr. Blaikie	5544
United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act		Ms. Lambropoulos	5545
Bill C-15—Notice of time allocation motion		Mr. Arya	5546
Mr. Blair	5539	Mr. Gerretsen	5547
Economic Statement Implementation Act, 2020			
Bill C-14. Third reading	5539	ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS	
Mr. Brassard	5539	Health	
		Ms. Rempel Garner	5548
		Ms. Bendayan	5548
PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS		Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship	
Canada Labour Code		Ms. Kwan	5549
Bill C-220. Report stage	5540	Mr. Schiefke	5550
Mr. Jeneroux	5540		
Motion for concurrence	5540	Tourism Industry	
Motion agreed to	5541	Mr. Melillo	5551
Third reading	5541	Mr. Sheehan	5552

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>