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Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, May 5, 2021

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayer

• (1405)

[*English*]

The Speaker: It being Wednesday, we will now have the singing of the national anthem led by the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

[*Members sang the national anthem*]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

LABOUR

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, GP): Mr. Speaker, last week, we observed the National Day of Mourning, celebrated International Workers' Day and, at the same time, the House passed legislation forcing striking employees to go back to work. This is just another example of the inconsistencies between what the government says and what it does.

Today, I want to recognize that some of us have been privileged to work from home, taking refuge from the worst consequences of the pandemic, carried along by its steady current. Those working in hospitals, long-term care homes, fields and stores, often at minimum wage and risking their lives every day, are the ones who had to swim against the current, barely keeping their head above water.

Recognition is not enough. We need to act by providing paid sick leave and paid time off for vaccinations. Every worker in our country must be protected and supported. Until then, are we really all in this together?

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COVID-19 VACCINES

Mrs. Tamara Jansen (Cloverdale—Langley City, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am a big fan of The Pioneer Woman, who blogs about life on the ranch in Oklahoma.

I was scrolling through my Instagram and I saw the gorgeous photos of her daughter's wedding, held last weekend, and the pictures of people dancing and having a great time. Then I wondered

why no one was wearing a mask or self-distancing. It turns out that back in January, Oklahomans were vaccinated by the hundreds of thousands, and now have days where they have no new cases of COVID. Here in Canada, almost no one was being vaccinated, and now we are setting records for new cases.

While the U.S. focused on procuring vaccines from reputable pharmaceutical companies early on, our Prime Minister frittered away his time trying to make a deal with China.

Today, we see America opening and getting back to normal, but because of our government's mismanagement, we are seeing stricter lockdowns that are wreaking havoc on our mental health. Canada should have been a leader, not at the back of the line. There will be no weddings and gatherings for Canadians this spring and summer, and we can thank the Liberals for that.

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[*Translation*]

DUTCH HERITAGE DAY

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Milton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the great pleasure today to rise in the House in recognition of Dutch Heritage Day.

[*English*]

Today, May 5, is Dutch Heritage Day.

Over a million tulips are in bloom in Ottawa, and a few dozen are up here in my garden in Milton as well. Today, Canadians of Dutch heritage from coast to coast to coast are celebrating their culture.

In 1945, the Dutch royal family sent 100,000 tulip bulbs to Ottawa in gratitude for Canadians having sheltered the future Queen Juliana and her family from Nazi occupation of the Netherlands during the Second World War. Every year since, the Dutch royal family has sent more tulip bulbs to celebrate the wonderful bond and friendship that our countries continue to share.

In October of 1953, a six-month old Joe van Koeverden, my dad, arrived in Canada with his parents and siblings and started our family's Canadian journey. I am proud of my Dutch heritage, as all Dutch Canadians are. My only regret is that I do not speak more Dutch.

[*Member spoke in Dutch*]

[*English*]

*Statements by Members***RED DRESS DAY**

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is red dress day, a day to honour the first nations, Inuit and Métis women and girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ people who we have loved and lost. We vow to put an end to this national tragedy that has impacted so many in Canada.

The Liberal budget 2021 proposes historic investments to support families and survivors, indigenous partners and governments to support those on their journey to healing and justice. Together, we will work to prevent future acts of violence in our country.

For example, we have partnered with Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada to fund the construction and operation of shelters across Inuit Nunangat and urban centres. We are investing to support cultural policing and community safety programs. We are working to foster a health care system that is free from racism and discrimination.

On this red dress day, we wear red for the daughters, sisters, mothers, grandmothers and all those whose lives have been affected. Together, we will end violence against missing, murdered and indigenous women in Canada and 2SLGBTQIA+ people.

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[*Translation*]**MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS AWARENESS MONTH**

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today, in recognition of Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Month, I am participating in the virtual distribution of carnations organized by the MS Society of Canada.

On average, 12 Canadians a day learn that they have multiple sclerosis. This disease can strike anyone, without warning. The best way to combat it is to invest in research. That is how we can develop better treatments, improve the quality of life of our fellow Canadians and find a cure for multiple sclerosis. It is critically important.

I encourage all members to support charitable health organizations, such as the MS Society of Canada, to keep the research momentum going.

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● (1410)

RODA MUSE

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I recently had the honour of congratulating an exceptional woman from Orléans, Roda Muse, on her appointment as Secretary General of the Canadian Commission for UNESCO.

Her career as a school board trustee, vice-chair of the Conseil des écoles publiques de l'Est de l'Ontario and lifelong public servant has earned her many accolades, including the "professional award" at the 2020 Soirée Saphir gala, an awards ceremony that recognizes female leadership in Ontario.

I am therefore not surprised to see her recognized once again, this time by such a prestigious organization. Her community build-

ing skills and her passion for the advancement of peace, diversity and tolerance certainly make her a great asset to that organization.

I congratulate her on this well-deserved recognition and thank her for all she does for our community and our country.

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[*English*]**MS AWARENESS MONTH**

Mr. Kerry Diotte (Edmonton Griesbach, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk about my late friend, Ted Marianix. Like more than 90,000 Canadians, Ted was living with MS. Ted struggled with MS, but worked hard to keep his independence.

MS is a terrible disease. Severe episodes come and go without warning. Research shows that people with MS have high unemployment. Sadly, many people who want to work struggle to do so. Bosses need to be more flexible for people with MS.

May is MS Awareness Month. Its symbol is a carnation. Get a virtual carnation online.

Today, I am remembering Ted. Let us support everyone living with MS.

* * *

MS AWARENESS MONTH

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, MS is the most common neurological disease affecting young Canadians. The incidence is three times higher among women. COVID-19 has amplified the income insecurity faced by women with disabilities.

Diagnosed with MS in 2008, Michelle Hewitt shares how difficult it is to make ends meet. She says, "I regularly speak to women...no longer able to work [WITH] no avenues for income once their medical employment insurance is finished...they are not seen as 'disabled enough.' The system is failing them."

Our government, in the Speech from the Throne, vowed to introduce a new Canadian disability benefit to support Canadians with disabilities and lift them out of poverty.

Today, in honour of MS Awareness Month, I will join with MS Society's carnation pinning campaign to support a world free of MS. I encourage all to join in this effort.

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NOVA SCOTIANS

Mr. Mike Kelloway (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week, the third wave of COVID-19 found its way to the shores of Nova Scotia, and I rise in the House today to commend Nova Scotians for doing their part to mitigate the spread of the virus in our province.

As soon as it became clear that the virus was finding its way back into our communities, Nova Scotians took swift action to support one another. Whether they are waiting in line for an asymptomatic COVID test, or volunteering at testing sites, or delivering food to those in need or giving up their space to provide child care for front-line workers, Nova Scotians know that we are all in this together, even while we are staying apart.

I want to thank Dr. Strang and his entire team at the Nova Scotia Public Health as well the Nova Scotia Health Authority for their leadership and for taking this pandemic seriously since the very beginning.

We are now at day seven of our two-week province-wide shutdown, and I am so proud of my constituents and all Nova Scotians for doing their part to keep our communities and province safe.

Waves have crashed on our shores before in Nova Scotia, but Nova Scotians always find a way forward.

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RED DRESS DAY

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to speak in support and recognition of today being Red Dress Day. It started with the REDress art installation project by Jaime Black.

Red dresses hung in public spaces are a visual reminder of Canada's missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. It has grown into a national day of awareness. It is a day dedicated to remembering and honouring the precious lives that have been lost and to stand against racism and hate.

The victims of these horrific tragedies and their families deserve justice today. A red dress is on display at each of my three constituency offices to honour these indigenous women and girls. I encourage everyone to wear red today to help raise awareness to support the victims and families of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls.

* * *

• (1415)

TECHNOLOGY

Mr. Greg McLean (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Calgary is a dynamic city. It is a resilient city. Analysts know that the advances Canada has led in oil and gas revolve around the development of technology. Despite a tumultuous six years, Calgary's tech-

Statements by Members

nology industry continues to prosper and is doubling down on growth and opportunities.

Venture capital investment in Alberta tech opportunities has experienced phenomenal growth. In 2020, \$455 million was invested in Alberta tech companies, eclipsing all previous records. Infosys has announced plans to create 500 jobs, and mCloud is moving its head office here. Extreme Telematics Corp., Nobal Technology, StellarAlgo and Carbonova present outstanding technology opportunities. I could go on at length.

These new companies build on a business culture that embraces challenges and rewards success. Let me thank all our great tech entrepreneurs who are building our innovative business culture in Alberta.

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[Translation]

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS AWARENESS MONTH

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, right now, we are all fighting against COVID-19, but today my thoughts go out to those who are engaged in another daily battle, those who have an autoimmune disease.

May is Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Month.

We all know people close to us who have to cope with multiple sclerosis on a daily basis. The symptoms of the disease vary from person to person and so does the pain. Also, for any one person, symptoms fluctuate from day to day and week to week, and the body does not always react the same way.

It is not unusual to hear that a person with MS has to stay in bed all day because their body can no longer function. Then, a few days later, they seem to be back to normal.

Today, and every day of the year, we need to think of them and be there for them. I invite all Canadians to support people with this type of disease. We must not forget them.

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[English]

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, multiple sclerosis is a disease that impacts all Canadians: not only the individuals living with the disease, but also their families, friends, co-workers and health care teams.

Oral Questions

Women are impacted by MS three times more often than men, and nearly 60% of people living with the disease eventually can no longer work. More needs to be done to support women who live with MS and to help them stay in the workforce for as long as they can.

Unfortunately, for too many people living with MS, treatments are not accessible, available or affordable. I support the MS Society's call for improved access to all Health Canada approved treatments. The MS community needs to know that the life-changing treatments that exist will be available to them regardless of where they live or how much money they earn.

Today, in honour of MS Awareness Month, I am participating in the MS Society's Virtual Carnation Pinning to show my commitment to improve the lives of Canadians affected by MS. I hope everyone will join me.

* * *

[Translation]

PHOENIX PAY SYSTEM

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, let us guess which employer I am talking about.

One person who retired from working for this employer has to pay tax on income he never received. Another is still waiting on nearly \$40,000 in back wages. One employee transferred to another unit and has not been paid in seven weeks. Another has been waiting two years for his pay, and his file just sat there gathering dust because the person who was supposed to handle it spoke only English and did not see fit to transfer the file to someone who could speak French. Thousands of other employees are being taxed on their compensation payments because Treasury Board and the Canada Revenue Agency have not figured out how to talk to each other.

Bingo. I am talking about the Government of Canada and its Phoenix pay system.

If a private company were to do this kind of thing, it would pretty quickly find itself in court. In this case, the government has left its own employees in the lurch for five years now.

Our public servants are dedicated and do not deserve to be treated the way we are treating them, the way the Canadian government is treating them.

* * *

[English]

BILL C-10

Mr. Matt Jeneroux (Edmonton Riverbend, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am here in Ottawa today specifically to push back and fight against the government's bill, Bill C-10, which is an absolute attack on the freedoms we as Canadians enjoy online. This legislation would give sweeping power to the CRTC to regulate the Internet with no clear guidelines of how that power would be used.

The government has now said it would introduce an amendment to make it clear that the content uploaded on social media sites would not be regulated by this bill. However, Canadians still have

the right to be concerned. This is unacceptable in a society such as ours that values its freedom.

It could not have been said any better than by the former chairman of the CRTC, who stated that this bill, "doesn't just infringe on free expression, it constitutes a full-blown assault upon it and, through it, the foundations of democracy."

This bill has no place in a free and fair society like Canada's, and I will work tirelessly to oppose such a bill becoming law.

* * *

• (1420)

[Translation]

VIMY CONSTITUENCY TEAM

Ms. Annie Koutrakis (Vimy, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, an MP is nothing without a passionate team. Today I would like to pay tribute to my own team, the "A-Team", which has helped me shine as a new MP.

I want to thank Maryse, George and Marlyna for giving the people of Vimy the support they deserve during these difficult times.

I appreciate the hard work of our fully committed interns, Christopher and Angelica.

I want to thank Thomas for supporting me in everything having to do with legislation and the Standing Committee on Finance.

I especially want to thank Sylvie for her knowledge, experience and her leadership, which guides us all.

I know that I speak on behalf of all members when I say that we are all proud of our teams. We owe them a debt of gratitude for the work they do for this great country.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when General Vance retired, the Prime Minister's Office praised his leadership of Operation HONOUR three full years after his office knew the general had been accused of sexual misconduct. A supportive statement of character for someone who perpetrated sexual misconduct was enough to terminate the special forces commander.

Why is it not enough to terminate Katie Telford?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the harassment, intimidation and assault faced by far too many women and men serving in the military is absolutely unacceptable. As a government, we move forward with measures to create greater support for anyone who comes forward. Measures we have taken since being in government have not gone far enough. We announced in budget 2021 over \$236 million to eliminate sexual misconduct and gender-based violence in the Canadian Armed Forces. It is a priority for us to eliminate all forms of misconduct and create a safe workspace. We will continue to work on this all together.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, he says, "continue to work on this". The Liberals ignored it for three years.

Michael Wernick testified that he sent the Prime Minister's Office a briefing in 2018 giving them the option of ending General Vance's tenure. Instead, the Prime Minister gave him a raise and allowed the general to stay for another two and a half years.

When discussions were being held about extending General Vance's tenure, did Katie Telford tell the Prime Minister there were outstanding allegations of sexual misconduct against him, yes or no?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, allow me to correct the record when the Leader of the Opposition says we have done nothing since we got elected. On the contrary, since 2015 we have listened to survivors, we have strengthened laws against intimate partner violence and we have made investments to prevent and address gender-based violence. We put forward the first-ever federal strategy to prevent gender-based violence in June 2017, with \$200 million provided; we put forward a national action plan against gender-based violence with the support of provinces, territories and indigenous partners; and we moved forward on support for gender-based violence prevention during the pandemic, with over \$100 million in emergency support.

We have always taken this seriously. We always will.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, did Katie Telford write those notes for the Prime Minister? He did not listen to survivors. Three years ago he ignored one. The Prime Minister's scandals are like the five stages of grief: First is denial, next is explaining, after that let us find a retired Supreme Court judge, then it becomes a learning opportunity for everybody, but there is never any accountability for the Prime Minister. Accountability starts today.

Who is the Prime Minister going to hold to account in his office for covering up sexual misconduct allegations for three years?

• (1425)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while the Conservatives look for partisan attacks, we will continue to focus on what matters.

The reality is that, as we have seen time and time again, far too many survivors, women and men, do not feel comfortable coming forward and do not get the institutional support they need. That is why we need to make transformational changes to the Canadian Armed Forces and right across the country. Those are the things we have moved forward with over the past many years, but we know

we need to do much. No one should feel unsafe in coming forward to share their experiences. There needs to be accountability and there need to be consequences. That is what we have always worked on.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when General Vance retired, the Prime Minister's Office praised his leadership of Operation Honour, three full years after his office learned of the allegations of sexual misconduct against him. That was enough to terminate the special forces commander. Why is it not enough for the Prime Minister to terminate his chief of staff?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the harassment, intimidation and assault faced by far too many women and men serving in the military is absolutely unacceptable.

As a government, we have taken measures to create greater support for anyone who comes forward. We announced in budget 2021 over \$236 million to eliminate sexual misconduct and gender-based violence in the Canadian Armed Forces. It is a priority for us to eliminate all forms of misconduct and create a safe workspace. We will continue to work on this all together.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the allegations of sexual misconduct against General Vance are a nightmare for all women who are serving and who want to serve their country in the Canadian Armed Forces.

There is a climate of fear and a culture of silence within the armed forces. Complaints go unanswered. The Liberal government is turning a blind eye to the severity of the situation. Who will the Prime Minister hold responsible?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, far too many survivors, women and men, in the Canadian Armed Forces do not feel comfortable coming forward to report their experiences and to make allegations against the individuals who perpetrated these unacceptable acts.

We need to change this. That is why we asked Justice Arbour for help and promoted General Carignan—so we can change the culture once and for all. We have done some things over the past few years and we need to do more.

*Oral Questions***CANADA REVENUE AGENCY**

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, a 74-year-old from Bécancour—Nicolet—Saurel with no employment income was the victim of \$10,000 in fraud related to the CERB. He also lost his GST rebate. He went to the police, he went to his caisse populaire and of course he went to the Canada Revenue Agency, which told him he had to pay \$3,000.

Does the Prime Minister agree with the minister and member for Gaspésie—Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine that, in such cases, the victim has to pay?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that unfortunately some Canadians are victims of fraud. The ministers are working closely with the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre to address these issues.

We also provided Employment and Social Development Canada and the CRA with the resources needed to increase their ability to detect CERB-related fraud, conduct investigations, resolve cases and support victims.

Victims of fraud will not be held responsible for amounts paid to people who have stolen their identity.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, what are the million victims of CERB fraud supposed to do with the Prime Minister's empty rhetoric?

A single person who earns \$50,000 a year and who is the victim of identity theft by someone who received \$14,000 in CERB benefits in their place will have to pay the government and the Prime Minister \$5,000 up front. Does the Prime Minister believe it is right to make victims of fraud pay?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, the victims of fraud are not held responsible for payments made to identity thieves.

* * *

● (1430)

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Justice Deschamps wrote a report on sexual misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces. She clearly recommended setting up an independent process for filing sexual harassment complaints.

Instead of launching another investigation, why does the Prime Minister not set up this independent process for filing complaints?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in budget 2021, we announced over \$236 million to eliminate sexual misconduct and gender-based violence in the Canadian Armed Forces, including to enhance internal support services to survivors.

In order to implement new external oversight mechanisms, we are building on the work that we are already doing, including a strategy for long-term culture change to eliminate sexual misconduct and implementing the declaration of victims rights.

Obviously, there is still a lot of work to be done. We will create a system in which people feel safe and supported when they have something to report.

[English]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yes, there is a lot of work that remains: putting in place the key recommendation of Justice Deschamps from 2015.

We had over 800 allegations in five years of either sexual assault or sexual harassment in the Canadian Forces, which is a staggering figure. That means over three allegations a week all while this Prime Minister was in government.

The Justice Deschamps report makes it clear. The number one recommendation was to put in place an independent process to bring forward complaints. Why has this Prime Minister, in those five years with all of those allegations, not put in place the key recommendation, which is an independent process to bring forward complaints?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in budget 2021, we announced over \$236 million to eliminate sexual misconduct and gender-based violence in the Canadian Armed Forces, including to enhance internal support services for survivors and implement new external oversight mechanisms. That builds on the work we have already done, including a strategy for long-term culture change to eliminate sexual misconduct and implementing the declaration of victims rights.

We have also appointed Justice Louise Arbour to follow up on the next steps that we can make for permanent change, while appointing General Jennie Carignan to take action right away.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the pattern of the Prime Minister, when faced with evidence of a cover-up and misleading for his own benefit, is to deny, then deny again, then say he did not know and then blame someone else, usually a woman. He has done that with the SNC-Lavalin corruption affair. He has done that with the WE scandal, making sure his family comes out ahead, and he is doing it now with his denial of knowing about the allegations around Vance.

Is it not true that the Prime Minister abandoned our women in the military and was complicit in covering up and protecting General Vance?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, no, it is not true. From the very beginning we have taken significant steps to support survivors of gender-based violence and support survivors of harassment and intimidation. We have moved forward with measures across government to create better supports, better accountability and stronger processes. As a government, and as an individual, we have always taken seriously concerns around sexual assault and we will continue to do even more. We know that there is much more to do and we will be focused on that.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is just not true. The Prime Minister is either complicit or he is incompetent. He either knew, which he denies, or his own chief of staff and minister of defence have so little regard for him that they see him as just a figurehead, or maybe they wanted to give him plausible deniability.

Which is it with the Prime Minister? Was he complicit in the cover-up, is he incompetent, or was he just conveniently left out of the loop so that with a nudge and a wink he could say, “I didn’t know”?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, from the time I was in university to the time I became the leader of the Liberal Party, to the time I became the Prime Minister, I have always dedicated myself to supporting survivors of sexual violence, to making sure there is a process, that there is accountability and that there are the proper kinds of supports for anyone who comes forward to denounce irresponsible or unacceptable actions and assaults.

This is something that goes to the core of our government and continues to be something that we will continue to work on, because we know there is always much more to do.

• (1435)

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is just remarkable because one thing we do know is that the Prime Minister is not a feminist. His record when it comes to the treatment of women is abysmal. Just ask the poor girl he groped at the Kokanee festival, ask the member for Vancouver Granville, or maybe Jane Philpott. How about Celina Caesar-Chavannes? Katie Telford will probably be next when he is done with her.

Most importantly, ask the women in our military if they think the Prime Minister is a feminist. It will be a resounding no. Is that not the sad truth?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, to be a feminist, one has to recognize that there is an inequality between men and women and agree that we need to do a lot more work to establish that. That is why we moved forward with feminist policies as a government on supporting survivors, on investing in things like child care and making sure that we are supporting women entrepreneurs, and on demonstrating a focus on pay equity.

We have continued to move forward because supporting women's equality, supporting opportunity for everyone is not just the right thing to do; it is also the smart economic thing to do.

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, military and civilian members know that harassment is alive and well in DND. The avalanche of allegations of

sexual misconduct in the military continues, but under the Prime Minister no one is ever responsible; no one is held accountable. He hides saying he did not know, but that was three years ago. He knows now and still refuses to act.

Will the Prime Minister hold anyone accountable for perpetrating sexual misconduct at the highest levels in Canada's military?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the process that was undergone in 2018 was exactly the same process embarked upon by the leader of the opposition back in 2015 when he was in government. He heard a rumour of misconduct, he told his staff, who told PMO and the Privy Council Office. The job of the politicians and their staff is to ensure that any allegation is given to the appropriate authorities.

The leader of the opposition and the Conservatives continue to decry a process that they themselves took when they appointed General Vance in the first place.

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, women in the military have lost hope. Some have lost their career, others have tragically accepted there will be no justice. Service to country is an honourable profession. My father served, I served, and I would be incredibly proud if my daughter wanted to as well, but under the Prime Minister, if she chose a military career I would be worried for her safety.

If they asked him, would the Prime Minister encourage Canada's sons and daughters, including his own, to serve in the Canadian Armed Forces?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an extraordinarily honourable calling to serve in the Canadian Armed Forces, to serve one's country in any given way. I am deeply proud that my grandfather was not just a sitting MP, but at the same time served in World War II as a flight lieutenant. Service to country is extraordinary and that's why we need to make sure that anyone who serves their country gets the proper support when unacceptable actions, assault or harassment happens.

We have made improvements, but we know there is much more to do, which is why we appointed both Louise Arbour and Jennie Carignan to lead on making these permanent changes.

Oral Questions

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, more reviews and more training are not enough. The Prime Minister's inaction has emboldened the military old boys' club and reinforced and entrenched a toxic culture. He refuses to hold those at the highest levels accountable, not the defence minister, no senior member of the Privy Council, no one on the Prime Minister's staff. Promotions and postings for all general officers must be frozen until all those who are complicit are held accountable.

Will the Prime Minister fire those who have failed in their duties to Canadians?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, over the past years and, indeed, over the past months, we have demonstrated firmness and resolve in transforming the culture of the military to make sure that anyone who serves feels supported and resourced as they come forward to share unacceptable actions. We need to put an end to the culture of tolerance, misogyny and harassment that exists in our military and in far too many other institutions. That is something this government has taken seriously over the past five years and we will continue to move forward.

• (1440)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in 2018, the national defence ombudsman gave the Minister of National Defence a substantial file showing that the highest-ranking officer in the military, General Vance, allegedly committed acts of sexual misconduct against a person while she was under his command.

The Minister of National Defence refused to look at the file. Even though he knew allegations had been made, the minister kept the general in his position for three years. The minister even gave the general a pay raise.

Does the Prime Minister condone his defence minister's wilful blindness?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a matter of principle, politicians should not be the ones to investigate allegations of harassment, intimidation or assault. These matters should be handed over to the appropriate authorities.

That is exactly what the Minister of National Defence did. He referred the ombudsman to the appropriate authorities so that the proper process could be followed in order to get to the truth of the matter. Unfortunately, in this case, the survivor did not feel as though she had enough guidance to allow the ombudsman to share her information. This is exactly one of the things we need to change.

Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there are better ways to handle this that do not involve conducting an investigation.

The Minister of National Defence turned a blind eye to allegations he knew were sexual in nature because the ombudsman had warned him about them. The Prime Minister has repeatedly claimed that he was not aware of the allegations against General Vance. This means that, for three years, the Minister of National Defence knew that the highest-ranking officer in the military was potentially

guilty of sexual misconduct and for three years he never told the Prime Minister.

Is a minister who hid such serious information from the Prime Minister still worthy of his trust?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what that hon. member is saying is entirely false.

The committee heard multiple witnesses over three months, including non-partisan officials, who said that the details of the allegation were not known. The record is clear.

During her testimony, the deputy secretary to the cabinet said, "I did not have information about the nature of the complaint or specifics that would have enabled further action."

The former mediator, the ombudsman, testified before the commission that he could not provide any details, saying that he took the investigation as far as he could.

* * *

[*English*]

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last night, Reuters had a headline that said, "the government was working on 'fake news' legislation to tackle 'misinformation, hatred and lies,' as worries grow over media freedoms".

When it comes to the basic freedom of expression, the Prime Minister has also always felt it should be free if it agreed with his expression.

Why is the government once again taking a hammer to Canadian free expression rights with Bill C-10?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our artists and creators are among the Canadians who have been hardest hit by this pandemic. They are suffering financially and mentally. This bill is about ensuring that we are no longer putting the interests of international companies ahead of Canadian creators.

We have been clear that this is not about individual users or about what individual Canadians post online. As the Minister of Canadian Heritage said, we will be bringing forward an amendment to ensure that this is absolutely clear. We must get to work and pass Bill C-10.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): It is very interesting, Mr. Speaker. That Reuters headline I was talking about was actually referencing new legislation being introduced in Hong Kong. It should worry Canadians that the Prime Minister could not tell the difference between what is happening in Hong Kong and his own bill, Bill C-10. Of course, we should not be surprised, because last fall he told Canadians that free speech has limits.

Why is the government using Bill C-10 to crack down on the free speech rights of everyday Canadians on the Internet?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, allow me to be absolutely clear: This is not about restricting content, but about making Canadian music more discoverable and available to the general public. Freedom of speech is explicitly protected under the act and in our Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It is not negotiable for our government and we will continue to protect it, uphold it and abide by it. The Conservatives are deliberately misleading Canadians once again, obstructing the study of this important bill and siding with web giants against Canadian creators.

• (1445)

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister knows this is not about cultural content. It is about the everyday content Canadians put on their social media. The Prime Minister, last fall, mused about placing limits on free speech. He then backtracked and told this House he would “unequivocally defend freedom of expression.”

Will he make good on that promise and withdraw Bill C-10, or will this broken promise to defend the free speech rights of Canadians just be added to the list of broken promises from the Prime Minister?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, unlike what the Leader of the Opposition is trying to pretend, Bill C-10 is not about what Canadians do online. It is about what web giants do not do, which is to support Canadian-made stories and music. That is why we made sure the bill covers professional, profitable content while explicitly exempting regular users from contribution requirements. We have improved, and we will continue to improve, this bill so it truly reflects its initial objective, which is to serve Canadian creators without hindering free expression in this country.

[Translation]

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, freedom of expression is fundamental. It is not a privilege, but a right.

The Prime Minister thinks this freedom should be free provided it is in line with his expression, but last year he said that freedom of expression has limits.

Why is this government once again attacking Canadian freedom of expression with Bill C-10?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, the Conservatives are showing that they know nothing about Canada's cultural industry. Canadian artists and creators have been some of the hardest hit by the pandemic.

This bill will ensure that we no longer put the interests of international corporations above the interests of Canadian creators. We have clearly indicated that this is not about individual users or about what Canadians themselves publish online.

As the Minister of Canadian Heritage said, we will propose an amendment to make this crystal clear to us and to everyone else. We must get to work and pass Bill C-10.

[English]

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in 2015, the Prime Minister promised to get clean drinking water to all indigenous people within six years. Six years later, he broke that promise. Now the promise is to do it in five years. Eleven years to get indigenous communities clean drinking water is absurd. It is outrageous. It is not good enough and people are fed up with excuses.

Why does the Prime Minister keep breaking promises to indigenous people?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, decades of neglect led to the unacceptable reality of first nations on reserve not having access to safe, clean and reliable drinking water. Let me be clear: Not a single long-term drinking water advisory has been delayed until 2026.

We have provided an additional \$1.6 billion to accelerate this commitment. We will directly contribute to lifting advisories and stabilizing operations. Since 2015, we have lifted 106 long-term drinking water advisories, and we remain aggressively committed to lifting all long-term advisories and ensuring first nations have clean water now and into the future.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the problem is that those aggressive commitments continue to be broken and pushed back again and again.

Another commitment the government made was to do something about the missing and murdered indigenous women and girls calls for justice. Today is a national day to recognize the losses, reflect on those losses and commit to doing something to protect indigenous women and girls. It has been two years since the report. Why has the Liberal government not done anything to advance those calls for justice to truly honour and respect the demands and needs of the indigenous communities?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is Red Dress Day, the National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. We honour and remember the women, girls, two-spirit and gender-diverse people who have been taken from their families and communities. We are actively working with provinces and territories, indigenous leaders, survivors and families to develop a national action plan that sets a clear road map to keep indigenous women, girls and two-spirit people safe. From the very beginning, we have made investments and fought against gender-based violence and the ongoing tragedy that is missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. We will continue to work hand in hand on this path to reconciliation.

Oral Questions

● (1450)

[Translation]

HEALTH

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this week is Mental Health Week, and the pandemic has underscored the need for more accessible mental health services.

Our government opened a clinic in my riding for people dealing with operational stress injuries to make it easier for our veterans to access these resources. This is positive news, but we know that there are still many Canadians looking for help during these difficult times.

Can the Prime Minister tell us what our government is doing to make sure Canadians have access to the mental health support they need?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne for her work and her question.

More Canadians are suffering from mental health problems because of the pandemic. That is why, in budget 2021, we are providing more funding for innovative projects designed to help Canadians have access to high-quality mental health care, including \$62 million so that Canadians can continue to access the Wellness Together Canada portal until 2022.

We will continue to be there for Canadians when they most need help.

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CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-10 originally stated that the act does not apply to users who transmit and receive programs through an online undertaking that provides a social media service, such as YouTube, Facebook or TikTok.

One Friday afternoon, without warning, the Liberals surprised us by deleting this entire clause of the bill, thereby attacking Canadians' freedom of expression. Why did the Prime Minister do this?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-10 is not about what Canadians do online. It is about what web giants do not do, which is to support Canadian-made stories and music. That is why we made sure this bill covers professional, profitable content while explicitly exempting regular users from contribution requirements.

We will continue to improve this bill so it truly reflects its initial objective, which is to serve Canadian creators without hindering freedom of expression in this country.

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has plenty to say, but he forgets that all MPs are responsible for protecting the freedom of expression we value so highly, no matter the cost.

The original version of the bill had one single clause protecting that freedom, and the Liberals chose to quietly delete that clause

one Friday afternoon. Given the Liberals' attempt to censor Canadians, why should Canadians believe anything the Prime Minister says now?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to culture, Canadians are certainly not going to believe the Conservatives. That is for sure.

As a government, we have always been there for creators, including during the pandemic. This bill is not about restricting content, but about making Canadian music more discoverable and available to the general public.

Freedom of speech is explicitly protected by the bill and by our Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It is not negotiable for our government. We will always continue to uphold freedom of speech while supporting content creators across the country.

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, now we are going to see whether the Prime Minister is honest in his next answer.

The Minister of Justice is responsible for providing a statement on whether every bill respects the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In the statement that he released in November, the justice minister said that the original clause exempting social media users was essential in order to respect the charter and freedom of expression.

Now that the Liberals have deleted that clause, can the Prime Minister guarantee us today that the Minister of Justice will issue a new charter statement before we continue studying Bill C-10?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government will always be there to support Canada's creators, cultural industry and content producers. The Conservatives are deliberately misleading Canadians, obstructing the study of this important bill and siding with web giants against Canadian creators. On this side of the House, we will always side with creators and the cultural industry across Canada.

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is the one misleading Canadians by trying to convince them that we are against culture.

For his information, we have received letters from thousands of Canadians, as well as former CRTC commissioner Peter Menzies, University of Ottawa emeritus law professor Michael Geist, University of Calgary law professor Emily Laidlaw, and Carleton University professor Dwayne Winseck. They all denounced the Liberals' direct attack on the freedom of expression we hold so dear.

Why is the Prime Minister ignoring them all by deleting the clause in Bill C-10 that protected our freedom of expression? Why?

• (1455)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are yet again deliberately misleading Canadians. This bill does not target what individual Canadians are doing online. Rather, it targets what the web giants are not doing, which is supporting Canadian stories, creators and music.

That is why we made sure the bill covers professional, profitable content while explicitly exempting regular users from contribution requirements. We will always protect freedom of expression. We will always support our artists and creators.

* * *

HEALTH

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, since the federal government imposed the mandatory quarantine, 5,000 travellers who registered at the hotels have tested positive, and a quarter of those cases involved variants. That is overwhelming evidence that the Bloc was right to demand this quarantine.

Given that the variants currently make up more than 84% of the cases in Quebec, this proves that Ottawa has allowed, and continues to allow, too many travellers through. For instance, Ottawa did not follow up with the contacts of the 1,411 people who left hotels with a negative test result after three days but later tested positive on day 10. Given the threat that variants pose, will the Prime Minister tighten traveller screening?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we closed our border to non-essential travellers over a year ago. We will continue to do whatever it takes to protect Canadians.

Now, when returning to Canada, travellers must test negative before boarding the plane and arriving at the border. They must also test negative upon arrival and on day eight. They are also required to quarantine for two weeks.

We are monitoring travellers. We are here to protect Canadians, and we will continue to implement additional measures when the data shows that we need them, as was the case when we stopped direct flights from India and Pakistan.

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the federal government is making the same mistake it has been making from the start. It is downplaying the impact of travel, even though that is how COVID-19 arrived and how the variants are entering our country.

Ottawa has no idea who has come into contact with the 1,411 people who left the hotel after testing negative but who tested positive on day 10. Ottawa has no idea who has come into contact with the hundreds of thousands of travellers crossing by land, who are only told to go home and get tested.

When will the Liberals realize that community spread starts at the border and that the measures must be tightened?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I expect the Conservatives to spread misinformation in the House, but I am surprised to hear it coming from the Bloc Québécois.

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The reality is that COVID-19 came to Canada when Canadians returned from their March break vacations in March 2020 carrying the virus. We are obviously not going to stop Canadians from coming home.

That is why we worked with the provinces to put the necessary restrictions in place and made sure that the federal government would be there to support Canadians through CERB and the wage subsidy. We will continue to work hand in hand with our partners.

* * *

[English]

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in a democracy, it is the government's job to defend people's right to speak freely, yet the Liberal government is doing the exact opposite with Bill C-10. It edited its very own bill to remove the protections that were once in place for the content that Canadians post online. Bizarrely, it is justifying this alarming move by saying that it is to protect art, music and culture.

If the Prime Minister is so obsessed with protecting culture, could he perhaps start by protecting Canada's long-standing commitment to free speech?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me be absolutely clear. Bill C-10 is not about restricting content or freedom of speech, but about making Canadian music more discoverable and more available to the general public. Freedom of speech is explicitly protected under this act and in our Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It is not negotiable by this government, and we will continue to abide by it, protect it and uphold it.

The Conservatives are yet again deliberately misleading Canadians and obstructing the study of this important bill by siding with web giants against Canadian creators.

• (1500)

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is interesting. The Prime Minister, on the one hand, says it is clear that everyone is protected, but then he says they are going to bring in amendments because further protection is needed. The Liberals keep saying that artists need this bill rushed through, therefore Conservatives should stop asking questions. There is no chance of that.

If they were not aware, freedom of speech and freedom of expression actually matter to Canadians, especially to artists. While the Liberals continue to justify their power grab, Conservatives will continue to stand up for all Canadians. Would the Prime Minister perhaps like to come on board?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, this bill is not about what Canadians do online. It is about what web giants do not do, which is support Canadian-made stories, music and creators. That is why we made sure this bill covers professional, profitable content, while explicitly exempting regular users from contribution requirements.

We have and we will continue to improve this bill so it truly reflects its initial objective, which is to serve Canadian creators without hindering freedom of expression in this country.

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is so unfamiliar with the content of the bill that he has to read talking points. Yesterday, I was on a talk radio panel. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage said it is crystal clear that Bill C-10 does not target individuals. A few minutes later, however, she said that the minister is going to bring forward amendments to make sure it is crystal clear. They cannot have it both ways. The bill cannot already be crystal clear and still need amendments.

Which is it? Is the bill already perfect, or does it infringe on Canadians' charter rights and therefore need to be amended?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know the Conservatives are casting about, desperate to make attacks on an issue that matters to all Canadians, which is freedom of expression, yet they find the fact we are willing to listen to amendments and move forward to make improvements as proof that it is a terrible piece of legislation.

The reality is we are focused on supporting content creators. We are focused on protecting freedom of expression. We are happy to work with all parties to ensure that Canadians understand that is exactly what this bill will do.

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PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Han Dong (Don Valley North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, each May, Canadians across this country mark Asian Heritage Month by recognizing the contributions of Asian Canadians in building our great nation from coast to coast. Unfortunately, since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have seen a significant increase in reported cases of anti-Asian racism, which has left many in my community of Don Valley North extremely concerned. We know that in Canada, diversity is one of our greatest strengths and there is no place for hate and intolerance.

Can the Prime Minister please tell this House the importance this year's Asian Heritage Month holds?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Don Valley North for his leadership and for his continuous efforts to combat anti-Asian racism.

Asian Heritage Month is an opportunity to celebrate the immeasurable contributions that Canadians of Asian descent have brought to shape Canada. This year's theme is recognition, resilience and resolve, an important theme to urge all Canadians to come together to combat all forms of racism and discrimination. As we celebrate Asian Heritage Month, we are committed to fighting all forms of

discrimination through important measures, such as Canada's anti-racism strategy 2019-2022, and we will keep at it.

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ETHICS

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, is the root of the problem with Bill C-10 that the Prime Minister cannot show leadership on questions of ethics?

He could not deal with sexual misconduct allegations against the former chief of the defence staff because he was dealing with the revelations of assaults he had committed. He fired his attorney general when she tried to stop him from interfering in the prosecution of his friends at SNC-Lavalin.

Instead of the Prime Minister fixing his own ethical problems, is the real plan to silence his critics online?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while the Conservatives again resort to personal attacks and mudslinging, we will stay focused on helping Canadians through this pandemic and into a build back better future.

The fact is, whether it is supporting creators and content producers online, whether it is standing up for survivors of sexual assault and ensuring we transform the culture of the military, or whether it is making sure that we are supporting small businesses and jobs right across the country, we will continue to stay focused on what matters to Canadians, while Conservatives continue to focus on me.

● (1505)

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, anytime anyone asks a tough question of the Prime Minister, he says it is a personal attack. That is why when the questions got really tough and heated for the Prime Minister, when he was trying to cover up his conflict of interest in the WE scandal, he shut down Parliament during a pandemic. Now his attacks on democracy have gotten more brazen.

That is what the Prime Minister is trying to do by silencing Canadians online with Bill C-10. Will the Prime Minister tell us how long it will be before every aspect of Canadian life must conform to his Liberal vision of Canadian society?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the tinfoil hats on the other side of the aisle are really quite spectacular.

Our focus throughout this pandemic has been on Canadians, on supporting hard-working Canadians, on supporting artists, on supporting workers, on supporting women, on making sure that vulnerable Canadians get the support they need throughout.

We will continue to stand up to defend freedom of speech and stand up against hatred and discrimination. We will do it while supporting Canadians to both get through this pandemic and come roaring back on the other side. That is our focus. The Conservatives can continue to focus on me. We will continue to focus on Canadians.

* * *

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, just like we heard from the Prime Minister that the story in the *Globe and Mail* was false, he cannot be believed.

Let us listen to Michael Geist, Canada research chair in Internet law at the University of Ottawa. He said, “[The Prime Minister] keeps saying in the House of Commons that Bill C-10 only covers professional, for-profit content. Simply false. The word “professional” doesn't even appear in the bill, which now clearly covers user generated content given the government's amendments.”

Who should Canadians believe, the Prime Minister, or Canada's leading internet law expert?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this bill is not about what Canadians do online. It is about what web giants do not do, which is to support Canadian-made stories and music.

That is why we made sure the bill covers professional, profitable content, while explicitly exempting regular users from contribution agreements. We have and will continue to improve this bill so it truly reflects its initial objective, which is to serve Canadian creators without hindering freedom of expression in this country.

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HUMAN RIGHTS

Ms. Ya'ara Saks (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in 2018, this House unanimously passed a bill making the month of May Canadian Jewish Heritage Month.

As a Jewish Canadian, I am proud to join the House today in celebrating the incredible contributions of the Jewish community to our great country. At the same time, though, we are witnessing a distressing rise in hate and anti-Semitism, not only globally, but also here at home in Canada.

Could the Prime Minister update this House on how the government is taking action against anti-Semitism in Canada?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from York Centre for her hard work for her constituents and her advocacy.

This month we have the opportunity to celebrate and learn about Jewish communities in Canada, along with their history of courage

Oral Questions

and resilience. This is also a time to reaffirm our commitment to combat xenophobia and anti-Semitism.

Our government is committed to fighting hatred, prejudice and discrimination in all their forms through important measures such as Canada's anti-racism strategy 2019-22, in which the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's definition of anti-Semitism was formally adopted.

* * *

HEALTH

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the situation right now in India is catastrophic. It is horrible to see the images of people desperate for help. People are dying because they cannot get access to oxygen. The situation requires the entire world to come together to provide support. We need to provide support to India to help the people of India.

There is one concrete thing the Liberal government could do. What poorer countries need is for vaccine patents to be waived so they could produce more vaccine and protect more people. What we have seen so far from the Liberal government is that it is more interested in protecting the profits of big pharmaceutical companies than actually helping these poorer countries by waiving those patent protections.

Will the Prime Minister waive, or support the waiver, of those patent protections, so poorer countries could produce more vaccine, and we could get the help to India and the people of India that they need?

● (1510)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the ongoing tragedy in India is breaking hearts around the world. This is why Canada has reached out to our Indian counterparts to ensure they know we are there to help in a broad range of ways. The Minister of Foreign Affairs has spoken with his counterparts, and we will continue to be there to support people suffering in India.

With respect to the WTO, we are actively working with international partners to support the WTO's dialogue with the pharmaceutical sector and to accelerate equitable global vaccine production and distribution. In this way, as well as through our contributions to COVAX, our government is committed to ensuring equitable access to vaccines.

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[Translation]

DIGITAL SERVICES TAX

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

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if you seek it, I think you will find the unanimous consent of the House for the following motion:

Private Members' Business

That the House:

- (a) recognize that tax giveaways to Netflix represent an injustice to local broadcasters; and
- (b) call on the government to make all webs giants pay their fair share, by including Netflix in its proposed 3% tax on digital services.

The Speaker: All those opposed to moving the motion 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.

Hearing no dissenting voice, I declare the motion carried.

(Motion agreed to)

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. On that last unanimous consent motion, I just wanted to clarify that no company is excluded from the proposed digital services tax.

The Speaker: I believe that is getting into debate, but I thank the hon. member for pointing that out.

Hon. Candice Bergen: Mr. Speaker, I would like to add to my question of privilege from last week. Would allow me to do that now or do you prefer I do it after the vote?

The Speaker: I believe that is scheduled for after the vote. I think there was some agreement reached between the whips and the table, but we will get there.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1515)

[*English*]

REDUCTION OF RECIDIVISM FRAMEWORK ACT

The House resumed from April 29 consideration of the motion that Bill C-228, An Act to establish a federal framework to reduce recidivism, be read the third time and passed.

The Speaker: It being 3:13 p.m., pursuant to an order made on Monday, January 25, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at third reading stage of Bill C-228 under Private Members' Business.

Call in the members.

• (1525)

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

(*Division No. 107*)

YEAS

Members

Aboultaif
Albas
Alleslev
Amos
Anandasangaree
Arnold
Arya
Atwin
Badawey
Bains

Aitchison
Alghabra
Allison
Anand
Angus
Arseneault
Ashton
Bachrach
Bagnell
Baker

Baldinelli
Barrett
Beech
Bennett
Bergen
Bessette
Bibeau
Blaikie
Blaney (North Island—Powell River)
Blois
Bragdon
Bratina
Calkins
Carr
Casey
Champagne
Chiu
Cooper
Cumming
Dalton
Dancho
Davies
d'Entremont
Dhillon
Doherty
Dowdall
Drouin
Duclos
Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)
Duvall
Easter
El-Khoury
Epp
Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)
Fast
Fillmore
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Fisher
Fortier
Fraser
Fry
Garrison
Genius
Gladu
Gould
Gray
Guilbeault
Hallan
Hardie
Hoback
Housefather
Hussen
Iacono
Jaczek
Jeneroux
Joly
Jordan
Julian
Kelly
Khalid
Kitchen
Koutrakis
Kurek
Kusmierczyk
Lake
Lambropoulos
Lamoureux
Lauzon
LeBlanc
Lefebvre
Lewis (Essex)
Lightbound
Lobb
Barlow
Battiste
Bendayan
Benzen
Berthold
Bezan
Bittle
Blair
Block
Boulerice
Brassard
Brière
Cannings
Carrie
Chagger
Chen
Chong
Cormier
Dabrusin
Damoff
Davidson
Deltell
Dhaliwal
Diotte
Dong
Dreeshen
Dubourg
Duguid
Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Dzerowicz
Ehsassi
Ellis
Erskine-Smith
Falk (Provencher)
Fergus
Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock)
Finnigan
Fonseca
Fragiskatos
Freeland
Gallant
Généreux
Gerretsen
Godin
Gourde
Green
Hajdu
Harder
Harris
Holland
Hughes
Hutchings
Ien
Jansen
Johns
Jones
Jowhari
Kelloway
Kent
Khera
Kmiec
Kram
Kusie
Kwan
Lalonde
Lametti
Lattanzio
Lawrence
Lebouthillier
Lehoux
Liepert
Lloyd
Long

Longfield
Lukiwski
MacGregor
MacKinnon (Gatineau)
Maloney
Martel
Masse
May (Cambridge)
Mazier
McColeman
McDonald
McKay
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)
McPherson
Mendès
Miller
Moore
Morrison
Motz
Nater
O'Connell
O'Regan
Paul-Hus
Poilievre
Qualtrough
Rayes
Regan
Rempel Garner
Robillard
Rogers
Rood
Sahota (Calgary Skyview)
Saini
Saks
Sangha
Saroya
Schiefke
Schulte
Serré
Shanahan
Shields
Shiple
Sidhu (Brampton South)
Singh
Sorbara
Spengemann
Steinley
Stubbs
Tabbara
Tochor
Turnbull
Van Bynen
Van Popta
Vandenbeld
Vecchio
Viersen
Vis
Warkentin
Webber
Wilkinson
Wilson-Raybould
Yip
Yurdiga
Zann
Zuberi— 297

Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga)
MacAulay (Cardigan)
MacKenzie
Maguire
Manly
Martinez Ferrada
Mathysen
May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)
McCaughey (Edmonton West)
McCrimmon
McGuinty
McKenna
McLean
McLeod (Northwest Territories)
Melillo
Mendicino
Monsef
Morantz
Morrisey
Murray
Ng
Oliphant
Patzner
Petipas Taylor
Powlowski
Ratansi
Redekopp
Reid
Richards
Rodriguez
Romanado
Ruff
Sahota (Brampton North)
Sajjan
Samson
Sarai
Scarpaleggia
Schmale
Seeback
Sgro
Sheehan
Shin
Sidhu (Brampton East)
Simms
Sloan
Soroka
Stanton
Strahl
Sweet
Tassi
Trudeau
Uppal
van Koeverden
Vandal
Vaughan
Vidal
Virani
Wagantall
Waugh
Weiler
Williamson
Wong
Young
Zahid
Zimmer

NAYS

Members

Barsalou-Duval
Bergeron
Blanchet

Beaulieu
Bérubé
Blanchette-Joncas

Business of Supply

Boudrias	Brunelle-Duceppe
Chabot	Champoux
Charbonneau	DeBellefeuille
Desbiens	Desilets
Fortin	Gaudreau
Gill	Larouche
Lemire	Marcil
Michaud	Normandin
Paupé	Perron
Plamondon	Savard-Tremblay
Simard	Ste-Marie
Thériault	Therrien
Trudel	Vignola— 32

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.
(Bill read the third time and passed)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—ALLEGATIONS OF SEXUAL MISCONDUCT IN THE MILITARY

The House resumed from May 4 consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: Pursuant to order made on Monday, January 25, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded on the motion of the hon. member for Portage—Lisgar relating to the business of supply.

• (1540)

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

(Division No. 108)

YEAS

Members

Aboultaif	Aitchison
Albas	Alleslev
Allison	Arnold
Baldinelli	Barlow
Barrett	Benzen
Bergen	Berthold
Bezan	Block
Bragdon	Brassard
Bratina	Calkins
Carrie	Chiu
Chong	Cooper
Cumming	Dalton
Dancho	Davidson
Deltell	d'Entremont
Diotte	Doherty
Dowdall	Dreeshen
Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)	Epp
Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)	Falk (Provencher)
Fast	Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock)
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Gallant
Généreux	Genuis
Gladi	Godin
Gourde	Gray
Hallan	Harder
Hoback	Jansen
Jeneroux	Kelly

Business of Supply

Kent	Kitchen	Finnigan	Fisher
Kmiec	Kram	Fonseca	Fortier
Kurek	Kusie	Fortin	Fragiskatos
Lake	Lawrence	Fraser	Freeland
Lehoux	Lewis (Essex)	Fry	Garrison
Liepert	Lloyd	Gaudreau	Gazan
Lobb	Lukiwski	Gerretsen	Gill
MacKenzie	Maguire	Gould	Green
Martel	Mazier	Guilbeault	Hajdu
McCauley (Edmonton West)	McColeman	Hardie	Harris
McLean	McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)	Holland	Housefather
Melillo	Moore	Hughes	Hussen
Morantz	Morrison	Hutchings	Iacono
Motz	Nater	Ien	Jaczek
O'Toole	Patzer	Johns	Joly
Paul-Hus	Poilievre	Jones	Jordan
Rayes	Redekopp	Jowhari	Julian
Reid	Rempel Garner	Kelloway	Khalid
Richards	Rood	Khera	Koutrakis
Ruff	Sahota (Calgary Skyview)	Kusmierczyk	Kwan
Sangha	Saroya	Lalonde	Lambropoulos
Scheer	Schmale	Lametti	Lamoureux
Seeback	Shields	Larouche	Lattanzio
Shin	Shipley	Lauzon	LeBlanc
Sloan	Soroka	Lebouthillier	Lefebvre
Stanton	Steinley	Lemire	Lightbound
Strahl	Stubbs	Long	Longfield
Sweet	Tochor	Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga)	MacAulay (Cardigan)
Uppal	Van Popta	MacGregor	MacKinnon (Gatineau)
Vecchio	Vidal	Maloney	Manly
Viersen	Vis	Marcil	Martinez Ferrada
Wagantall	Warkentin	Masse	Mathysen
Waugh	Webber	May (Cambridge)	May (Saanic—Gulf Islands)
Williamson	Wong	McCrimmon	McDonald
Yurdiga	Zimmer — 122	McGuinty	McKay

NAYS

Members

Alhabra	Amos	McLeod (Northwest Territories)	McPherson
Anand	Anandasangaree	Mendès	Medicino
Angus	Arseneault	Michaud	Miller
Arya	Ashton	Monsef	Morrissey
Atwin	Bachrach	Murray	Ng
Badawey	Bagnell	Normandin	O'Connell
Bains	Baker	Oliphant	O'Regan
Barsalou-Duval	Battiste	Paupé	Perron
Beaulieu	Beech	Petitpas Taylor	Plamondon
Bendayan	Bennett	Powlowski	Qualtrough
Bergeron	Bérubé	Ratansi	Regan
Bessette	Bibeau	Robillard	Rodriguez
Bittle	Blaikie	Rogers	Romanado
Blair	Blanchet	Sahota (Brampton North)	Saini
Blanchette-Joncas	Blaney (North Island—Powell River)	Sajjan	Saks
Blois	Boudrias	Samson	Sarai
Boulerice	Brière	Savard-Tremblay	Scarpaleggia
Brunelle-Duceppe	Cannings	Schiefke	Schulte
Carr	Casey	Serré	Sgro
Chabot	Chagger	Shanahan	Sheehan
Champagne	Champoux	Sidhu (Brampton East)	Sidhu (Brampton South)
Charbonneau	Chen	Simard	Simms
Cormier	Dabrusin	Singh	Sorbara
Damoff	Davies	Spengemann	Ste-Marie
DeBellefeuille	Desbiens	Tabbara	Tassi
Desilets	Dhaliwal	Thériault	Therrien
Dhillon	Dong	Trudeau	Trudel
Drouin	Dubourg	Turnbull	Van Bynen
Duclos	Duguid	van Koeverden	Vandal
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Duvall	Vandenbeld	Vaughan
Dzerowicz	Easter	Vignola	Virani
Ehsassi	El-Khoury	Weiler	Wilkinson
Ellis	Erskine-Smith	Yip	Young
Fergus	Fillmore	Zahid	Zann
		Zuberi — 209	

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion defeated.

* * *

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

The Speaker: I have the honour to inform the House that a message has been received from the Senate informing this House that the Senate has passed the following public bill to which the concurrence of the House is desired: Bill S-223, an act respecting kindness week.

Before proceeding, I just want to clarify that I may have given the hon. member for Portage—Lisgar the wrong impression that we would to take her question of privilege after the vote.

The hon. member for La Prairie.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order arising from the comments made by the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands after the motion moved by the NDP. The member said that every digital company is subject to the new legislation. That is wrong. It is false.

Subscription-based companies like Netflix, Amazon Prime and YouTube Premium are not considered to be covered by this tax. The member made a mistake. I would like the record to show that he told a lie—

The Speaker: I have to interrupt the hon. member. The point of order raised by the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands was bordering on debate, as is that of the member for La Prairie.

We will leave it at that.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[Translation]

FEDERAL OMBUDSMAN FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the 2019-20 annual report of the Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime.

* * *

[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

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, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8)(a) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to 18 petitions. These returns will be tabled in an electronic format.

Routine Proceedings

PERINATAL MENTAL HEALTH

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties and I believe that if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent for the following motion:

That,

(a) the House recognize that,

(i) 20% of women and 10% of men in Canada suffer from a perinatal mental illness and rates of postpartum depression have doubled since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic,

(ii) Black, Indigenous, people of colour, people with disabilities, gender and sexual minority populations experience higher rates of perinatal mental illness,

(iii) a new study by the Canadian Perinatal Mental Health Collaborative shows that 95% of health care practitioners believe perinatal mental health services in Canada are insufficient,

(iv) advocates are calling for a national perinatal mental health strategy; and

(b) in the opinion of the House, the government should develop a national perinatal mental health strategy and follow other countries in recognizing the first Wednesday of May annually as World Maternal Mental Health Day.

• (1545)

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

[Translation]

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

[English]

I declare the motion carried.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

PETITIONS

WILD ANIMAL TRADE

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present today e-petition 3015, which received over 13,000 signatures. This petition notes that 75% of new and emerging infectious diseases affecting human health over the past decade have originated from animals, principally from wildlife, and that Canada's participation in the wild animal trade is something that needs to end to protect both human and animal health and welfare. It notes that it is time for Canada to end participation in this trade, and calls upon the government to protect animal welfare and commit to ending international and domestic trade of wild animals.

FOREIGN WORKERS

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I present e-petition 2990 on behalf of 5,529 online signatories from across the country, plus thousands more on paper, asking the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship to address issues around foreign workers, specifically more access to permanent resident status and work permits, and a special program to help support migrant workers and their families in Canada.

Routine Proceedings

CRIME PREVENTION

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to present e-petition 3218, which was initiated by constituents in Nanaimo—Ladysmith and signed by 1,077 Canadians.

The petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to make Canada safer for all by using evidence-based interventions to significantly reduce violent crime, to engage with vulnerable groups and develop violence-prevention strategies, to establish a permanent office for violence prevention that reports to the Prime Minister, to spearhead action across all relevant ministries in partnership with provinces, territories, municipalities and indigenous peoples, to ensure significant measurable reductions in victimizations, and to redirect the equivalent of 10% of current federal expenditures on policing, courts and incarceration toward adequate and sustained funding for effective local prevention programs.

TRAVEL ADVISERS

Mr. Chris Lewis (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to present a petition on behalf of 24,000 travel advisers across Canada. The federal government has recently announced funding for Air Canada and Air Transat. One of the conditions is to refund their passengers for cancelled flights. Meanwhile travel advisers, without any income or any government support for over a year, are facing commission clawbacks.

The petitioners are asking the House to ensure the following: that any financial assistance to airlines and their subsidiary travel companies be conditional on the protection of travel advisers, and that any commissions already clawed back be repaid to these travel advisers in a timely fashion.

CONVERSION THERAPY

Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wish to table a petition today signed by Canadians regarding the definition of “conversion therapy” in Bill C-6. The petitioners agree that coercive, degrading practices designed to change a person's sexual orientation or gender identity should be banned. They are also troubled, however, by the broad definition of “conversion therapy” that the bill uses. They are concerned that the definition wrongly applies the label “conversion therapy” to a range of practices, such as counsel from parents, teachers and counsellors, encouraging children to reduce their sexual behaviour.

The petitioners call on the House of Commons to ban coercive and degrading practices, ensure that no laws discriminate against Canadians by limiting the services that they can receive, allow parents to speak with their own children about sexuality and gender, allow free and open conversation about sexuality and sexual behaviour and avoid criminalizing professional and religious counselling voluntarily requested and consented to by Canadians.

All of us in this place must work together to ensure that the bill does not prevent anyone from receiving the support that they deserve from trusted family members, educators, medical professionals or faith leaders.

• (1550)

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, the following questions will be answered today: Nos. 554, 559, 563 and 564.

[Text]

Question No. 554—**Ms. Heather McPherson:**

With regard to the government's estimation, in the Fall Economic Statement 2020, on the Canada Revenue Agency's (CRA) investments to tackle tax evasion, “It is estimated that these incremental investments have already delivered over \$3 billion in additional federal tax revenues assessed”, broken down by fiscal year, from 2016-17 to date: (a) what is the breakdown of the \$3 billion in additional federal tax revenues assessed by (i) taxpayer categories, (ii) CRA compliance programs and services; (b) what methodology was used to estimate the amount of \$3 billion; and (c) does the federal tax revenue estimate of over \$3 billion represent the total amount recovered or is a portion of the amount still being appealed in the courts?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with respect to the above-noted question, what follows is the response from the CRA.

In response to part (a)(i), the CRA is unable to provide the information as it is not captured in the manner requested.

In response to part (a)(ii), the CRA is unable to provide the information as there is no formal breakdown of the estimated \$3 billion in the manner requested.

In response to part (b), the CRA tracks gross tax earned by audit, for federal tax, and gross revenue impact, for federal tax, plus provincial tax, plus penalties, for all of its compliance activities. In tracking additional gross tax revenue resulting from increased audit resources, the CRA formula tracks the relative increase in dollars over the historical baseline of results.

In response to part (c), the estimate is based on the gross federal amounts reassessed, plus audit changes that impact future revenues, and does not include a reserve for amounts that may be reversed on appeal.

*Routine Proceedings***Question No. 559—Ms. Christine Normandin:**

With regard to spousal sponsorship and visa applications, the staffing and operation of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) visa offices (VOs) abroad, with responses broken down by the Accra, Mexico City, Dakar, New Delhi, Port-au-Prince, London, Paris and Cairo offices: (a) since January 1, 2019, how many spousal sponsorship applications were received each month, broken down by the applicant's country of residence; (b) of the applications in (a), how many (i) were processed, broken down by the applicant's country of residence, (ii) had to redo a medical exam because the original exam had expired in the process, (iii) had to redo their police or security clearance because the original clearance had expired in the process; (c) of the applications in (b)(i), how many (i) were accepted, (ii) were rejected, (iii) are in process; (d) of the applications in (c)(iii), how many are awaiting an interview, either virtually or in person, with an immigration officer; (e) how many officers (i) were hired for each of the VOs as of September 24, 2020, (ii) have been hired since the IRCC Minister's announcement of September 24, 2020; (f) of the number in (e)(ii), broken down by month from March 2020 to date, how many officers (i) were working on site, (ii) were working from home, (iii) could not work due to COVID-19; (g) during the COVID-19 pandemic, were these VOs closed, and, if so, on which date did they reopen; (h) do these VOs have the equipment required to conduct virtual interviews; (i) on what date did the spousal sponsorship application digitization pilot program announced on September 24, 2020, officially begin and what percentage of the applications have been digitized since then; (j) since January 1, 2019, how many visitor visa applications linked to a sponsorship application have been received each month, broken down by the applicant's country of address; (k) of the applications in (j), how many were processed each month; (l) of the applications in (k), how many (i) were accepted, (ii) were rejected, (iii) are in process; (m) how many sponsorship applications have been finalized, broken down by month since January 2019; and (n) of the applications in (m), how many were rejected?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, IRCC, undertook an extensive preliminary search in order to determine the amount of information that would fall within the scope of the question and the amount of time that would be required to prepare a comprehensive response. The information requested is not systematically tracked in a centralized database. IRCC concluded that producing and validating a comprehensive response to this question would require a manual collection of information that is not possible in the time allotted and could lead to the disclosure of incomplete and misleading information.

Question No. 563—Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas:

With regard to the Prime Minister's new website and new official portrait: (a) what is the total cost of the Prime Minister's website redesign project, including the (i) amount spent on writing biographical content about the Prime Minister, (ii) graphic design, (iii) website development, (iv) migration of the content from the old website to the new one, (v) Prime Minister's new official portrait, (vi) translation and language editing costs; (b) what is the number of full-time equivalents assigned to the Prime Minister's website update project; and (c) has the Privy Council Office used external suppliers for this project, and, if so, what are the (i) dates of contracts, (ii) value of contracts, (iii) names of suppliers, (iv) reference numbers, (v) description of the services provided?

Mr. Greg Fergus (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, to the President of the Treasury Board and to the Minister of Digital Government, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the response from the Office of the Prime Minister is as follows.

The recent updates to the Prime Minister's website, which were adapted from the site created to support the new Deputy Prime Minister, have improved usability for site visitors and provided a fresh code base that is much faster and easier to maintain from an operational perspective. The changes not only help our developers and publishers do their work more efficiently, but the fresh code base also provides for future maintainability of the health and security of the site.

The Prime Minister's website has features that allow users to subscribe to and unsubscribe from specific news products via email, request celebratory greetings from the Prime Minister, submit correspondence, and view videos that are both captioned and accompanied by full transcripts for accessibility reasons.

These changes will allow developers and editors to do their work more efficiently, while also allowing for future maintenance of the website security.

Information pertaining to contracts over \$10,000 is available by department through the following proactive disclosure of contracts web page: <https://search.open.canada.ca/en/ct/>.

Question No. 564—Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:

With regard to the disposal of lands along the St. Lawrence Seaway that began in 2013, particularly in the Municipality of Beauharnois (Melocheville sector), and the appraisal of these lands by the Canada Lands Company: (a) what is the timeframe that the Department of Transport has set for the Canada Lands Company to complete this appraisal; and (b) what are the next steps, as well as the timelines for each of these steps, to complete the disposal process?

Hon. Omar Alghabra (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in response to parts (a) and (b), discussions with Canada Lands Company are ongoing, with the outcome to determine the precise next steps and the timing. It is not anticipated that any of the surplus Seaway properties in Quebec will be disposed of prior to fiscal year 2022-23.

The surplus Seaway properties in the Montreal area are part of a larger portfolio of such properties that also includes lands in Ontario, in Cornwall and the Niagara region. Pursuant to Treasury Board policies regarding the disposal of surplus federal properties, Transport Canada has engaged Canada Lands Company regarding the divestiture of the entire portfolio. For the properties in Quebec, Transport Canada has completed due diligence activities, including survey work, appraisals and the canvassing of potential interest in the properties from all three levels of government for public purpose.

* * *

[English]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

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, if the government's responses to Questions Nos. 555 to 558, 560 to 562 and 565 could be made orders for returns, these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Routine Proceedings

[Text]

Question No. 555—Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:

With regard to the Canadian Coast Guard fleet renewal and the National Shipbuilding Strategy (NSS): (a) what is the list of each vessel, including the (i) name, (ii) region, (iii) home port, (iv) area of operations, i.e. north or south or both, (v) year commissioned, (vi) notional operational life, (vii) current age, (viii) percentage of operational notional life, as of 2021, (ix) planned end of service life (EOSL), (x) age at the end of EOSL, (xi) percentage of notional operational life at EOSL, (xii) confirm whether funding has been provided for a replacement or not, (xiii) how much funding has been provided or allocated, including taxes and contingencies for each vessel replacement, (xiv) date funding provided, (xv) date on which a replacement vessel is expected to be (A) designed, (B) constructed, (C) commissioned; (b) what are all the reasons why the polar icebreaker was removed from the Seaspan's umbrella agreement in 2019 and substituted by 16 multi-purpose vessels; (c) what are all the risks identified with building a polar icebreaker at the Vancouver Shipyards; (d) what are the proposed scope, the schedule and the draft or anticipated budget for the replacement of the CCGS Louis S. St-Laurent and the CCGS Terry Fox polar icebreaker; (e) what is the summary of risks, including the (i) scope, (ii) budget, (iii) schedule, related to building the offshore oceanographic science vessel and the multi-purpose vessels; and (f) what are the anticipated benefits for the Royal Canadian Navy and Canadian Coast Guard of adding a third shipyard to the NSS?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 556—Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:

With regard to the National Shipbuilding Strategy (NSS): (a) what is the full budget for the Canadian Surface Combatants (CSC), including (i) design, (ii) construction, (iii) licences, including intellectual property (IP) licences, (iv) spares, (v) taxes, (vi) contingencies, (vii) any specific infrastructure required for building the CSC in Halifax and all associated costs and considerations; (b) what is the total expected cost or value of the Industrial and Technological Benefits (ITB) Policies on each vessel built under the NSS, including an explanation of how these costs are calculated and how the ITB costs are validated; (c) what is the list of estimated costs that the ITB policies is adding to each vessel under the NSS, and the summary of any discussion had at the NSS Secretariat, Privy Council Office or at the deputy minister level regarding costs of the ITB policies as it relates to NSS; (d) what is the summary of any analysis conducted on the ITB policies, and a comparison in relation to any similar policy existing in the United Kingdom or in the United States frigate programs; and (e) what is the full costing of the first Arctic and offshore patrol ship, including the cost of (i) design, (ii) IP licences; (iii) construction, (iv) commissioning, (v) taxes, (vi) profit, (vii) contingencies?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 557—Ms. Raquel Dancho:

With regard to data breaches involving Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) and the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA), including data breaches that may have involved IRCC facilities or subcontractors abroad: (a) how many data breaches have occurred at IRCC or CBSA since January 1, 2020; (b) what are the details of each breach, including the (i) description or summary of the incident and the date, (ii) number of individuals whose information was involved, (iii) whether or not individuals whose information was involved were contacted, (iv) whether or not the Privacy Commissioner was notified, (v) whether or not the RCMP was notified; (c) how many RCMP investigations related to data breaches involving IRCC or CBSA have either been initiated or are ongoing; and (d) what were the results of the investigations in (c)?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 558—Mr. Dan Mazier:

With regard to the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA), since January 2020, broken down by month: (a) how many phone calls did the CRA receive from the general public; (b) what was the average wait time for an individual who contacted the CRA by phone before first making contact with a live employee; (c) what was the average wait or on hold time after first being connected with a live employee; (d) what was the average duration of total call time, including the time waiting or on hold, for an individual who contacted the CRA by phone; and (e) how many documented server, website, portal or system errors occurred on the CRA website?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 560—Mr. Damien C. Kurek:

With regard to the government's quarantine requirement for travellers arriving by air, broken down by point of entry (i.e. airport where the traveller arrived in Canada): (a) how many travellers have been (i) arrested, (ii) charged in relation to violations of the Quarantine Act; and (b) how many individuals have been charged with a Criminal Code offence related to an incident at a quarantine facility, broken down by type of offence?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 561—Ms. Elizabeth May:

With regard to the defrauding of many Canadians, including CINAR, facilitated by the Isle of Man offshore trust scam: (a) what steps have the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA), the RCMP, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), and any other government agencies taken to track and trace funds obtained illegally and held in offshore accounts; (b) what efforts have the CRA, the RCMP, the CSIS, and any other government agencies taken to recover the funds defrauded from CINAR and other Canadian investors; (c) what were the specific roles of respective government departments and agencies in the secret KPMG amnesty deal relating to the Isle of Man; (d) what role, if any, was played by the Department of Justice in aborting a Standing Committee on Finance study into the matter; and (e) what specific lobbying activities occurred with the Prime Minister or others in the federal government relating to the Isle of Man scam, including by the Liberal Party of Canada treasurer and retired KPMG partner, John Herhalt?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 562—Mr. Randall Garrison:

With regard to the government's commitment to address the practice of conversion therapy in Canada: (a) what steps are being taken, at the federal level, to prevent this practice from taking place; (b) how, and through which programs, is the government proactively promoting and applying the Canadian Guidelines on Sexual Health Education, as an upstream prevention strategy, for affirming the sexual orientation and gender identities of LGBTQ2 young people before they may be exposed to conversion therapy; (c) what resources will the government be providing to survivors who have experienced psychological trauma and other negative effects from conversion therapy, through interventions such as counselling and peer support programs; (d) how is the government planning to work with faith leaders, counsellors, educators and other relevant service providers to equip individuals with tools to identify and stop conversion therapy; and (e) what steps is the government taking to address numerous recommendations received from the United Nations to harmonize sexuality education curricula across jurisdictions in Canada?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 565—Mr. Denis Trudel:

With regard to federal government investments in housing, for each fiscal year since 2017–18, broken down by province and territory: (a) what was the total amount of federal funding allocated to housing in Canada; (b) how many applications were received for (i) the National Housing Strategy (NHS) overall, (ii) the Affordable Housing Innovation Fund, (iii) the Rental Construction Financing Initiative, (iv) the National Housing Co-Investment Fund, (v) the Rapid Housing Initiative under the projects stream, (vi) the Federal Lands Initiative, (vii) the Federal Community Housing Initiative, (viii) Reaching Home, (ix) the Shared Equity Mortgage Providers Fund, (x) the First-Time Home Buyer Incentive, (xi) the NHS's Solutions Labs Initiative; (c) of the applications under (b), for each funding program and initiative, how many were accepted; (d) of the applications under (c), for each funding program and initiative, what was the amount of federal funding allocated; (e) of the amounts in (d) allocated in the Province of Quebec, for each funding program and initiative, what is the breakdown per region; and (f) of the amounts in (b) (xi), what criteria were used for project selection?

(Return tabled)

[English]

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

S. O. 52

LINE 5 PIPELINE

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY DEBATE

COVID-19 IN ALBERTA

The Speaker: The Chair has received two notices of a request for an emergency debate, the first coming from the hon. member for Edmonton Strathcona.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Alberta is facing a public health emergency unparalleled in Canada. Today Alberta has the highest rate of COVID-19 infection in the entire country. In fact, Alberta has the highest rate of infection in North America. Alberta's infection rate is double that of Ontario's and is one of the highest rates in the world. In some hot spots, such as Calgary and Fort McMurray, the rate of infection is higher than in India. The situation is so bad that last week physicians in Alberta were given instructions on a special COVID-19 protocol. It was a way to decide which patients would receive life-saving treatment and which would not. This is the first time in history that Alberta's doctors have been given emergency instructions like this. It is the first time they have been put into the situation of determining who lives and who is left to die.

The reason is quite clear. Alberta's acute care health care system is on the very edge of collapse. This is a public health emergency, but it is not just Alberta's public health emergency: With a positivity rate of 13% and infection hot spots such as Wood Buffalo, where oil sands workers fly in and out from all over Canada, Alberta's COVID crisis will soon become Canada's COVID crisis if nothing is done.

On Monday, Alberta Health stopped testing for variants of concern, because variants have taken over. Virtually every case of COVID in Alberta is a variant of concern now. The goal must be to stop the exponential growth of infections in Alberta to save lives and not put doctors, nurses and other health care workers through the trauma of saying no to patients who desperately need help.

We have an obligation as parliamentarians to address this public health crisis in Alberta. It is a public health crisis that simply cannot be contained within Alberta's borders. We have an obligation to debate the federal role in combatting it.

We have heard the Prime Minister state again and again that he has our backs and that every Canadian will get the support they need. We cannot shrug our shoulders and say this is Alberta's problem. We owe it to Albertans and all Canadians to acknowledge that what is happening in Alberta is an emergency that demands an emergency debate in the House.

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Edmonton Strathcona for her intervention and I am prepared to grant an emergency debate concerning the COVID-19 situation in Alberta. The debate will be held later today at the ordinary hour of daily adjournment.

The second request is from the hon. member for Banff—Airdrie.

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a “ticking time bomb”. Those are the words of the office of the Governor of Michigan in regard to the Line 5 pipeline.

I will point out, and it is very important to do so, that those words are entirely inaccurate, but it is a statement that makes very clear that this is, in fact, an emergency situation for Canada. It also makes it very clear that our government has failed to take appropriate action to ensure this matter is taken care of.

The Governor of Michigan has ordered this critical piece of Canadian infrastructure to be shut down by May 12, a week from today, and the government has failed to ensure and secure the critical continued operation of this piece of infrastructure. This pipeline is a crucial link between the energy producers in the west and the consumers in the east. Through this pipeline, Alberta fuels Quebec and Ontario.

The Minister of Natural Resources has confirmed this one pipeline alone is responsible for 53% of Ontario's crude and 66% of Quebec's. It is responsible for the majority of propane in Ontario and Quebec as well. Without this pipeline, gasoline prices would skyrocket, the economies of Ontario and Quebec would crash and propane supplies would completely disappear, wiping out farmers, shutting down warehouses and threatening heating and life-saving equipment at hospitals that are already stretched beyond capacity.

This is not just a threat to tens of thousands of direct jobs in Sarnia, Montreal, Quebec City and the province of Alberta, but to 40 million Canadians and Americans who rely on the products produced by these refineries for the necessities of life.

In short, the shutdown of this pipeline would cause catastrophic economic damage to Canada at a time when COVID-19 has already created an incredible burden on Canadian workers. It would also create catastrophic damage from an environmental perspective, because shutting down Line 5 would be an environmental disaster.

The shortfall that would result would mean Canada would have to obtain energy from far less environmentally friendly sources. It would also mean the potential for transport by truck and rail rather than through a pipeline, which is the far more environmentally friendly alternative. It would require approximately 2,000 trucks or 800 rail cars each day to make up for the shutdown of this pipeline. Neither of those options is good for either our economy or our environment.

With this in mind, I would ask that you accept this request for an emergency debate, pursuant to Standing Order 52, so members of Parliament can debate this very urgent economic and environmental crisis for our country.

Privilege

• (1555)

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am prepared to grant an emergency debate concerning the Line 5 pipeline shutdown. The debate will be held tomorrow at the ordinary hour of daily adjournment.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

ALLEGED MISLEADING COMMENTS BY THE PRIME MINISTER

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been quite eager to stand up and add to my question of privilege. I would like to respond, just very briefly, to the government House leader's intervention on my question of privilege concerning the Prime Minister deliberately misleading the House about when he knew of the sexual misconduct of General Vance in 2018. I will let my submission of last week stand, as presented, but I want to make a few additional comments.

The government House leader raised the matter of my reference to the emails from Janine Sherman, the deputy secretary to the cabinet responsible for Governor in Council appointments, where Ms. Sherman sent a draft email that the Minister of National Defence could use to respond to Mr. Walbourne. This is what the government House leader actually said: "While she does not include the words 'allegations of sexual harassment', I can only speculate that she was making an assumption."

The government House leader offers the speculation that someone is assuming, and this someone is not just anyone; she is the deputy secretary to the cabinet, and the person speculating on the assumption is a minister of the Crown. This is all the more reason, Mr. Speaker, for you to rule this to be a prima facie question of privilege and have the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs get to the bottom of this important matter.

I will not go over the three tests applied to the question of privilege. I made my submission on that subject and I know the government House leader offered his version. However, there is another important application that Speakers rely on that is just as important, and in many cases more important, when considering questions of privilege that I would like you to consider, Mr. Speaker.

I ended my original submission referencing Maginot's second edition of *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada*, at page 227, where he suggests that if the Speaker feels any doubt on the question, he should leave it to the House. This citation is from a ruling from March 21, 1978, page 3,975 of Debates, where the Speaker cites the report of the U.K. Select Committee on Parliamentary Privilege, and from a ruling of October 10, 1989, at pages 4,457 to 4,461 of Debates.

In another ruling, from October 24, 1966, at page 9,005 of Debates, the Speaker uses the same application when referring to the member at the time who was raising the question of privilege. I am going to quote what it says:

In considering this matter, I asked myself what is the duty of the Speaker in cases of doubt? If we take into consideration that at the moment the Speaker is about to render a decision as to whether or not the article complained of constitutes a breach of privilege ... and considering also that the Speaker is the guardian of the rules, rights and privileges of the House and of its members and that he cannot deprive

them of such privileges when there is uncertainty in his mind ... I think, at this preliminary stage of the proceedings, the doubt which I have in my mind should be interpreted to the benefit of the member.

Again, on March 27, 1969, page 853 of Debates, the Speaker stated:

[The member] has, perhaps, a grievance against the government in that capacity rather than in his capacity as a Member of Parliament. On the other hand, honourable Members know that the House has always exercised great care in attempting to protect the rights and privileges of all its Members. Since there is some doubt about the interpretation of the precedents in this situation, I would be inclined to resolve the doubt in favour of the honourable Member [the one making the request].

No one will argue, except for the government House leader, that the Prime Minister's assertion that he did not know the nature of the complaints was believable; and no one will argue that there is much doubt and uncertainty about the interpretation of the evidence and precedents in this matter.

Casting further doubt on the innocence of the Prime Minister was the fact that on the same day the government House leader made his submission on the question of privilege, the Liberal chair of the Standing Committee on National Defence unilaterally cancelled the meeting where the committee was prepared to invite the Prime Minister's chief of staff to bring some clarity to this issue. Many viewed this as an attempt to cover up and conceal the truth about what the Prime Minister knew.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, the authorities are consistent about the need for clarity in our proceedings and about the need to ensure the integrity of the information provided by the government to this House. As I said earlier, the government House leader is the only one who thinks there is not sufficient doubt to justify the Speaker's allowing me to move the appropriate motion and get to the bottom of this.

• (1600)

I would like to bring to the attention of the House a few observations to support that point, starting with an article written by Chantal Hébert over the weekend. She actually puts it much better than I could. She is talking about the report prepared by former Supreme Court Justice Marie Deschamps, a report I also referenced in my original submission. Here is what Ms. Hébert said:

Her 2015 report recommended the creation of an independent agency for reporting misconduct.

Those findings and that core prescription were in [the prime ministerial] in-tray when he took office.

And yet, following up on the recommendation to create an independent body has not made it into the marching orders the prime minister has given Defence Minister...over the years....

For weeks, the media and the opposition parties have been trying to find out why [the Minister of Defence] along with [the Prime Minister's] staff took so little action when first apprised in 2018 of allegations of misconduct against then-Chief of Defence Staff Jonathan Vance. This, after all, is a government that never lets an opportunity pass to flaunt its self-styled feminist credentials.

Given that, being on the lookout for instances of sexual harassment [especially in the upper levels of institutions such as the armed forces] would be expected to be a priority....

And yet, to listen to the prime minister...[this week], his advisers were unaware that the allegations against Vance were sexual in nature.

Forget that there is correspondence between some PMO staffers that suggest otherwise.

Privilege

For anyone who had read Deschamps' report, sexual harassment would logically be one of the first possibilities that would spring to mind upon hearing about misconduct allegations against Vance.

In light of the prime minister's oft-stated commitment to a zero-tolerance policy on sexual misconduct, the mere possibility that Canada's top soldier might be part of the systemic problem he was tasked with fixing should have set off alarm bells.

That it apparently did not is testimony either to a remarkable collective case of wilful blindness or an abysmal lack of interest...

Andrew Coyne wrote an article published this morning that I believe colleagues will find pretty much sums up the confusion and what most Canadians are thinking about regarding this question. He states that:

The issue, then, is no longer "who knew what when," but who said what and did what—or did not say or do what—and for what reason. If the Prime Minister was, as he claims, not told, it would be of the greatest possible interest to know why.

Did his chief of staff take it entirely upon herself not to inform him of such a potentially explosive development? Or was there some prior understanding that he was to be kept out of the loop on such matters? If so, on what other matters is he kept out of the loop? And, most intriguing of all, why?

Or, if he was told, then it would follow that the Prime Minister has been lying through his teeth, again, about a scandal for which he bears primary responsibility.

I have one final article to briefly reference, but keep in mind that there are more. This article is one that I really appreciate from Robyn Urbach, published at the beginning of the weekend. She concludes that:

If hundreds of (mostly) women were being sexually assaulted in any other federal workplace—and were accused of lying by their superiors—there would be marches in the street and demands for resignations. The minister on the file would not be able to get away with claiming he didn't want to look at allegations for fear of "political interference," as [the defence minister] claimed, implausibly, when questioned about Mr. Vance during a committee hearing. Similarly, the Prime Minister would not be allowed to both boast about his government's "feminist credentials" and claim, also implausibly, that no one in his office knew the charge against Mr. Vance was a "Me Too" complaint - though emails show otherwise. And the minister would not be able to announce, with a straight face, a new independent review by another former Supreme Court justice....

In conclusion, a few moments ago, the House disposed of a Conservative motion, my motion, that suggests the Prime Minister's chief of staff failed to notify him about serious sexual harassment allegations at the highest ranks of the Canadian Armed Forces and was complicit in hiding the truth from Canadians. The Liberals voted against the motion, which suggests very strongly, that Katie Telford may very well have notified the Prime Minister.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, if you find there is a prima facie question of privilege, I am prepared to move the appropriate motion.

• (1605)

The Speaker: I want to thank the hon. member, and I will take it under advisement.

We have a point of order from the hon. member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek.

Mr. Bob Bratina: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order with regard to the previous vote.

I have been having technical issues with my device. I had originally cast my intended vote, but, subsequently, I received a message saying that there was only about a minute left and that my vote had not been submitted. In panic form, I went back to my device and cast a vote, which, unfortunately, was opposite to my intention, and it was recorded.

I am pretty sure that I am not able to ask the House at this point to change it, but I do want to publicly state that I have the highest respect for the chief of staff of the Prime Minister. My intention was not to vote with the Conservatives, and I apologize for that.

Once again, I inadvertently cast the wrong vote during—

The Speaker: I believe I have heard enough. Normally what would happen is that you would ask for unanimous consent to allow you to change your vote.

The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, because it has become a custom in this House to allow this, I think if you seek it you will find unanimous consent to allow the member to change his vote from yea to nay.

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

An hon. member: Nay.

The Speaker: I am afraid we do not have unanimous consent.

On a point of order, the hon. member for Banff—Airdrie.

• (1610)

Mr. Blake Richards: Mr. Speaker, I want to rise on this point, because, obviously, when a member finds themselves in a situation where there has been an inadvertent mistake, certainly I believe that we should always try to apply the principle that we do. However, I suggest that members should rise and seek that clarification prior to the result of a vote being announced. I think it is a bit of different precedent that we would be setting to have someone come after the result of a vote to do so. I would encourage the member to have risen prior to that, which would have been the correct way to do it.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, on that point, I think the member clearly indicated the confusion in what had happened and the reason why. I am sure he was respecting the House and the procedures that we were going through with Routine Proceedings in order to get to the point that he did before he brought this to the attention of the House. Perhaps, as he indicated, he was just unaware that there was still a possibility to do that. I know that it has become a practice in this House to take the word of a member if they had made an error, especially during the time of virtual voting like this.

I know that unanimous consent was not given, and I will not necessarily ask for it again, but I would encourage my colleagues across the way to reconsider this and to allow the member to cast his vote in the manner in which he had intended to do so.

The Speaker: I thank hon. members for their input.

*Government Orders***GOVERNMENT ORDERS***[English]***BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2021, NO. 1**

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.) moved that Bill C-30, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on April 19, 2021 and other measures, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

She said: Mr. Speaker, it is my sincere pleasure to join this debate on Bill C-30, an act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on April 19, 2021 and other measures.

[Translation]

Since the beginning of the pandemic, we have done everything necessary to protect Canadians' health and safety, to help businesses weather the storm and to position our country for a strong recovery. After 14 months of uncertainty and hardship, Canadians continue to fight COVID-19 with determination and courage.

Right now we are being hit hard by the third wave, but we can see the light at the end of the tunnel. More and more Canadians are getting vaccinated. The recovery is around the corner. The bill before us today would implement our plan to finish the fight against COVID-19, create jobs, grow the economy and ensure a robust recovery from which all Canadians would benefit.

The budget I presented to the House on April 19 contains further details about the plan. The budget focuses on middle-class Canadians and seeks to help more Canadians join the middle class. It is also in line with the global shift to a green, clean economy.

This plan will help Canadians and Canadian businesses heal the wounds left by COVID-19 and come back stronger than ever.

[English]

This budget meets three fundamental challenges. First, we must conquer COVID. That means buying vaccines and supporting provincial and territorial health care systems. It means enforcing quarantine rules at the border and within the country. It means providing Canadians and Canadian businesses with the support they need to get through these final lockdowns.

Second, we must punch our way out of the COVID recession. That means ensuring that lost jobs are recovered as swiftly as possible and hard-hit businesses rebound quickly. It means providing support where COVID has hit hardest: to women, to young people, to racialized Canadians and low-wage workers, and to small and medium-sized businesses, especially in tourism and hospitality. When fully enacted, this budget will create, in total, nearly 500,000 new training and work opportunities for Canadians.

Third, the major challenge is to build a more resilient Canada: better, more fair, more prosperous and more innovative. That means investing in Canada's green transition and the green jobs that go with it, in Canada's digital transformation and in Canadian innovation, and it means building infrastructure for a dynamic, growing country. This budget invests in social infrastructure and in physical infrastructure. It invests in human capital and in physical capital. It invests in Canadians and it invests in Canada.

Vaccine campaigns are accelerating, and that is such a good thing, but we need to vaccinate even more Canadians even more quickly. Thanks to plentiful and growing vaccine supply, that is something team Canada can get done working together. This legislation proposes a one-time payment of \$1 billion to provinces and territories to reinforce and roll out vaccination programs.

Canadians should take advantage of our increasing vaccine supply and, when it is their turn, go and get the first Health Canada-approved vaccine available to them. I was vaccinated with the AstraZeneca vaccine nine days ago at a Toronto pharmacy, and I am so grateful I was able to be vaccinated when it was my turn.

COVID-19 has placed extreme pressure on health care systems across the country. The pandemic is still with us and Canadians do need help urgently. That is why we propose to provide \$4 billion through the Canada health transfer to help provinces and territories address immediate health care system pressures.

● (1615)

[Translation]

These funds are in addition to our unprecedented investments in the health care systems during the pandemic, including the \$13.8 billion invested in health care under the safe restart agreement.

[English]

A full recovery from this pandemic requires new, long-term investments in social infrastructure, from early learning and child care to student grants to income top-ups, so that the middle class can flourish and so that more Canadians can join it.

COVID-19 has brutally exposed what women have long known: Without child care, parents, usually mothers, cannot work outside the home. A cornerstone of our jobs and growth plan is a historic investment of \$30 billion over five years, reaching \$9.2 billion annually in permanent investments when combined with previous commitments, to build a high-quality, affordable and accessible early learning and child care system across Canada.

Within five years, families everywhere in Canada should have access to high-quality child care for an average of \$10 a day. This will help increase parents', and especially women's, participation in the workforce. It will create jobs for child care workers, more than 95% of whom are women. It will give every child in Canada the best possible start in life. Early learning and child care has long been a feminist issue. COVID has shown us that it is an urgent economic issue as well.

• (1620)

[Translation]

As we make this historic commitment, I would like to thank the visionary leaders in Quebec, and in particular Quebec feminists, who led the way for the rest of Canada. I am very grateful to these women.

Of course, the plan also includes additional resources for Quebec that could be used to provide further support for its early learning and child care system, a system that is already the envy of the rest of Canada and, indeed, much of the world.

[English]

We also recognize the continuing need to bridge Canadians and Canadian businesses through this tough third wave of the virus and into a full recovery. To date, the Canada emergency wage subsidy has helped more than 5.3 million Canadians keep their jobs. The Canada emergency rent subsidy and lockdown support have helped more than 175,000 organizations with rent, mortgage and other expenses.

The wage subsidy, rent subsidy and lockdown support were set to expire in June 2021. Bill C-30 extends these measures through to September 25, 2021, for a total of \$12.1 billion in additional support. Extending the support will mean that millions of jobs will be protected, as they have been throughout this crisis.

[Translation]

To help people who still cannot work, we also propose maintaining flexible access to employment insurance benefits for another year, until fall 2022.

We also plan to extend the number of weeks for certain major income support measures, including the Canada recovery benefit and the Canada recovery caregiver benefit.

We are providing an extra 12 weeks of benefits to recipients of the Canada recovery benefit, which was created to help Canadians who are not eligible for employment insurance.

Bill C-30 also proposes extending the Canada recovery caregiver benefit by 4 weeks, up to a maximum of 42 weeks at \$500 a week. This will help when the economy begins its safe reopening.

For caregivers who cannot find a solution, especially those who take care of children, the employment insurance sickness benefit will be extended from 15 to 26 weeks.

[English]

Canada's prosperity depends on every Canadian having a fair chance to join the middle class. Low-wage workers in Canada work harder than anyone else in the country and for less pay. In the past

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year, they have faced both significant infection risks and job losses. Many live below the poverty line, even though they work full time. We are Canadian, and this should not be acceptable to any of us.

Through Bill C-30, we propose to expand the Canada workers benefit to invest \$8.9 billion over six years in additional support for low-wage workers. This will extend income top-ups to about a million more workers and will lift 100,000 Canadians out of poverty. This legislation will also introduce a \$15-an-hour federal minimum wage.

Young people have made extraordinary sacrifices over this past year to keep us, their elders, safe. We must not and we will not allow them to become a lost generation. Bill C-30 would make college and university more accessible and affordable. This legislation will extend the waiver of interest on federal student and apprentice loans to March 2023. Waiving the interest on student loans will provide savings for the approximately 1.5 million Canadians repaying student loans.

• (1625)

[Translation]

In the past 14 months, no one has felt the devastating health effects of COVID-19 more than seniors. They deserve a safe, secure and dignified retirement. We therefore propose a one-time payment of \$500 in August 2021 to old age security recipients who are or will be 75 or over in June 2022.

Bill C-30 also includes a permanent 10% increase in the old age security benefit for people aged 75 and over as of July 2022.

Small businesses are the cornerstone of our economy. Lockdowns, though necessary, have hit them hardest. To heal the wounds left by COVID, we have to put a small business rescue plan into action as well as a long-term plan to help them grow.

In addition to extending the Canada emergency wage subsidy, the Canada emergency rent subsidy and lockdown support, we also have to make sure that [*Technical difficulty—Editor*].

[English]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. minister seems to be having technical issues. We stopped hearing her feed.

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[Translation]

I would like to inform the House that technicians are currently checking the minister's connection. We will return in a few minutes.

[English]

In light of the fact that the technical problems seem to be a little more problematic than we expected, we are resuming debate with the hon. member for Abbotsford. We will return to the minister's speech once the technical issues are resolved.

The hon. member for Abbotsford.

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Wellington—Halton Hills.

It has been over two years—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We have to obtain unanimous consent for the sharing of time.

The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands is rising on a point of order.

• (1630)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, I was rising on a point of order that I believe unanimous consent was required.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. House Leader of the Official Opposition is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Madam Speaker, we do accept that, but we want to raise the point that it is very important, especially for this specific debate where we are talking about billions of dollars, to be sure that everything is said. I want to remind everyone that the best place to talk is here in the House of Commons.

Hon. Ed Fast: Madam Speaker, I am seeking unanimous consent to split my time with the member for Wellington—Halton Hills.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Does the hon. member for Abbotsford have the unanimous consent of the House to split his time?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Hon. Ed Fast: Madam Speaker, it has been well over two years since the last budget was tabled in the House. After all this time, one would have expected that our Liberal friends would have gotten it right. Instead, budget 2021 is a massive letdown. Instead of building back better, as the Prime Minister had so vacuously promised, and focusing on job creation and long-term growth, this budget has left us with bigger debt, bigger deficits, an avalanche of unfocused spending and a much bigger and more intrusive government.

Our Conservatives have repeatedly supported emergency programs for struggling Canadians to make it through the pandemic. What we cannot support is the Liberal government's failure to address the most urgent health and economic issues facing our country.

The virus has inflicted untold damage and put intense pressure on our health care system. Health care workers and hospitals are under siege. Even today, only 3% of Canadians have received their second dose of vaccine, while in the U.S., 32% of Americans have been fully vaccinated. How can that be?

The Prime Minister has failed to put forward strategic investments to ramp up vaccinations and provide the help the provinces and territories have asked for, as they struggle to contain the virus and treat the thousands of sick and dying patients. In fact, he has refused to sit down with those provinces to discuss health care support. Instead, the Prime Minister has said that he will get around to discussing this once the COVID pandemic is over. The premiers had asked for one thing, and that was a reliable federal partner to help them in the fight against COVID-19. They did not get one.

The budget also fails to live up to the Liberal government's own financial commitments. For example, the finance minister had originally signalled that \$100 billion of additional spending would be used to stimulate the economy, but only if absolutely necessary.

Today, the parliamentary budget officer noted that in fact a good portion of the spending was not used to stimulate the economy at all. In classic Liberal fashion, much of the so-called stimulus was instead spent on measures intended to further the political interests of the Liberal government. The PBO even noted that the Liberals could have reduced Canada's massive deficits by more than \$100 billion over the next six years. Instead, they chose to spend that money on an avalanche of election goodies to buy the votes of Canadians.

The minister's own mandate letter from the Prime Minister instructed her to present a new fiscal anchor, in other words, rules and safeguards, to guide her management of the massive debt and deficits that the Liberals had created. Yet, the best she could do was to recycle the old debt-to-GDP ratio, but this time without any firm targets. What is very clear is that the government has no intention of ever returning to balance, even in the longer term.

The PBO's newly released report for parliamentarians highlights a number of other things. First, the finance minister's stimulus has been miscalibrated. That is his term. In other words, it missed the mark. Second, the finance minister failed to distinguish between stimulus spending and COVID spending. I would suggest that she may have conflated the two to hide the fact that much of the spending was, indeed, election related. The PBO also said that the Liberals had overstated the economic impact of the stimulus. In other words, they misrepresented and oversold the value of the stimulus.

We also found out that the Liberal government had left itself no fiscal room. In other words, the Prime Minister has maxed out our country's credit card and ability to make future investments.

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Finally, the PBO confirms that the government is not on course to return our debt and deficits to pre-pandemic levels, another big fail.

However, to be sure, there are some measures in the budget that Conservatives support, for example, the extension of the emergency support measures like the wage subsidy, the rent subsidy and other recovery benefits as well as the hiring and training program for employers to maintain a level playing field and allow them to transition from the wage subsidy program. There is an improved tax treatment for capital investment over a two-year time frame and there is some support for hospitality, tourism and culture, although not the support required to reflect that these sectors were the hardest hit, the first to be shut down and will likely be the last to reopen.

● (1635)

Quite frankly, what I heard from tourism stakeholders is that they do not want handouts. What they want is for the government to come up with a plan to safely reopen the economy and let them do what they do best, which is to sustain and create good-paying jobs. Sadly, they did not get that plan.

In the lead up to the budget, we had sent the Prime Minister and his finance minister letters outlining the measures we believed were critical to fuelling our post-pandemic recovery. Unsurprisingly, almost all our advice was ignored, including on child care. Instead of building on existing family support measures that would deliver immediate relief to parents wanting to enter the labour force, the Liberals recycled an old promise to create an Ottawa-knows-best one-size-fits-all regulated day care program, one that will leave millions of Canadian parents behind.

The minister herself acknowledged just now that it would take at least five years to get this program in place to negotiate child care agreements with the provinces. Meanwhile, parents wishing to enter the labour force right now will be left hanging. Liberal leaders have made the very same child care promise in almost every election since 1993 and have never, ever delivered. Canadians have a right to skeptical.

Remember, this was supposed to be a growth budget. That is what the Prime Minister promised. Therefore, will this budget actually grow the economy and position us for long-term prosperity? Not at all. In fact, high profile Liberals like the Prime Minister's former economic adviser, Robert Asselin, have acknowledged this budget is not about long-term growth.

Today's PBO report confirms that significant elements of this budget were misrepresented by the Liberal government and overstate the stimulus and growth effects on our economy. As other countries provide their citizens with faster access to vaccines, they are also beating us to the punch by giving their economies a shot in the arm.

The U.K. has launched an infrastructure revolution. Italy has introduced what its Prime Minister has called "the mother of all reforms" to slash red tape. France and Germany are cutting taxes. Japan is helping its firms reduce their reliance on China with a shift toward more reliable and ethical trading partners. What did the Liberal budget do? It sprayed billions of dollars around without a clear strategy to position Canada for long-term prosperity.

The budget has no investments to address the structural problems that have plagued productivity and our ability to compete on the global stage. There is no plan to address the unprecedented level of investment that is fleeing Canada. There is no plan for regulatory and tax reform to help us win on the global stage. There is no comprehensive innovation strategy to ensure Canadian tech start-ups keep their job-creating investments here at home.

The budget is largely silent on our world-leading natural resource sector, one of the most significant contributors to our national prosperity. The Liberal government has again turned its back on our oil and gas producing provinces by expressly excluding the sector from the new carbon capture tax credit.

The Liberal government also missed a golden opportunity to substantively address the skyrocketing cost of housing in Canada. The budget introduces a 1% tax on foreign owners of vacant housing, which, quite frankly, will be considered an inconvenience to wealthy foreigners who will simply treat this as a cost of doing business, especially when we see the appreciation property values year over year.

Meanwhile, millions of Canadians are seeing their dream of home ownership slip through their fingers. That is a major failure.

I believe Canadians are looking for hope that things will soon get better and that we still have a bright future to look forward to. They want their jobs and small businesses back. They want their lives and communities back. Simply put, they want a return to normal and to live the Canadian dream.

This budget fails to deliver. There is no growth plan, only spending on an unprecedented scale, and spending is not an economic plan.

● (1640)

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.): Madam Speaker, while I quite like and respect the member personally, I am disappointed with the number of falsehoods that characterize his remarks today.

In particular, he criticized our plan for growth. I would point him to Scotiabank Economics that has said our measures were well-targeted to raise potential output by focusing on economic inclusion, the green transition and measures to encourage business investment. He criticized our fiscal sustainability, when the major credit rating agencies, post-budget, have reaffirmed our AAA rating.

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My question relates to one very specific point. He has said that he supports the continuation of emergency measures, despite the fact that his leader opposes CERB and has opposed our investments on long-term care. If the member supports the continuation of the Canada emergency wage subsidy into the summer, why did he and his colleagues vote against that very specific measure on Friday of last week?

Hon. Ed Fast: Madam Speaker, the member should know that many economists across Canada have lambasted the government for this failure to deliver a growth budget.

I already mentioned one of the Prime Minister's former top advisers, saying that this was not a growth budget. I would note that Mark Carney, a really close friend of the Liberals, basically damned the budget with faint praise.

It is very clear the budget does not position our country and our economy for long-term growth. Canadians were looking for a plan that would reopen the economy, get Canadians back to work, get small businesses back on their feet and then provide our business sector with the confidence of knowing that—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for New Westminster—Burnaby.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Speaker, my colleague is a student of history. He knows that during the Second World War, the last big crisis this country lived through, we put in place an excess profits tax, which led to the unparalleled growth that came after we had vanquished Nazism and fascism.

Today, we see a government that is absolutely refusing to put in place a pandemic profits tax or wealth tax, despite the fact that Canada's billionaires have increased their wealth by over \$78 billion during this pandemic. These measures were supported by over 80% of Canadians, including two-thirds of Conservative voters.

Do the Conservatives believe that the Liberals have acted inappropriately by giving a free ride to the ultra-rich?

Hon. Ed Fast: Madam Speaker, it seems every time I give a speech in the House, the member asks me the same question. I will give him the same answer that I have given in the past.

Coming out of the pandemic, coming out of an economic crisis is the worst time to raise taxes. Now I know that given the fact that the Liberal government has run up huge debts and huge deficits and has no plan to go to balance in the future, it is very clear that it will have to raise taxes in the future. It maybe an inheritance tax, maybe a home equity tax, maybe an increase in the GST or the carbon tax, we do not know.

However, I am pretty certain, under the Prime Minister, eventually there will be significant increases in the tax burden on Canadians, which is the worst thing a government can do. The best thing it can do is put in place the strategies, programs and investments that will position the country for long-term prosperity—

• (1645)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about health transfers.

The government is announcing a one-time transfer rather than the annual steady increase the entire country is asking for. This is what all the provinces, not just Quebec, are calling for. I get the feeling that the government is implementing mini-measures to try to keep people dependent.

Consider, for example, the renewal of the tax deferral for agricultural co-operatives. The deferral has been renewed several times for five years. Why not make this credit permanent, since it works so well?

My answer is that the government wants to keep people dependent so that it can make election promises. By renewing these measures in five years, it is making sure that the people who politely come begging remain dependent on Ottawa.

What does my colleague think?

[*English*]

Hon. Ed Fast: Madam Speaker, my impression is that we have a Prime Minister who is unwilling to work with the provinces. He has made it very clear that he has no intention of talking to the provinces until the COVID pandemic is over.

Quite frankly, right now, in the middle of this pandemic, with the pressure on our health care systems, on our hospitals, on our health care workers, the Prime Minister should be sitting down with our provincial leaders, with our premiers, and working something out. He has shown an unwillingness to do that.

We are willing to sit down—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Before we resume debate, the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands is rising on a point of order.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I believe if you seek it you will find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order, special order or usual practice of the House, during the debates tonight and tomorrow, pursuant to Standing Order 52, no quorum calls, dilatory motions or requests for unanimous consent shall be received by the Chair.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): All those opposed to the hon. member moving the motion will please say nay.

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

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

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

[English]

BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2021, NO. 1

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-30, an act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on April 19, 2021 and other measures, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Madam Speaker, this is the longest budget in Canadian history. As Andrew Coyne pointed out in *The Globe and Mail*, this budget comes in at 739 pages and 232,903 words. Paul Martin's landmark budget of 1995 was fewer than 200 pages. Michael Wilson's budgets of the late 1980s, which put Canada back on fiscal track and had operational surpluses, averaged less than 120 pages.

The longest budget in Canadian history is the biggest disappointment. Never has a budget proposed so little with so many words. There is no plan to tackle the immediate problem Canadians are facing, which is the lack of vaccines. There can be no economic recovery without vaccines.

In Halton region, for example, where part of my riding is, only half the people who could have been vaccinated have been. This is because the federal government has failed to secure vaccines. Last month, in places such as Burlington, Oakville, Milton, Georgetown and Acton, Halton region was only able to vaccinate 90,000 residents. It could have vaccinated 216,000 residents, or 7,200 residents a day, more than double the number of people it actually vaccinated. The reason only half the number of people were vaccinated was because of a lack of vaccines.

I will quote Halton region directly, which stated, "While we have the capacity to book approximately 7,200 appointments per day through our clinics, the availability of consistent vaccine supply continues to constrain the Vaccination Program rollout."

[Translation]

The budget does nothing to fix this lack of vaccines. As a result, we are experiencing a third wave, unlike countries who were able to secure an adequate supply of vaccines like the United States and the United Kingdom.

[English]

This budget has no plan to build back better. It has no plan to create jobs and growth. Instead, it leaves us with a bigger debt, bigger deficits and an avalanche of unfocused spending.

The budget has no plan for regulatory and tax reform to help us in a fiercely competitive global economy. It has no plan to address Canada's chronically low levels of productivity, the only long-term determinant of prosperity. It has no plan for Canada's natural resources sector, which is so important, and the race for critical minerals and the energy transition heats up.

There is no plan to address the overheated housing market, which has put the dream of affordable home ownership out of the reach of millions of Canadian families and saddled them with sky-high levels of indebtedness. There is no plan to achieve budget bal-

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ance and rein in the skyrocketing debt and deficits that are threatening our children's future.

Members do not need to take it from me. They can take it from the experts. This is what David Dodge, the deputy minister of finance during the Chrétien government of the 1990s and former governor of the Bank of Canada, had to say about the budget in *The Globe and Mail*. He stated, "My policy criticism of the budget is that it really does not focus on growth".

Referring to growth and the finance minister, he continues, "over the longer haul, we face a very real challenge. And I don't think she tried to seriously address that in the budget".

He went on to say that the vast majority of the extra \$100 billion in spending is consumption not investment. He also said the budget does not have a prudent fiscal plan. He stated, "To me, it wouldn't accord with something that is a reasonably prudent fiscal plan, let me put it that way".

According to the International Monetary Fund, Canada has incurred the largest deficit among major economies in the last year at 20% of our GDP, yet the IMF estimates that, compared to our economic peers, Canada's economy has contracted more and will recover more slowly. Despite this, the budget does nothing to create jobs and growth.

● (1650)

[Translation]

There is no plan in the budget to balance public finances. The budget itself indicates that in the next five years alone, interest charges on the national debt will double, increasing from about 20 billion dollars a year to about 40 billion dollars a year.

[English]

Other experts have also been critical of the budget, as my colleague just said in his most recent remarks in the House. Here is what the finance minister's former policy and budget director, Robert Asselin, had to say about the budget in *The Hub*.

He said, "The federal budget has no answers on the question of growth". He went on to say, "it was clear for some time that the government's decision to spend more than \$100 billion in so-called short-term stimulus was a political solution in search of an economic problem." He concluded by saying, "After doubling our federal debt in only six years, and spending close to a trillion dollars, not moving the needle on long-term growth would be the worst possible legacy of this budget."

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This budget has no plan for growth, no plan to make Canada more competitive on the global stage and no plan to deal with Canada's aging labour force and chronically low levels of business investment. The Parliamentary Budget Officer has noted that a significant amount of the spending in the budget would neither stimulate jobs nor create economic growth. Like many others, he has concluded that a good portion of the spending is not stimulus at all.

Much of the spending in the budget is designed to help get Liberals re-elected. It is clearly a pre-election budget with a shotgun approach to spending. For example, the budget promises a national child care program. They do not mind the fact that it is provincial jurisdiction and some provinces have already set up universal child care programs. They do not mind the fact that the social union framework agreement, which was negotiated in 1999 by a previous Liberal government, requires the government to get the support of the majority of provincial governments to proceed. They do not mind the fact that provinces are rightfully skeptical about a federal government setting up new shared-cost programs in provincial areas of jurisdiction, only to have the federal government reduce funding at a later date, leaving the provinces on the hook to make up the deficit.

This promise of a national child care program is one Canadians have every right to be skeptical about. The Liberals first made this promise in the infamous red book of 1993, some 28 years ago. Over the last 28 years, they have continued to trot it out, and they keep failing to deliver. The government had two years to prepare for this budget. The fact that after two years all they could come out with is a budget soaring in rhetoric, but lacking in substance, is not surprising.

This is a government with an unprecedented gap between its rhetoric and reality. It is a government that said it was about gender equality, yet forced out of its cabinet and caucus the first indigenous female minister of justice and forced out of its caucus Jane Philpott, someone whose medical expertise we could have desperately used as minister of health during the last year of this pandemic. It is a government that said it was feminist, yet ignored the specific allegation of sexual harassment against the head of the armed forces

It is a government that said it would introduce electoral reform. It is a government headed by a Prime Minister who arrogantly proclaimed to the world in 2015 that Canada was back, and who made it a centrepiece of his foreign policy to secure a seat for Canada on the UN Security Council. However, Canada lost the vote for the Security Council seat with six fewer votes than it received a decade earlier. It is a government that came to office promising to do more for the world's poor, but that has spent 10% less on official development assistance than the previous government. It is a government that came to office promising to do better on climate change, but emissions have risen each and every year it has been in office.

In 2016, the first full year the current government was in office, emissions were 708 megatonnes. Just last month, the government announced emissions for the latest year, 2019, at 730 megatonnes. This is a 22-megatonne increase from its first full year in office, when it stood at 708 megatonnes, and so, too, it is with this budget.

This is a government that says it is focused on the middle class. It says it is focused on jobs and growth and focused on fiscal prudence, yet it presents a budget that is focused on anything but. For all those reasons, I cannot support this budget.

• (1655)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, for starters, this member and I are both of Dutch heritage, being half Dutch, and I want to wish him a happy Dutch Heritage Day. I know that we both spoke passionately in favour of Motion No. 207 just a couple of years ago, which established Dutch Heritage Day. Perhaps our only regret is that, being Dutch, we are too modest to insist on a whole month.

I would like to go back to the member's comments about the vaccines. He referenced the Halton region. I think it is fair to be critical and to assess the job of vaccine delivery. Yes, there were a couple of weeks in February when there were some disruptions to the delivery, but by the end of the first quarter we had had more vaccines delivered to Canada than had been scheduled.

More important, the provinces knew what the schedule was well in advance, and the provinces were also getting forecasts with respect to where the pandemic was going and what to expect. Would the member not at least agree that, yes, there may have been some disruptions, but vaccines did get delivered as per the schedule just as the provinces were expecting?

Hon. Michael Chong: Madam Speaker, I wish a happy Dutch Heritage Day to my colleague across the aisle as well. I appreciate the sentiment.

Let me respond to my colleague's question by saying that Canada has done nothing well in response to this pandemic. It is clear that both the United States and the United Kingdom botched the early response to the pandemic a year ago. That is clear. Their cases skyrocketed. They had many more cases than we did. However, they eventually pulled up their bootstraps and they have led the world, not just the free world, in vaccinating significant numbers of their own citizens to the point now where over 50% of Britons now have been vaccinated and almost 50% of Americans have been vaccinated.

We have not done anything well during this pandemic. The fact that we are now going through a third wave with a third set of restrictions is reflective of that. The government needs to do a much better job in managing the pandemic and in coordinating the response. At the end of the day, peace, order and good government—

• (1700)

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

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Madam Speaker, with respect to Dutch Heritage Day, the NDP is partial to orange, and we would not mind it being extended to a month. I know we could certainly live with that.

One of the things that took place at the start of the pandemic was that pressured credit card companies went on a campaign to lower interest rates for borrowing. The member mentioned families. I am curious about where he and his party are with the credit card agencies right now, when most of them are moving back to interest rates of 20% or more.

Does the member and his party think there should be some regulatory reform, either in the short term or the long term, as Canada's borrowing rate is so low right now and these predatory prices are accumulating a lot of debt for Canadians. I am curious about where his party is on that, because we believe that there should be some regulatory oversight, especially right now, given the circumstances Canadians find themselves in.

Hon. Michael Chong: Madam Speaker, the member represents a portion of Windsor, the place of my birth and a part of southwestern Ontario that, I know, he and I are quite proud of.

In answer to the member's question, we believe that the government should have introduced, in this budget, measures to help cool the housing market, which is the single biggest factor driving household indebtedness and household challenges in this country. Household mortgage debt in this country stands at over \$1.5 trillion. It is by far and away the largest portion, about three-quarters, of all household debt. The fact that the government did not introduce measures to help cool the housing market is only going to further add to that overall debt burden that Canadian families are facing.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Resuming debate, we have the hon. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance for the five and a half minutes she has remaining for her speech.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank colleagues for their patience with my Internet difficulties today. I apologize and I do really appreciate their forbearance.

[*Translation*]

Small businesses are the cornerstone of our economy and of every main street in Canada. Lockdowns, though necessary, have hit them hardest. To heal the wounds left by COVID, we have to put a small business rescue plan into action as well as a long-term plan to help them grow.

In addition to extending the Canada emergency wage subsidy, the Canada emergency rent subsidy and lockdown support, we also have to make sure that the hardest-hit businesses pivot back to growth and stay on track.

[*English*]

Bill C-30 proposes the new Canada recovery hiring program, which will run from June to November and make it easier for businesses to hire back laid-off employees or to hire new workers. We also intend to invest up to \$4 billion to help up to 160,000 small

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and medium-sized businesses buy and adopt the new technologies they need to grow. We will encourage businesses to invest in themselves by allowing for the immediate expensing of up to \$1.5 million of eligible investments by Canadian-controlled private corporations in each of the next three years.

Small businesses need access to financing in order to invest in people and innovation and to have the space to operate and grow. That is why Bill C-30 enhances the Canada small business financing program through amendments to the Canada Small Business Financing Act. This will mean broader eligibility and increased loan limits.

In 2021, job growth is green growth. This budget sets out an ambitious and realistic plan to help Canada get to net-zero emissions, and it puts in place the funding to achieve our 25% land and marine conservation targets by 2025. At the same time, we will make targeted investments in transformational technologies, helping our business growth and making us more productive and competitive around the world.

The hard and essential work of reconciliation continues. This budget commits to investing \$18 billion over the next five years to narrow gaps between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples, to support safe, healthy communities and to advance reconciliation. We are committing to investing \$6 billion to improve infrastructure in indigenous communities.

Bill C-30 earmarks \$2.2 billion to flow through the federal gas tax fund, renamed more appropriately the Canada community-building fund, to communities across Canada. Cities and towns have faced steep revenue declines because of COVID. This funding will help them maintain and build the local infrastructure on which Canadians depend.

Collaboration with all levels of government across Canada has been and will continue to be the cornerstone of our team Canada response to this pandemic. Together, we will finish the fight against COVID and together we will come roaring back.

● (1705)

[*Translation*]

Bill C-30 is essential if we are to activate our government's recovery plan as presented in budget 2021. Our people and our businesses cannot do without the support measures in this bill. This bill takes unprecedented steps to stimulate future growth.

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[English]

This plan is about people. It will make a measurable, positive, tangible difference in the lives of millions of Canadians. It is about making concrete, targeted commitments to heal the wounds of COVID, to get us all back to work and to put us on a long-term path toward growth, prosperity and a clean, green future.

I urge all members to join me in supporting the speedy passage of this essential legislation.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Madam Speaker, why is the government placing restrictions on people's ability to be compensated through the Canada Deposit Insurance Corporation? Is she expecting federal financial institutions to fail?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Speaker, I have a very high degree of confidence in our country's financial institutions. Indeed, the stability of Canada's financial institutions is one of our core economic strengths.

The CDIC is one of our key institutions, and the well-regulated, prudent way in which it operates is really central to Canada's stability. It is one of the reasons that Canada continues to enjoy a AAA credit rating.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Madam Speaker, I have a big problem with division 5 of part 4 on the centralization of securities.

This plan to set up the pan-Canadian securities regulation organization in Toronto is bound to result in regulatory activities transitioning out of Quebec. The minister is allocating nearly \$120 million to this ill-conceived plan. This is not just a conflict between provincial and federal responsibility. It is a battle between Bay Street and Quebec.

Nobody in Quebec—none of the political parties, not the business community, not the financial sector and not workers' funds—nobody is in favour of this plan.

After she invests \$120 million, what will the minister tell them? Will she tell them that Ottawa cares more about Bay Street than about all those people?

• (1710)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. We do not always agree, but we always have useful discussions.

With respect to securities, I certainly understand Quebec's position. I have had constructive conversations about this with Minister Eric Girard.

While I certainly understand Quebec's position, I think that, with the agreement of all the provinces and territories, it is a good thing for the whole country to do things that help us establish a shared economy. One example of that is trade among the provinces and territories.

[English]

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Speaker, unlike BIAs in any other crisis we have had in Canadian history, this budget implementation act basically gives a free ride to the ultrarich. Canada's billionaires have increased their wealth by over \$78 billion, yet there is no wealth tax, there is no pandemic profits tax and the luxury tax is purely symbolic, bringing in less than one cent on the dollar of what the PBO has said a wealth tax would provide for.

At the same time, the Liberal government is slashing benefits. Starting in July, the emergency response benefit will be slashed almost in half. Students are still forced to pay for their loans during the pandemic, and people with disabilities get a three-year consultation. Try putting food on the table with a consultation.

My question is very simple: Why is the government slashing benefits at the same time as it is giving a free ride to the ultrarich?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for New Westminster—Burnaby for his very great concern for the people he represents. I appreciate that.

I take a very different view about what this budget is putting forward. This budget would extend the emergency support measures for individuals and businesses through to the end of September. It would extend the enhanced EI benefits for a full year and would create a new hiring credit that would run from June to November. These are important support measures, and we are glad to put them in place.

When it comes to students and young people, I agree with the hon. member that we need to support them. That is why there is nearly \$6 billion in this budget to support young Canadians.

Finally, when it comes to taxes, let me highlight a very important element of this budget: unprecedented efforts to fight tax evasion, to close loopholes, including action on—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We have to have allow the opportunity for more questions.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance.

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.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the minister for her work in putting together this transformational document that is going to support Canadians.

The pandemic has not impacted everyone equally. A lot of people are doing just fine from an economic perspective, notwithstanding the public health crisis we are facing. However, women, young people, Black Canadians, indigenous Canadians and other groups from marginalized communities have suffered disproportionate consequences. When we talk about job numbers and GDP growth, sometimes people think that politicians are concerned with the economy but not as concerned as they should be about the people who live and work in it.

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I am hoping the minister can offer comments on why supporting the groups that have been hit hardest by the pandemic is not just the right thing to do from a moral perspective. It is in our economic self-interest to support them as we rebound from the economic crisis of COVID-19 pandemic.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Speaker, I want to start my answer by paying tribute to my parliamentary secretary and highlighting the very personal role he played in putting together this budget. He has a constituent who had advocated, with huge energy and personal passion, for extending the EI sickness benefit from 15 to 26 weeks. The parliamentary secretary spoke to me about the personal story of this constituent. In his view, based on his constituency work as a MP, this was a measure we needed to put in place, as sick Canadians needed longer support. We acted on what he proposed, and I am very, very glad we were able to do that.

I would say to all members of the House that there are times when speaking up for an individual member of our constituencies can transform the lives of millions of Canadians. I think that is what the parliamentary secretary has done.

• (1715)

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the minister for reaching out to me last week after the budget had been tabled. We had a good conversation. However, had she reached out a little earlier, we could have helped her craft a budget that was truly a growth budget.

I noticed that her speech was almost exclusively about how much she had spent. There are certainly elements within the budget that we support, but as she is the finance minister, I would have expected her to talk about debts, talk about deficits and talk about the impact inflation and interest rates could have on the sustainability of our economy and our national finances. She mentioned none of that.

The minister's mandate letter from the Prime Minister directed her to come up with a "new fiscal anchor". However, the fiscal anchor she came up with was the old one based on the debt-to-GDP ratio, except it did not have any targets attached to it this time.

Why has the minister not directed her mind to the financial sustainability of the country? Why did she not—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. Minister of Finance.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Speaker, earlier on, the parliamentary secretary spoke about his personal high regard for the member for Abbotsford and, I believe, his fondness for him. I must confess to the same weakness. I was glad to speak with him last week, and indeed to speak with him while we were putting the budget together. Notwithstanding that high regard, I disagree with some of the hon. member's contentions.

When it comes to the fiscal sustainability of our budget, let me point to something that is important for Canadians to know. I am holding it up now. A week after we delivered the budget, S&P Global, the ratings agency whose job it is to determine which sovereign borrower has a good plan and which does not, reaffirmed Canada's AAA rating. S&P said that it expects the Canadian economy will post a strong recovery in—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Madam Speaker, seniors are angry, and with good reason.

They view the latest budget as an insult. Seniors saw an increase in old age security for people aged 75 and over, but no increase for people aged 65 to 74.

Will the Minister of Finance stop denying our seniors their dignity and provide the OAS increase to people aged 65 to 74 and those 75 and over?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Speaker, I must say that I do not agree with the hon. member.

Earlier this week, I had a discussion with the Prime Minister and a group of Quebec seniors. We had an excellent conversation and these seniors really appreciated the OAS increase included in this budget.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Madam Speaker, that is not what we are hearing on the ground. We are hearing a lot of grumbling about the creation of two classes of seniors and the exclusion of seniors aged 65 to 74. From our point of view, this is not being well received on the ground.

I would like to start by informing the House that the Bloc Québécois will support the principle of the bill. We will make amendments in committee and review our position in subsequent votes.

This implementation bill is mammoth in scope. It has 346 pages, four parts, 37 divisions and four schedules. The summary alone is 10 pages long. It goes without saying that it contains tonnes of measures, like the woolly mammoth, which could weigh up to six tonnes. We obviously support most of the measures, such as the ones aimed at extending support programs like the wage and rent subsidies.

Given the mammoth scope of the bill and the time I am allotted, I will limit myself to a brief overview, stopping to discuss some of its elements.

Part 1 contains a series of highly technical amendments to the Income Tax Act. It limits the stock option deduction for large companies. It increases the basic personal deduction to \$15,000. It prohibits bonuses for senior executives in companies receiving the wage subsidy, and introduces anti-avoidance measures. These are some of the measures we support. Part 2 imposes GST on Internet and Airbnb purchases, which is obviously a good thing.

The bill extends the wage subsidy until September 27, gradually reducing the rates from 75% to 20%, and also allows the minister to extend the program by regulation for two more months, until November 30. During these two months, the minister could also make a regulation concerning eligibility criteria for the wage subsidy as well as its calculation.

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This provision sounds like an insurance policy in case the House is dissolved for elections, preventing it from enacting a law that would extend the wage subsidy beyond September 27 if necessary. If you read between the lines, the choice of November 30 gives you an idea of when the current government anticipates the House to be back.

The bill creates a new hiring subsidy program for businesses restarting their activities. The hiring subsidy will be in effect from June 6 to November 20. It will be offered to businesses restarting their activities and hiring or rehiring employees. It could cover up to half of new salaries. Businesses will therefore be able to choose between the hiring subsidy and the wage subsidy, depending on which one benefits them most. These are measures that we support.

As I said in my question to the minister, division 5 of part 4 is a serious problem for us. This section involves the centralization of the securities commission, which infringes on Quebec's jurisdiction. With this division, the federal government is trying to strip Quebec of its financial sector.

Bill C-30 renews and significantly increases the budget of the Canadian Securities Regulation Regime Transition Office to expedite its work. The bill authorizes the government to make payments to the transition office of up to \$119,500,000 or any greater amount that may be specified in an appropriation act. The transition office was established in July 2009 to create a single pan-Canadian securities regulator in Toronto.

There have been a number of setbacks before the Supreme Court, which deemed that securities were not under federal jurisdiction. However, Ottawa finally got the green light in 2018—remember it well—to interfere in this jurisdiction provided that it co-operate with the provinces and not act unilaterally. That is what is on paper, so that is the theory. However, as Yogi Berra said, “In theory there is no difference between theory and practice. In practice there is.”

If the federal government carried out its plan to establish a pan-Canadian securities regulator in Toronto, we would inevitably see a creep of regulation activities outside Quebec. This plan is just bad and must never see the light of day. This is more than just a dispute over jurisdictions or mere squabbling between Quebec and Ottawa or the federal government and the provinces. This is a battle between Bay Street and Quebec.

• (1720)

I would like to remind the House that everyone is against this in Quebec, including all political parties in the Quebec National Assembly, business communities, the financial sector and labour-sponsored funds. Seldom have we seen Quebec's business community come together as one to oppose a government initiative.

In addition to the Government of Quebec and the National Assembly, economic circles unanimously and vehemently oppose it, including the Fédération des chambres de commerce du Québec, the Chamber of Commerce of Metropolitan Montreal, Finance Montréal, the International Financial Centre corporation, the Desjardins Group, Fonds de solidarité FTQ, as well as most Quebec businesses, like Air Transat, Transcontinental, Canam, Québecor, Metro, La Capitale, Cogeco, Molson, and the list goes on.

A strong Quebec Autorité des marchés financiers means a strong talent pool in support of the financial legal framework, a prerequisite to the sector's development.

When the Toronto Stock Exchange bought the Bourse de Montréal, the Commission des valeurs mobilières, the predecessor to the Autorité des marchés financiers, demanded before authorizing the sale that Montreal retain a stock exchange. We know that it specialized in derivatives, including the carbon exchange.

In Quebec, the financial sector represents 150,000 jobs with a contribution of more than \$20 billion, or the equivalent of 6.3% of the GDP. Montreal is the 13th largest global financial centre with nearly 100,000 jobs.

The provisions in division 5 are an attack on our ability to keep our head offices and preserve our businesses. We are talking about the Quebec model. The Task Force on the Protection of Québec Businesses estimates that the 578 head offices in Quebec represent 50,000 jobs with a salary that is twice as high as the Quebec average in addition to 20,000 other jobs at specialized service providers such as accounting, legal, financial or computer services.

Quebec companies tend to favour Quebec suppliers, while foreign companies in Quebec rely more on globalized supply chains and all the impact that can have on our network of SMEs, in the regions in particular. We saw with the pandemic that globalized supply chains are fragile and make us entirely dependent on foreign supply.

Ultimately, businesses tend to concentrate their strategic activities, in particular research and development, where their headquarters are located. There is also a branch plant economy and a less innovative economy. These are threats to Quebec.

A strong financial hub is vital to the functioning of our headquarters and the preservation of our businesses. Keeping the sector's regulator in Quebec ensures that decision-makers are nearby, which in turn enables access to capital markets for businesses, an essential condition to support business investment and growth across Quebec.

The Bloc Québécois wants to eliminate division 5 of Bill C-30, by deleting the clause in question. This would be tantamount to cutting off funding for the centralization of Toronto's financial sector. We are sorry, but we will be standing in Bay Street's way.

I will move on to division 8 of part 4.

Division 8 enacts a new act, the retail payment activities act, which would govern all electronic transactions. It applies not only to online payment activities of federally regulated institutions but also to those of all businesses. Even provincial governments are subject to this law.

Government Orders

At this point, we have serious concerns about division 8. In our view, the activities described are essentially private in nature and fall under civil law. Why is Ottawa sticking its nose in? There is also the possibility that the federal legislation may not apply to a non-federally regulated business in a province that has passed comparable legislation.

The Bloc Québécois and I find this all rather vague. Is this yet another encroachment by Ottawa into the area of financial consumer protection? We have questions. We are going to look into the matter and shed some light on it. Our constituents can count on us.

We all remember a mammoth bill introduced by former minister Morneau that removed the Bay Street financial sector from the Civil Code of Quebec. We managed to get the government to back down and we are ready to do it again, if needed.

I will now move on to division 22.

Here, Bill C-30 amends the Canada Labour Code in an effort to address the issue of contract flipping.

• (1725)

Unfortunately, this contract flipping is still happening in airports. It involves replacing one company with another less expensive one through competitive bidding. What does the new company do? It rehires the same workers to do the same job but with inferior working conditions and wages. That is unacceptable. It is straight out of another century. It is time for that to change.

We welcome that division of the bill. However, it seems that it refers only to pay and not to all of the social benefits and other benefits set out in the collective agreement. In fact, the collective agreement does not seem to be transferred. We will therefore continue to examine that division of the bill and possibly make some improvements.

Next, I want to talk about division 23, which increases minimum wage to \$15 an hour. Obviously, we applaud that initiative. The Bloc Québécois is always in favour of improving the quality of life and working conditions of Quebecers and Canadians. However, members need to be aware that only a minority of workers, or approximately 26,000 Canadians, will be able to get that wage increase, because the Canada Labour Code applies only to federally regulated sectors, so this measure is nothing too spectacular.

Division 25 provides for a payment to Quebec to offset the cost of aligning the Quebec parental insurance plan. For once, Quebec may not have to fight for its share of the funding allocated to a program it opted out of. We hope Ottawa will remember this way of doing things and do it more often. That would be nice sometimes instead of always wasting time haggling over money for social housing, roads and lots of other things, money that takes years to get transferred. We applaud what is being done here.

I will move on to division 32, which is about old age security, but before I talk about old age security, what do we have here in division 32? A \$500 cheque for people 75 and over this summer, right before the election. People probably remember how Duplessis gave folks refrigerators so they would not forget which side to vote for. Well done, Liberals. Duplessis used to say that heaven was blue

and hell was red. Unfortunately, the Liberals cannot appropriate that particular Duplessis slogan.

As I said earlier, division 32 will increase old age security by 10% for those aged 75 and over, not this summer, but in the summer of 2022. That is \$63 more per month. I would remind the House that the Bloc Québécois is asking for an increase of \$110 per month for all seniors aged 65 and over, starting immediately. This would bring Canada back in line with the OECD average. Canada would still lag far behind Europe.

On that topic, I would like to quote the economic analyst Gérald Fillion. In a very interesting article he wrote recently in response to the budget, he said, and I quote:

Two questions come to mind. First, why not increase old age security by 10% as of this year? Second, why do these measures apply only to seniors aged 75 and over? Why not those aged 65 and over?

Those are very legitimate questions that we too want to ask the government. The FADOQ network and seniors' groups in Quebec also spoke out against this approach. Gérald Fillion made a number of points. He noted that, in Canada, people's income drops precipitously when they retire. The technical term is net pension replacement rate, which was 50.7% of pre-retirement income in Canada in 2018. That translates into roughly half as much after retirement.

Across the OECD, that rate is seven percentage points higher. In the European Union, it is 63%. The figures are therefore 50%, 57% and 63%. These data are from a study of 49 countries, among which Canada ranks 32nd, well behind countries such as Italy, India, France and Denmark, and just slightly above the United States, where inequality is surging. That is not impressive. These statistics are alarming, so we must take action. Seniors were the first victims of the pandemic, and there was already inequality before the pandemic.

Gérald Fillion concluded his article by saying:

Considering Canada's poor showing in the OECD ranking, it would have made sense for the 10% increase to begin this year and apply as of age 65 and for this issue to be free from electioneering.

Improving old age security starting not this summer, but next summer, is what we are talking about. To reiterate our position, we are proposing \$110 a month starting at age 65 to bring us in line with the OECD average. It is hardly a revolutionary proposal.

I will now move on to division 34, which deals with child care services. The government is giving itself the right to compensate a province that wishes to opt out of the federal early learning and child care program. That is obviously what Quebec would like to do.

• (1730)

However, the Bloc Québécois wants guarantees. This spending authority seems to be valid only for the current fiscal year and for a maximum transfer of \$3 billion per province.

In the budget, but not the bill, there are different program objectives, and the budget also raises the possibility of an asymmetrical bilateral agreement with Quebec.

Government Orders

As everyone knows, the bill covers only this year. Is that until asymmetrical agreements are signed? Can the government finally guarantee that Quebec will receive full compensation every year, without conditions, for what it has been doing since 1997? That is what we want, and that is what we are asking for.

I would like to remind members that the new pan-Canadian child care program is another federal intrusion. Family policies and all associated programs are the exclusive jurisdiction of Quebec and the provinces. It is clearly a good policy, a worthwhile, feminist policy, but it is still an intrusion.

I will now move on to divisions 35 and 36, which grant 12 additional weeks of the Canada recovery benefit, bringing us to September 25 of this year. The total number of weeks is now increased to 50, which is a good thing. For the first four additional weeks, recipients will receive \$500 a week. For the other eight weeks, the maximum will be reduced to \$300, starting July 18. This division also extends the Canada recovery caregiving benefit by four weeks to a maximum of 42 weeks, providing \$500 a week in the event that caregiving options are not sufficiently available. The maximum number of weeks for which the benefit can be paid to people living at the same address is 42.

The bill contains several measures, including extending EI benefits, which may be prescribed by regulation and extended until November 20, if necessary; maintaining EI eligibility at 420 hours; and extending the maximum length of EI sickness benefits from 15 weeks to 26 weeks starting in the summer. I do not mean this summer, but the one following the election. This measure continues to penalize people who are fighting cancer, for example, and need more weeks of benefits. It does not take into account the order that the House gave the government to extend the benefit period to 50 weeks. Twenty-six weeks is better than 15, but that was not what the House voted for.

I remind members that the Bloc Québécois voted against the budget. Although we believe the budget contains some worthwhile measures, it overlooked the key issues, namely proper funding for health care and proper support for seniors.

The Bloc Québécois also denounces the government's decision to use the budget to set up infrastructure that would enable it to interfere in provincial jurisdictions. The budget provides for frameworks for mental health care, women's health and reproductive health. These are all the exclusive jurisdictions of Quebec and the provinces.

The budget also provides for a framework for extracting the minerals needed for the green transition. Furthermore, as I pointed out earlier, the government is once again talking about a Canadian securities regulator. The budget also talks about a federal office for recognizing foreign credentials, which is not a federal jurisdiction. There is also mention of a Canadian water agency and a federal framework for skills training. Whenever Quebec or the provinces do something good, Ottawa tries to latch on, even though it is not able to take care of its own jurisdictions.

This is all very troubling. All of these measures, frameworks and policies do not represent significant amounts in the budget, but they reflect the government's intention to set up the infrastructure to

keep moving in this direction. We will be keeping an eye on the government, that is for sure. The government's vision is to control specific areas that, according to the Constitution, fall under provincial jurisdiction. The federal government has the power to spend, and that enables it to stick its nose into everybody's business, but as a result, we are becoming less and less of a federation with provincial autonomy and more and more of a centralized country where everything happens in Ottawa. The federal government could not care less about the provincial autonomy that Quebec holds so dear. The provinces are being starved. With health care costs rising and Ottawa refusing to co-operate, Quebec and the provinces have no more room to manoeuvre. If they want some breathing room, they need to turn to Ottawa, which will tell them how to do things. That is very troubling.

Madam Speaker, I see you indicating that my time is up. I will—

• (1735)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): You have 10 seconds left.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Madam Speaker, since I have little time left, I will be brief.

Several elements of the mammoth bill are appealing, but others are not.

We will vote in favour of the bill at this stage, and we will try to make it better.

[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.): Madam Speaker, I would have to save an entire day to discuss some of the questions around jurisdiction. My question is about the government's fiscal policy in terms of the macroeconomic approach, which I know my colleague has serious expertise in.

At committee, we have heard the Governor of the Bank of Canada describe the monetary policy to be the effective lower bound of the interest rate the bank can offer. The chief economist of the International Monetary Fund has suggested that, for countries that have a central bank that has reached the effective lower bound of interest rates, public stimulus is not just economically sound but is the fiscally responsible thing to do.

Without getting into the specifics of 100 different measures he may agree or disagree with, from a macroeconomic policy point of view, I am curious whether he agrees it is essential to support the economy, and more importantly the people and businesses inside that economy, by ensuring we extend enough supports to ensure they can be on a life raft through this pandemic so they can contribute to the recovery on the back end.

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• (1740)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Madam Speaker, I salute and thank the parliamentary secretary. We both sit on the finance committee, where we both work very hard.

This is a very interesting question. Economists welcomed the income support measures during the pandemic, and they are currently debating the need for a recovery plan.

The Bloc Québécois and I are in favour of a recovery plan, as long as it is used properly. It should not be used to put more money in the pockets of the government's friends. It should be used to boost the strong sectors of tomorrow's economy, for example, the green economy and strategic sectors such as aerospace.

[*English*]

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened intently to the member's speech, particularly the issues around the stock exchange. It was extremely interesting and something I am not as familiar with. The jurisdictional questions are always something he and I agree on, and I am happy he brought them up.

What are his opinions on the massive amounts of debt we are taking on? Are we getting anything for that in return?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Madam Speaker, I salute my colleague and thank him for his comments and questions.

Obviously, we have reached a record debt level, which is troubling. Every dollar borrowed must serve the economy well.

As I said before, there was some consensus on maintaining income for those who lost their jobs during the pandemic. The money used for the recovery must generate more savings than it costs.

I remind you that there were apparently a million cases of fraud in the Canada Revenue Agency's CERB program. That is troubling, and we need to investigate. If that is the case, the government failed miserably. A million cases of fraud is unacceptable.

[*English*]

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Madam Speaker, I agree with my colleague that the finance committee certainly is going to have its work cut out for it. Tying into the last question on the size of the debt, I am very concerned that, as we have seen in the past, it is going to be small businesses and our vulnerable workers who have to shoulder this burden while very wealthy corporations and very wealthy individuals have been making out like bandits for this entire pandemic.

I know the member has spoken at great length in previous speeches about tax evasion, tax avoidance and the need for a wealth tax. Can he tell the House about maybe his disappointment that the budget did not really address those key areas? Going forward, the government needs to make sure those at the very top are in fact paying their fair share and that the burden is not unfairly falling on everyone else, as we have seen in the past.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague, and I sincerely salute all the work he does in the House for the well-being of ordinary Canadians.

Can Canada still afford to allow the wealthiest, multinationals and Bay Street banks to shelter their money to avoid paying income tax? Given the colossal amount the pandemic cost, can we still allow them that privilege? In my opinion, we cannot.

Everyone should contribute according to their means. I am thinking about the big Bay Street banks that earned more than \$40 billion in 2020, that took advantage of the pandemic and that are protected by regulation. They should no longer be able to use tax havens to avoid paying income tax. The budget presented by the minister does some things, but does not go far enough. We will continue to put pressure on the government.

• (1745)

Mr. Denis Trudel: Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his knowledgeable speech. I can see that he knows what he is talking about when it comes to finance, and I am very happy to be part of his team and to not have to make that kind of speech.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I would ask the member to make sure his microphone is connected, because there seems to be a problem.

Mr. Denis Trudel: Is it working, Madam Speaker?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): It is not any better.

We will move on to the member for New Westminster—Burnaby and come back to the member for Longueuil—Saint-Hubert afterward.

The hon. member for New Westminster—Burnaby.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Speaker, my colleague, whom I much admire and whom I work with on the Standing Committee on Finance, mentioned the whole issue of tax havens, the lack of a tax on wealth that other countries have put in place and the fact that there is no tax on pandemic-related profits, even though billionaires saw their wealth grow by \$78 billion during the pandemic.

Meanwhile, we are seeing contradictions. The government made cuts to emergency programs. Students are being forced to pay back their loans during the pandemic, and of course there is nothing in the budget for people with disabilities, who will have to wait three years for bogus consultations.

I would like to ask my colleague whether he sees a contradiction in this situation, where the ultra-rich are not paying anything and ordinary Canadians are being forced to bear the entire burden of this pandemic.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Madam Speaker, the admiration is mutual. I appreciate how productively we work together at the Standing Committee on Finance.

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He raised some super-important issues. As I was saying to a colleague who spoke earlier, this inequity has been around for decades. It is actually getting worse. The gap between rich and poor is widening.

My question is, given the economic and social costs of the pandemic, can society still afford to hand out gifts to the very rich?

I think the answer is clear. The answer is no, and this has to change now.

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Madam Speaker, I know my colleague is well acquainted with the housing crisis happening in Quebec right now. I think the housing crisis comes up pretty much every day.

There was an announcement today about \$100 million for renovations in Montreal, but the Fédération des locataires d'habitations à loyer modique du Québec, which advocates for affordable housing, said that what the system needs is more like \$400 million.

The rapid housing initiative, or RHI, which my colleague is familiar with, was launched in the fall. The government just injected \$1.5 billion, but the Federation of Canadian Municipalities asked it to put \$7 billion into the program. Ottawa clearly does not understand the gravity of the housing situation. All we ever see is a piecemeal approach.

Does my colleague agree that we need game-changing investments to deal with Quebec's current housing crisis?

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague and send him my regards.

I congratulate him on the work he is doing for social housing and affordable housing. He is out there on the ground with people and doing an excellent job. I am proud to be part of his team, no doubt about it.

If social housing is in such bad shape, it is because Ottawa withdrew from the file in the 1990s, essentially abandoning it. Quebec did take it over but had limited means, which resulted in a senseless step backward in social housing. There is a huge amount of catching up to do.

In the last year we have had a minority government, which has helped. The government came up with some money, but neither the approach nor the amount were really enough to address the root of the problem that, I remind the House, Ottawa itself created.

• (1750)

[*English*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Resuming debate, the hon. member for New Westminster—Burnaby will be able to start his debate. However, I will have to interrupt him. He will be able to continue the next time this matter is before the House.

The hon. member for New Westminster—Burnaby.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to mention that I am speaking today

from the traditional unceded territory of the Qayqayt First Nation and of the Coast Salish peoples.

[*English*]

I would like to underscore today, sadly. As members know, every day in Parliament I wear the Moose Hide square to commemorate the stolen sisters, missing and murdered indigenous women and girls, and two-spirit people. Today is Red Dress Day, when we commemorate their lives and we recommit to fight for accountability, dignity and justice and to say that there will be, one day, no more stolen sisters.

I have only a few minutes to start the debate today, but I would like to set the table talking about a tale of two countries during this pandemic.

During this pandemic, we have seen one country, a country of very ultrawealthy Canadians, billionaires who have seen their wealth increase by \$78 billion during this pandemic, an astounding amount. At the same time, we have seen unprecedented supports showered on the banking sector to maintain bank profits, \$750 billion in liquidity supports, which has led to, so far in the pandemic and we will have the latest figures in the next few weeks, over \$40 billion in profits.

This flies in the face of every other crisis we have come through, where there has been a sense that we are all in this together and that the ultrarich have to pay their fair share. Notably, in the Second World War, an excess profits tax ensured that we had the wherewithal to fight Nazism and fascism and to rebuild, most vigorously, our economy, putting in place record investments in health care, education, housing and transportation in the postwar period. Sadly, that is not the case through this pandemic with the current government, which has allowed the ultrarich to benefit, to profit and to profiteer in an unprecedented way and refuses even to ask them to pay their fair share of taxes.

There is another country in this tale of two countries, and that is regular Canadians who have been struggling through this pandemic. We have seen Canadians losing their jobs. We have seen Canadians who have invested in their family-owned community businesses for years having to take that sad step of closing the door and turning the key for the very last time. We have seen students struggling to pay for their student loan during the course of this pandemic, as if paying back a Canada student loan should be their priority, rather than putting food on the table or keeping a roof over their heads. We have seen people with disabilities who have struggled and, through this entire pandemic, in about a third of cases with people with disabilities, they have received a \$600 one-time stipend.

I contrast that with the land of the billionaires and the banks, with \$750 billion in liquidity supports, \$78 billion in increased wealth and \$42 billion in profits. Throughout this pandemic, we have seen our inequalities exacerbated. We have seen more and more that difference between the ultrawealthy and all the privilege they get from the government, and the struggles that regular Canadian families are having to go through.

I must shout out to our frontline workers, the health care workers and the emergency responders, all of whom have been struggling with all of the financial challenges of this pandemic, often with no supports at all, and at the same time are showing, with great courage, their ability to continue to fight and contribute, fight for people's lives and support Canadians in the health care system, as first responders or as frontline workers. This is the contrast—

• (1755)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member will have 15 minutes and 10 seconds left to raise this matter before the House the next time the bill is brought forward.

It being 5:55 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

INCOME TAX ACT

The House resumed from April 21 consideration of the motion that Bill C-208, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (transfer of small business or family farm or fishing corporation), be read the third time and passed.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Malpeque had nine minutes left when the debate resumed last time.

The hon. member for Malpeque.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to get the opportunity to speak a little further on Bill C-208, an act to amend the Income Tax Act regarding transfer of a small business, a family farm or a fishing corporation, which is sponsored by the member for Brandon—Souris.

As members know, Bill C-208 is now at third reading stage. How did it get here? Simply put, Bill C-208 has had considerable debate in the House and was referred to the finance committee, which I chair. I will make a few comments on what witnesses had to say before committee in a moment. The finance committee referred the bill back to the House without amendment.

Bill C-208 has a long history, and it criss-crosses the political landscape. It was first introduced by the current member of Parliament for Bourassa, a Liberal, two parliaments ago. In the last Parliament, the same bill was brought forward by Guy Caron, an NDP member. Now, in this current Parliament, it is sponsored by the member for Brandon—Souris, a Conservative member.

This long history, across all major political parties in the House, certainly shows that there is a need to bring fairness and equity from a taxation perspective to the transfer of family farm corporations, fisheries enterprises and small family businesses. Quite honestly, it is long past time that this problem was fixed.

During an earlier discussion at third reading, it was suggested by the government spokesman that just maybe the bill could provide opportunities for tax avoidance. I would agree that tax avoidance is a legitimate concern. However, I must point out that at the finance

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committee we heard from 17 witnesses, and every opportunity was given to address the concern of tax avoidance. We called on the public and Finance Canada to provide witnesses and propose amendments, to anybody who had those kinds of concerns.

I certainly appreciate that the assistant deputy minister of the tax policy branch and the senior director of the tax legislation division in the tax policy branch appeared and answered questions, and their comments appear in the transcript for the finance committee for anybody who wants to see it. To be fair, they did outline some concerns, especially as it relates to what is called "surplus stripping" for the purpose of tax avoidance.

Where does that leave us? On the one hand, we have concerns being expressed by officials, and I do take their concerns seriously. On the other hand, we have a broad section of witnesses who expressed a serious and immediate need for a way to transfer a small business, farming corporation or fishing enterprise without facing unfair taxation when transferring to a family member. We do not see amendments to the bill that would fix this alleged problem.

I would even agree with those who might say that private members' bills are not the best vehicle to change tax policy. They are not. However, we simply cannot allow this inequity disadvantaging intergenerational transfers to family members to continue. It is time to accept the only change that is on the table to fix the problem, and that happens to be Bill C-208.

The sponsor of the bill, the member for Brandon—Souris, gave about the most concise and clear example of this inequity in the tax system. He said:

The second example was a father wanting to sell his farm to his son to fund his retirement. If the father were to sell his farm to a stranger, he could use his capital gains exemption on the sale, resulting in an effective tax rate of 13.39%. However, if the farmer sold his farm to his son, that sale would be recorded as a dividend rather than a capital gain, and the farmer would pay 47.4% in tax. That is a huge difference, and I think we can all agree that it is completely unfair.

The second quote is from Ms. Robyn Young, president-elect of the Insurance Brokers Association of Canada.

• (1800)

She said this:

In closing, this is an issue of equity and fairness. Business owners should not be penalized for selling their business to a family member. Tax implications should never be a consideration when making the decision to sell a business to a family member.

There were many other good witnesses I could quote and make the point on this serious inequity, including the UPA, the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, other farming and fishing organizations, the tax manager at Deloitte, underwriting companies and more, but I think members get my point.

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The backbone of many communities are small businesses, farmers and fishermen. Those who can pass a business down from generation to generation create the history and the character of many of our communities in the country. We need to give every opportunity for those families to make that transfer.

It is absolutely true that during this pandemic the federal government has been there in every way possible to support Canadians, businesses, farmers and fishermen. Tax policy, however, should not cause a disincentive to transfer to the next generation. Tax fairness should be the cornerstone on which to encourage intergenerational transfers. This bill would move tax policy in that direction.

Finance Canada, and the government for that matter, always have the option to put forward corrections in a ways and means motion if concerns expressed before committee do arise in reality. That, in itself, is a safeguard. They have the ability to do that fairly quickly through a ways and means motion. However, farmers, fishermen and small business owners, with respect to the unfairness of this taxation system, have been waiting for this change for years.

We have to put the shoe on the other foot. Instead of having those families that want intergenerational transfers sitting in the wings waiting for something to happen, we have to pass this bill and put the shoe on the other foot. If there is a problem, then government has the ability to fix that problem. I am encouraging others to recognize this problem.

I, for sure, will be supporting Bill C-208, and I hope others can do the same.

• (1805)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Madam Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague on his speech, which was interesting. My speech will be along the same lines as his, as it was all very sensible.

In his speech, my colleague said that Bill C-208, an act to amend the Income Tax Act, is not partisan. The bill does not belong to the Liberal Party, the Conservative Party, the NDP or the Bloc Québécois.

In fact, since there were no questions and comments following the remarks by the previous speaker, I would like to point out an oversight. I believe it was an oversight. Perhaps not, but I hope it was.

He mentioned some of the previous versions of this bill intended to facilitate the transfer of family businesses. Yes, the hon. member for Bourassa did in fact introduce legislation to facilitate the transfer of family businesses when he was in opposition a few years ago. Yes, it is also true that the former member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, Guy Caron, had also introduced legislation to facilitate the transfer of family businesses.

However, my colleague may have forgotten that the member speaking right now, in other words me, also had the opportunity to introduce Bill C-275, which sought to facilitate the transfer of family businesses. I introduced it at roughly the same time as my former colleague from Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques. In fact, as we were announcing the introduction of this bill, my for-

mer colleague from Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques thought it was such a good idea that he quickly introduced his bill as well.

There was a bit of a friendly competition about doing the right thing. We wanted parents who want to hand down their business to their children to stop being penalized. This only makes sense, because it is good to see a family's achievement carry on.

Now it is the Conservatives' turn to introduce a similar bill. At the time, when they were in government, the Conservatives were against it, but now they support the cause. Of course we are very pleased to see that, but we are still disappointed to see that the current Liberal government does not seem to want to support the bill. It is hard to understand. How is it that when the Liberal and Conservative parties are in the opposition they want to do the right thing, but when they are in power they do not? That is quite disappointing, to say the least.

When this type of bill is introduced, many people pay attention to the ongoing debates. When the bill was introduced, and then when we began debating it, I immediately alerted certain businesses in my riding as well as some people I went to school with who also wanted to take over their family businesses. After seeing so many bills fail, they were all excited and hoped that this one would come to fruition.

In the meantime, after so many bills failed to pass in previous parliaments, the Quebec government decided to act. Quebec changed its tax legislation to allow the transfer of family businesses. It would seem that the federal government is frozen and incapable of moving forward. When either the Liberals or the Conservatives come to power, everything suddenly stops and fails to move forward.

I am making a heartfelt plea, which I believe echoes the pleas of the people who have been contacting me. They want to know what progress has been made on this bill and whether it will pass. Sometimes I tell them that even if my bill does not pass, some measures might well be included in a budget. In several economic updates and even in some budgets, the government stated that it would work to facilitate the transfer of family businesses and that it would examine the legislation to make certain improvements.

Once again, the government is giving people hope. People are thinking that maybe the government is finally going to do something. It is disappointing, because year after year there is always a holdup. Is it an administrative problem or does the bill run counter to some kind of interest? I do not know who would have an interest in preventing families from passing their business from one family member to another.

• (1810)

Passing a business on to the next generation is not easy. It is rare. People often say that it is difficult to transfer a business and to encourage their children to take over the family business. When their children do want to take over, why are we stopping them from doing so? Why would we financially penalize those who pass their business on to family members but not penalize those who do not? Why is it more profitable to sell one's business to anyone other than one's own children?

For example, I could sell my business to a stranger and make more money. There are many parents who have to think about that option. Obviously, all parents want what is best for their children, but when they see that passing their business on to their children could, in some cases, cost them hundreds of thousands of dollars, many of them have to stop and think about whether doing so is financially viable for them. Not all business owners have millions of dollars put away. Often these business owners invested in their business thinking that they would use it for their retirement. They therefore want to be able to benefit from it.

This is creating quite the dilemma for people. If they pass their business on to their children, then they may have to forgo their retirement. It is really disappointing to see that this situation has not yet been resolved. That is why I wanted to speak today, to bring to light this issue, this problem.

We also have to look further ahead. What happens when there is no one in a family to take over the business? The owner has to seek out someone else, approaching businesses or people who are already well established, such as a competitor, a bigger company. That is what poses a problem.

Family farms can disappear when they are taken over by larger farms. I have nothing against large farms, by why not let small businesses exist and prosper, run by people who are working for themselves and being their own boss? I think that would be nice. However, we are faced with a bill that hinders that possibility.

If we let farms disappear, if we let small businesses disappear because there is nobody to take them over, we are making other people think it is not easy to start a business or start a farm. Ultimately, if we want to allow those transfers, if we want to avoid seeing mega-businesses and mega-farms that are held by shareholders and operated by absentee executives and managers who live who knows where or are very far away from the customer, the consumer, we have to be flexible and attentive to this concern.

I studied accounting. Business owners and I are not the only ones saying we are frustrated. We are also hearing that from accountants, accounting students and professors, who have been saying for ages that the government is not interested in listening or understanding. We were hearing it back in the early 2000s, when I was in university. Professors did not understand why the government was not doing something about this issue. All the students were appalled to learn that, by law, this kind of capital gain was considered a dividend, which meant at least twice as much tax had to be paid on that gain. Financially, that hurts. Like it or not, money influences these decisions and affects the young people who would like to take over.

As I see that my time is almost up and I do not want you to interrupt, Madam Speaker, I will conclude with a heartfelt plea. I implore the government to finally listen to the wishes of the business world, small businesses, members of the House and members of the Standing Committee on Finance and to do the right thing by supporting and passing this much-needed bill.

[English]

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is a great honour to be standing virtually in the House and speaking to Bill C-208. I would like to thank the

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member for Brandon—Souris for being the sponsor of this bill. He is the latest in a fairly long line of MPs who have been trying to achieve this legislative proposal.

I was present in the 42nd Parliament when my former colleague, Guy Caron, brought in Bill C-274, and I remember his passionate speech in the House of Commons during its second reading. He was trying to illustrate the reasons why that legislation was so important. It was great to witness that speech, but ultimately it was very disappointing to see the vote results when the Liberal government at the time used its majority to prevent the bill from going any further.

I am glad to see this time it has been different, by virtue of the fact that we are in a minority Parliament and the opposition used its combined numbers to send this bill to the Standing Committee on Finance where it had a good airing. We got to hear from many witnesses, and ultimately the committee decided to send the bill back to us for our final consideration. It is my sincere hope that this bill will be sent off to the other place and that we can look forward to royal assent, hopefully in the near future.

When Bill C-274 was being considered in the previous Parliament, I had a meeting with the Port Renfrew Chamber of Commerce. I was given a 10-minute speaking spot during their AGM, and when I talked about Bill C-274 at that time and about what we were hoping to do, I got unanimous positive feedback from the members of that chamber. For those who do not know, Port Renfrew is on the southwest coast of Vancouver Island. Many people there depend on fishing for their livelihoods. They are either commercial fishermen or are in sport fishing, so they have small fishing corporations. To have the ability put forward to transfer their businesses to family members really meant a lot to them. There was overwhelmingly positive feedback. I ultimately had to give them bad news, but here we are with a real opportunity to try to bring about some positive change.

This bill is pretty much tailor-made for the types of small businesses that exist in the riding I represent, Cowichan—Malahat—Langford. Like so many members before me, I want to acknowledge the pain and suffering that small businesses have gone through over the last year. I think it is incumbent upon us not only to have support programs to help them through the pandemic, but also to bring about long-term systemic change to important statutes such as the Income Tax Act, so that we can make their business operations and their succession planning that much easier.

My riding is dominated by farming as well. Here in the Cowichan Valley we have a beautiful climate. It is, I think, Canada's only Mediterranean climate and we have a very long and storied agricultural history. We have generational family farms here. Some have the fifth generation of a family farming the same plot of land. If we can bring about legislative change that makes succession easier and gives them peace of mind, I think we are doing a good thing.

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I also want to give a shout-out to the five chambers of commerce in my riding: Chemainus, Cowichan Lake District, Duncan Cowichan, Port Renfrew and WestShore. They have all been incredible advocates for their members. I have been staying in touch with them quite consistently over the last year and their feedback during this pandemic has been invaluable in helping me, as a member, advocate on their behalf in Ottawa to make sure that the federal government's policies and programs are reflecting their needs.

I will concentrate mostly on family farms, given the nature of my riding and the fact that I am the NDP's critic for agriculture and agri-food. When we look at family farms, we are looking at \$50 billion in farm assets that are set to change hands over the next 10 years. History has shown us that roughly 8,000 family farms have disappeared over the last decade.

● (1815)

The National Farmers Union has done an incredible report on the status of Canada's farms, called "Tackling the Farm Crisis and the Climate Crisis". It not only looks at agriculture in the context of climate change, but also the financial footing that many farms are on and how shaky it is. According to the NFU, Canadian farm debt has doubled since the year 2000. That is in 21 short years. It was listed at \$106 billion in 2019.

Many farms have to chase income from off-farm work, taxpayer support programs and other farm sources. That is just a reality for so many small farms. What is really concerning is that we have lost two-thirds of our young farmers since 1991. The family farm is pretty much being systematically destroyed in Canada, and we need to put measures in place that are going to help.

Why is Bill C-208 so important? The owners of small businesses, family farms and fishing operations who want to retire want to be able to sell to their children because it is often their children who have been brought up in the family business and on the family farm. From a young age they have learned the culture of the business and what it does, and they often have a lot invested in that business continuing to succeed. The next generation often has very important ideas about where to take that business.

When parents decide to sell their business to their children, the difference between the sale price and the price originally paid is currently considered a dividend, but if they sell their business to an unrelated individual or corporation it is considered a capital gain. Unlike capital gains, a dividend does not include the right to a lifetime exemption and is taxed more heavily. We can make a measurable improvement in allowing families to pass on businesses that might have been part of a family for generations to their children, making it easier for that work to get done.

I want to recognize the work done at the Standing Committee on Finance. I appreciate the witnesses who appeared. Many of them also appeared at the agriculture committee. We heard important testimony from the CFIB, the Grain Growers of Canada, L'Union des producteurs agricoles and, of course, the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, which has been such an incredibly important voice for farmers from coast to coast to coast.

They noted at committee that the average age of Canadian farmers is now above 55, and the opportunities these businesses face

will carry into the next generation. It is a sector in which the vast majority of businesses remain family owned, and maintaining the financial health of those businesses across generations is critical. At committee, the CFA very clearly said that it supported Bill C-208 because it would ensure that real family farm transfers could access the same capital gains treatment as businesses selling to unrelated parties, rather than treating the difference as a dividend that was taxed at a higher rate and not being able to access the lifetime capital gains exemption.

We have an important opportunity before us. During the vote at second reading, I was sad to see that 145 Liberal MPs voted against this bill. Two Liberal MPs supported it. It is my sincere hope that when this bill comes to a final vote to be sent to the Senate, Liberals can finally see this as an important opportunity and can represent the interests of small businesses, family farms and fishing corporations by making this much-needed change to the Income Tax Act and doing right by their constituents.

I, for one, will be proud to vote in favour of Bill C-208 and send it on its journey. I look forward to the day when we can finally see it receive royal assent.

● (1820)

Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Madam Speaker, what a privilege and honour it is to speak to Bill C-208. Not often in the House do we find a private member's bill that has all-party support, and this is one of those unique situations.

For many small business owners, business succession is an important factor to consider when planning for the future. This is no surprise. When they spend so much of their time and energy pouring hour after hour into running their operation, what happens to the fruits of their labour when it is time for them to retire or move on matters to them.

However, surveys tell us that only about half of small businesses have a succession plan. I suspect that is because they are caught up in the day-to-day running of their businesses. However, whether they are thinking about succession early on or are confronting succession decisions near the time of transition, somewhere along the line these entrepreneurs face a frustrating reality: It is more expensive to sell an incorporated small business, or a family farm or fishing enterprise, to a family member than to a stranger.

What is behind this? When a business is sold to a family member, it is considered a dividend. When sold to a stranger, it is considered a capital gain and is eligible for capital gains exemption. In its simplest form, when selling to a family member the tax rate is higher for the seller than when selling to a stranger. That tax rate is significantly lower.

This is not right, and it is not fair. About half of small business owners are hoping to sell or transfer their operations to family members when it is time for them to move on. If members have spent even a little time around family-run businesses, the “why” becomes clear. Sometimes kids are raised in the business and learn the ropes at a young age. They come to know the ins and outs of the business better than anyone. They put in the time, they know the customers and they are established figures in their communities. When the time comes for succession, they are an obvious option for so many reasons.

This is where Bill C-208 comes in. It seeks to achieve tax fairness for business succession by amending the Income Tax Act to level the playing field. It would allow a small business owner the same tax rate when selling their operation to a family member as when selling to a third party. It would correct the injustice within the act that unfairly punishes individuals when they sell their qualifying small business, farm or fishing operation to their own family.

During the finance committee's study of the bill, Brian Janzen, a senior tax manager with Deloitte, gave an example to help members understand just how stark the financial difference currently is between selling to a family member and selling to a stranger. He said:

Right now, if you have a \$1-million business and you sell your shares—in a restaurant, let's say—to your neighbour, you will walk away with after-tax proceeds from a \$1-million sale of about \$971,000. That's only \$29,000 of leakage....

There are various ways to sell your shares to your kids under the current regime of section 84.1, but I'll just use the worst-case scenario. The worst-case scenario is that your kid sets up a holding company, or holdco, and buys your shares from you. In Manitoba, that will cost you \$466,000 because of the deemed dividend. That's a difference, between the two scenarios, of \$437,000. That's just crazy.

He is right. That is crazy, especially when we consider the value small business continuity can have in our communities. Small business owners have often built strong relationships with their customers over the long term. They have employees, whether a couple or a couple dozen, whom they care about and have invested in. They are plugged into their communities in multiple ways. Whether by supporting local food banks, sponsoring sports clubs or donating to construct a new community centre, small businesses are there.

Handing that over to a stranger, perhaps someone from out of town, may not be the best situation for the business owners or their communities. When they have built something and invested plenty of sweat equity in their operation, it is understandable to want to hand it off to someone who can carry on that legacy.

Robyn Young, president-elect of the Insurance Brokers Association of Canada, told the finance committee about her experience of purchasing the family business from her parents. She said:

When my parents decided to sell their business, they received an offer from a large direct writer. They ultimately chose to sell the business to me and my brother, because it was important to them to keep the business they had built within the family. They also wanted to ensure that their clients would continue to receive the same expert advice and personal touch they had come to expect.

She went on to say:

Family-run brokerages are the pillars of the community and the lifeblood of the economy. They serve and support their communities in good times and bad by creating employment and donating time, money and other resources.

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• (1825)

These are the considerations for many small business owners looking at succession planning. There needs to be a level playing field that empowers owners to make the best choice for them and their communities.

The current inequity is a reality that impacts a variety of types of small businesses, but I want to take a moment to talk about farm families specifically.

Agriculture is incredibly capital intensive, and as Scott Ross of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture told the finance committee, “effective succession planning is critically important, particularly for a sector that will transfer tens of billions of dollars in assets to the next generation in this decade alone.” Uniquely, the agriculture sector continues to be one where the vast majority of farms, even though they are incorporated, still remain family owned. This has considerable advantages for all Canadians since, as Mr. Ross highlighted, “studies show that family farming encourages sustainable growth, environmental stewardship and increased spending within one’s local community, not to mention its contributions to the social fabric of rural Canada.”

I share several commonalities with the bill's sponsor, the member for Brandon—Souris. For one, we were both elected in the same 2013 by-election. More importantly for today's discussion, we both have “farmer” on our resumes. We are very familiar with the immense benefits that farming and agriculture provide to the communities we represent. By passing Bill C-208, the House can acknowledge the tremendous contributions that our farmers make and can help ensure tax fairness for farm succession.

Throughout debate on this bill, we have heard some members suggest that this change will just benefit the rich or create opportunities for tax avoidance. I want to address this head-on because that is a mischaracterization that finance committee testimony swiftly put to rest.

The bill includes tax-avoidance safeguards mandating that the family member who purchases the operation must maintain their shares for a minimum of five years to avoid penalization. As Deloitte senior tax manager Brian Janzen confirmed, “This bill is helping the lower end of the small business community. It is not helping the huge, rich companies, even if they're family owned.” He also told the finance committee that Bill C-208 has enough guardrails to prevent tax avoidance, even as he urged vigilance so that tweaks could be made if required.

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Like all colleagues, I wanted to make sure that the bill did not providing an undue benefit to large corporations. I therefore asked Mr. Jansen very specifically about those concerns. He said it did not benefit large corporations, “partly because of the guardrails you have in this bill, but also because for the larger companies...section 84.1 and the capital gains exemption didn't even come into play. The numbers are big enough that this is just...not material to the larger private businesses. This is really helping the small private business.”

It is clear that this bill strikes the right balance between providing tax fairness and preventing abuse. I encourage any members who feel differently to review the testimony before the finance committee. They will see experts addressing these concerns and urging the bill's swift passage.

There were 145 Liberal members who voted against this common-sense bill at second reading. Meanwhile, members of all the opposition parties supported it, and so did two Liberal MPs. I sincerely appreciate the two Liberal members who voted in favour of this bill. They recognized the positive impact that it would have on their constituents. I hope that the testimony we have heard since that time will help other Liberal MPs better understand why they ought to lend their support to Bill C-208. Their constituents deserve tax fairness.

I want to wrap up by saying thanks to the member for Brandon—Souris for introducing this pertinent legislation. His efforts are going to make a real difference in the lives of many small business owners and farm families. We have seen iterations of this bill brought forward by multiple parties over the years, and this goes to show that there is cross-party support for this bill. It is time to get it over the finish line.

I invite all my colleagues to support small business and vote in favour of Bill C-208. Let us get it passed and get it to the Senate. Hopefully it will deal with it as expeditiously as the House has. I am thankful for the opportunity to speak to the bill.

• (1830)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Madam Speaker, it is an honour and a privilege for me to speak to this bill at third reading stage.

At its annual general meeting, the Syndicat de la relève agricole d'Abitibi-Témiscamingue called on MPs from the Abitibi-Témiscamingue area to support Bill C-208 and to actively contribute to its passage before the next election. That is my role today in bringing debate to a close at third reading.

The resolution of the Syndicat de la relève agricole d'Abitibi-Témiscamingue speaks of fairness when transferring agricultural farms. At present, when an individual sells their shares in their small business or family farm corporation to a family member, the difference between the sale price and the initial purchase price is treated as a dividend. However, if the business or corporation is sold to someone other than a family member, this transaction is treated as a capital gain.

Bill C-208 would give small businesses, farming families and fishing families the same tax treatment whether they sell their business to a family member or a third party. The economic landscape of our region is made up of a growing number of incorporated farms and family fishing corporations, which is why the Syndicat de la relève agricole d'Abitibi-Témiscamingue adopted this resolution, and I am here to honour it.

I had the opportunity to take part in the debate on this bill in November 2020, and I remember that my presentation centred on the fact that, incredible as it may seem, a business owner is currently better off selling their business to outside shareholders than to members of their own family. As I said, under the existing legislation, the transfer of a business to a family member is treated as a dividend and not as a capital gain, unlike a sale to a third party. As a result, owners are not entitled to the lifetime capital gains exemption if they decide to sell the business to their children.

The Bloc Québécois is in favour of Bill C-208. For several years now, my party has been calling for measures to encourage and facilitate the transfer of family businesses, especially in the agriculture and fisheries sectors. I would also like to acknowledge the work of my colleague, the member for Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, who had the opportunity to speak before me and who introduced Bill C-275 back in the day.

The Bloc Québécois has been calling for measures to encourage and facilitate the transfer of family businesses for over 15 years. For Quebeckers, the Bloc Québécois and myself, business succession is important. It is also important for our SMEs in general, but especially for family farms in the regions, like the Abitibi-Témiscamingue region. Perhaps we will soon have the opportunity to speak of Bill C-208 and its consequences in the past tense, a thought that fills me with excitement.

The existing legislation makes no sense at all. What is prompting the Liberal Party to vote against Bill C-208? They are raising the possibility of tax abuse and tax fraud, but we know that the Parliamentary Budget Officer questioned the amount of money that the Liberal government estimated would be lost, calculating that it would be tens or hundreds of millions instead of billions of dollars. Speaking of losses, I still do not understand why the government is not cracking down on tax havens.

I would like to share the comments of a farmer from my riding, a friend of mine named Simon Leblond, who was the president of the Fédération de la relève agricole du Québec when I was working for the union. With regard to the transfer of family farms, he said that it is important to maintain a large enough pool of farmers to maintain services for farms and, more generally, to ensure the vitality of the industry, make it known to those outside the world of agriculture, and ensure interest.

Farmers face major challenges, and I think it is important to point that out. Some of the challenges faced by farmers in Abitibi-Témiscamingue and everywhere else include land grabbing, farmland financialization, the whole issue of income security, vet services for farm animals, crop insurance and agricultural drainage. These are major challenges, and improving access to land and quality of life for Quebec's young farmers is one way to ensure a future in agriculture for Quebec's youth.

The more people we have who are willing to take over farms, the more services we will be able to provide. It is a cycle, but unfortunately that cycle has been broken. I hope that we can get that cycle going again and that we will see more and more young people taking over farms. Land prices, quota prices and new forms of agricultural production are leading to higher costs every year, and the red tape is becoming increasingly cumbersome, making it harder and harder for farmers to access land and operate their business. As politicians, we have a responsibility in that regard. I repeat: It is not right that a business owner is better off selling the business to a third party than to their own family members.

• (1835)

The Government of Quebec included measures in its 2016 budget to facilitate the transfer of family businesses in the primary and manufacturing sectors. A change to Quebec's Taxation Act relaxed the rule that prohibited the seller from using the capital gains tax exemption. Quebec has addressed this issue, while the federal government still lags behind, or at least it was lagging until now. I remind members that the Parliamentary Budget Officer assessed the cost of these measures, and his figure was lower than what the federal government was claiming.

I want to get back to the speech my colleague from Berthier—Maskinongé made about Bill C-208 at second reading. I want to make a little aside, though, and I want to acknowledge and commend our colleague, the member for Brandon—Souris, for his leadership. I would like to congratulate the Conservative Party for its leadership in this debate, because Bill C-208 has been given priority on two occasions at third reading. That is why we are debating it today. I hope that we will be able to vote on this bill by next week so that it can be sent to the Senate and then get royal assent. That would be the blessing that so many have hoped for. I will give some examples soon, but I just wanted to mention that.

The member for Berthier—Maskinongé said:

...what we are really talking about are small and medium-sized businesses, which are the backbone of our economy. We need to keep these businesses alive and make sure they survive. We need to make sure that these small businesses can keep going and that they are not put at a disadvantage where they will end up being bought out by big corporations. The survival of these small businesses is directly connected to the survival of our regions. This is why I am appealing to all of my colleagues.

I second my colleague from Berthier—Maskinongé's appeal because the Bloc Québécois stands for human-scale enterprises.

I also want to say that I got to be part of the debates that took place when Bill C-208 was sent to the Standing Committee on Finance. On March 9, Julie Bissonnette, a dairy farmer in L'Avenir and the president of the Fédération de la relève agricole du Québec, and Philippe Pagé, the FRAQ's general director and mayor of Saint-Camille, had this to say:

Bill C-208 is significant for young farmers because we believe it will encourage the transfer of farms to family members and go a long way towards correcting tax unfairness, while supporting a strong farming community.

As an organization whose mission is to protect the interests of the next generation of farmers and improve conditions for those starting out, it has taken a clear position. The FRAQ representatives also wanted the committee to know that some young Canadians are

seeing their dreams evaporate because of ill-conceived tax rules. They said:

The numbers speak for themselves. A business that is transferred to a family member is six times more likely to succeed than a business transferred to someone outside the family. What's more, 70% of all entrepreneurs in Quebec would prefer to keep their businesses in the family. Even today, selling a business to a related party is the preferred way to transfer a farm. Our tax system should support all young farmers, no matter their path to business ownership, something the system does not currently do.

Marcel Groleau, from the Union des producteurs agricoles, echoed these comments. During the same meeting, he mentioned the pride that comes from completing a successful transfer, saying:

Some 98% of the country's farms are family owned and operated. That business model is a source of pride for Canadians. Family farming promotes sustainable growth, environmental stewardship and reinvestment in local economies.

He added:

According to a 2017 study by the Business Development Bank of Canada, nearly 40% of small businesses will be transferred or sold by the end of 2022 as owners near retirement.

There is an urgent need for action. Obviously, the reference to subsection 84(1) of the Income Tax Act is one of the things that needs to be revised. The act has not evolved to reflect the context and the demographic pressure that applies to farms.

I also want to mention the support of Daniel Kelly, the president and CEO of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, or CFIB, who appeared before the Standing Committee on Finance and was quite happy to express CFIB's very favourable position on the bill. I should note that 17% of business owners are seriously considering shutting down, that Bill C-208 would facilitate business transfers and, most importantly, that it is time for a resolution and for significant action.

I will conclude by recalling two points raised by Mr. Groleau, who shared some data from the Commission de protection du territoire agricole, Quebec's farmland protection commission. He pointed out that everything is documented and that we are seeing an increasing number of transactions involving farmland being carried out by investors rather than by producers. The investors' interest lies in renting out the land while they wait to potentially do something else with it.

• (1840)

The devil is in the details, and it will be important to move on in order to meet the needs of the next generation of farmers.

[English]

Mr. Dan Mazier (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise today to speak to a very important bill that would positively impact countless farmers and small business owners across Canada if passed.

I want to sincerely thank my colleague, the member for Brandon—Souris, for introducing the bill to Parliament and making so much progress on this issue. I am fortunate to work with my Manitoba colleague, who gained my profound respect for representing his constituents in an exceptional manner throughout his tenure as a member of Parliament.

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Bill C-208, an act to amend the Income Tax Act, would provide tax fairness for farmers and small business owners across our nation.

This may surprise most Canadians, but selling a farm or a small business to an unknown third party receives better tax treatment than selling that same business to a family member. The current structure of the Income Tax Act penalizes farm and small business owners from transferring their operations to a member of their own family. This discrepancy in tax treatment can result in hundreds of thousands of dollars in more taxes if sold to family as opposed to a stranger.

For example, imagine a couple who has owned a local auto repair shop in Manitoba for decades and is ready to retire. These owners have worked hard to support their family and community and their business is now worth \$1 million. The couple is approached by a multinational auto repair company that has no roots in the community but wants to buy the business. If owners were to sell their business to this unknown third party, they would incur \$29,000 in taxes.

Their son is also interested in buying the local business as he looks to raise a family and make a living in the community in which he grew up. However, if their son were to purchase the same company at the same price, his parents could pay up to \$466,000 in taxes, a tax difference of \$437,000.

Now the couple who owns the auto repair shop must make a decision. Do the owners sell to the multinational company and maximize their retirement fund or do they sell to their son and keep the business in the family? Why should small business owners be placed in a position to choose between sacrificing their retirement fund or sacrificing the word family in their family business? The answer is obvious: they should not.

However, thousands of business owners spend their entire careers operating their businesses with the expectation of passing it to their children. They do not realize the staggering tax difference they will be indebted with until they part ways with their business. This puts retirement and business plans at risk.

The constituency of Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa is built on the foundation of small business and agriculture. These sectors are the lifeblood to the vibrant rural communities of our region. I was raised and spent my entire life in rural Manitoba. I understand how these businesses support our communities and the families within.

Last year, I spent a year touring rural Manitoba to meet specifically with small businesses to hear their priorities and concerns. One of the most prominent things I heard was the concern of what the future would look like in rural populations as aging and younger generations moved to urban centres. Many rural communities rely on a single business to provide a good or service.

I think of the No. 5 Store in the rural town of Riding Mountain, located between the community of Neepawa and Ste. Rose. This family run business is the only supplier of essential goods and services to the Riding Mountain community. Locals rely on the No. 5 Store for their everyday essentials like groceries and mail.

Small businesses like these provide families with goods and services needed to successfully make a living in rural communities. If businesses like these close their doors, communities suffer.

Large multinational companies will never replace the locally owned family businesses that are the engines of rural Canada. Family-owned small businesses are what give rural communities their identity. We must support them in transferring their businesses to future generations so they can endure. Without small businesses, rural Canada evaporates.

Agriculture is another pillar to our country and to the region I represent. Family farms contribute immensely to the social and cultural fabric of rural Canada. However, by 2025, one in four farmers will be 65 or older and over 110,000 farmers are expected to retire within the coming decade. This means thousands of farmers will be transferring their farm operations as they retire.

• (1845)

I should remind the members of the House that farmers are the people who have a strong connection to the land. They care deeply about keeping their farm in the family in the hopes of watching their children take the same care of the land in the manner they did.

There something to be said about the family farm. The family farm is not just a business, it is not just an operation; it is generational and sentimental. It is a way of life for hundreds of thousands of Canadians and their families. The family farm is an ideal and it is an ideal worth preserving. However, it is clear that agriculture is approaching a demographic revolution and as parliamentarians, it is our duty to support such a massive transition to ensure the future prosperity of Canadian agriculture.

Unfortunately, under the current tax regime, farmers are unable to transfer their family farm to the family without experiencing unfair tax treatment. As parliamentarians, we need to work creating more sustainable rural Canada through job creation and economic prosperity. Bill C-208 would do that.

Bill C-208 would keep the family in the family business. It would provide a future for the family farm. It would create fairness for countless Canadians as well as preserve the rural communities that are the bedrock to our nation.

• (1850)

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Madam Speaker, my colleagues have outlined all the details at second reading, third reading and previous iterations of this bill, so I will not go into those right now.

Tonight, I want to begin by thanking all those who have helped get Bill C-208 to this point. Without my Conservative colleagues trading the speaking spots for their private members' bills, we would never have gotten to third reading before the summer recess. I am immensely thankful to them for that.

For my colleagues from Prince Albert, Saskatoon—Grasswood and Regina—Qu'Appelle, I am eternally grateful for their support and assistance. For that support, I want them to know we are on the cusp of passing the legislation and sending it to the Senate.

I have spoken to numerous MPs over the past year about the importance of correcting this massive injustice within the Income Tax Act. The purpose of this bill is straightforward. It will level the playing field by giving families the exact same tax treatment whether they transfer their businesses or operations to their children or to a stranger. It will result in more locally owned and operated businesses, as has been outlined by many of my colleagues who have spoken to the bill, the types of businesses that are involved in their communities and provide steady employment for countless individuals. It will help keep farms and fishing operations in the family as well as any other qualifying small business.

Bill C-208 would send a message of hope to young farmers who want to carry on what their families started. Most of all, it would bring tax fairness to the Income Tax Act. No longer will parents have given a false choice of having to choose between a larger retirement package by selling to a stranger or a massive tax bill because they have sold to a family member, their own son, daughter or grandchildren. Every single community in Canada will be positively impacted by the passage of the bill.

As I said in my speech two weeks ago, there is bipartisan support for the legislation. I want to recognize and thank not only my colleagues from Provencher and Dauphin—Swan River—Neepeewa for their kind words and informational speeches, but also the members of other parties for their speeches and support at second reading, third reading and at committee as well as all the witnesses who gave testimony.

In particular, I want to thank my colleague from Malpeque, who also happens to be the chair of the finance committee, who announced he would be voting in favour of Bill C-208. I thank him for his kind presentation in the House today as well.

While I know my Liberal colleague from Winnipeg North, and I know him very well, is well-intentioned, I found that during his speech on the legislation a couple of weeks ago, his comments were quite off base. I know, had he taken the time to read the evidence and testimony provided at the finance committee, he would have known his speaking points and the concerns given to him by the finance department were all truly addressed.

For my Liberal colleagues, who, for the most part, all voted against the bill at second reading, I know the process. I know the party whips and the powers that be have likely told them to vote against the bill. However, I implore them to listen to their constituents who want this legislation passed, review what the tax experts have said and reach out to their businesses, farms or organizations in their ridings and ask them if they support the bill. I can as-

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sure all my colleagues that if they do reach out, they will find almost universal support for Bill C-208.

Once and for all, we can finally resolve this long-standing problem that countless families have had to endure when selling their businesses or operations to their immediate children or grandchildren.

I look forward to the final vote next week and kindly ask all my colleagues to support the bill, thus allowing for the debate in the other place and passage of it into law.

• (1855)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The question is on the motion.

[*Translation*]

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

The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, I would ask for a recorded division.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Pursuant to an order Monday, January 25, the division stands deferred until Wednesday, May 12, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

EMERGENCY DEBATE

[*English*]

COVID-19 IN ALBERTA

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The House will now proceed to the consideration of a motion to adjourn the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter requiring urgent consideration, namely the COVID-19 situation in Alberta.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP) moved:

That this House do now adjourn.

She said: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the Speaker for allowing us to have this debate today. It is an extremely important debate, and I am grateful to have the opportunity to stand and represent my constituents and represent all people in Alberta and across Canada who are deeply concerned about what is happening in my province.

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We are here tonight because Alberta, my province, is in crisis and that crisis is threatening all of Canada. Once again, Alberta reported nearly 2,000 new cases of COVID-19 today. Alberta's per capita rate of infection is the highest in Canada, nearly double that of Ontario. It is the highest rate of infection in North America and one of the highest rates in the world. In some locations in Alberta, the rate of infection is higher than in India.

ICUs in Alberta are nearing capacity. There is no more room for acute COVID patients. There is no more capacity in the health care system to deal with this crisis. Alberta's acute care health care system is on the verge of collapse.

Late last week, Alberta Health Services instructed physicians to review a new protocol, the critical care triage framework. The framework is designed to guide physicians in case of "a dire situation" where "the demand for life-sustaining critical care support is greater than the available resources". In other words, for the first time in history, Alberta's doctors have been given emergency instructions on how to determine which patients will receive life-saving treatment and which ones will not, instructions to determine who lives and who dies.

As I am sure everyone in Canada can appreciate, Alberta's physicians are not pleased that it has come to this. Edmonton doctor Noel Gibney, who co-chairs the Edmonton pandemic response committee, said that the implementation of the triage framework would be devastating for physicians, for nurses and for other front-line health care workers. He said:

It would put significant moral distress on ICU doctors and nurses because we would see patients who would typically, although very sick, with appropriate critical care treatment would normally survive but instead those individuals would be referred to palliative care.

On Monday, 50 critical care physicians, including Dr. Gibney, wrote an open letter to Premier Jason Kenney warning that there were not enough critical care health workers in Alberta to handle more cases, begging the premier to do something to stop the exponential growth in cases, and yet, last night, in a highly anticipated prime-time announcement, he refused to take questions from reporters. Jason Kenney failed once again to lead Alberta through this crisis.

If members want to know why it is so bad in Alberta, why other provinces have withstood the third wave better than my province, the answer is clear: It is Jason Kenney. From the very beginning of this global pandemic, he has failed Albertans. His Donald Trump-like approach to COVID-19 has put us where we are today: in a state of absolute crisis.

At the beginning of the global pandemic last year and through wave after wave of infection, Jason Kenney has bowed to the worst elements of his political base, downplaying the lethal threat that COVID-19 poses and instead belittling efforts to stop the transmission of the virus. He has referred to the coronavirus repeatedly as nothing more than a flu, even after medical experts alerted us that calling COVID a flu was misleading and damaging to public health efforts and even after we had seen the devastating impact COVID-19 has had on our seniors, especially those living in long-term care.

Just like Donald Trump, Premier Kenney promised that the flu would go away. Rather than shut down schools to prevent transmission, Jason Kenney claimed that there was no transmission in schools. When his own government data suggested otherwise, when we saw outbreaks in school after school, he shut down contact tracing of cases in schools because, of course, they cannot report on what they refuse to measure.

• (1900)

My children are in those schools. I send my children to school every day and it is terrifying. It is terrifying for my children, but it is also terrifying for those teachers who had to be on the front line, who were not prioritized for vaccinations. It is terrifying to know that every day they may be bringing COVID home. They may be bringing COVID to their neighbours, their families. It is devastating. My son's best friend has come down with COVID.

In August I brought forward the unanimous consent motion asking the Government of Canada to put \$2 billion toward a safer restart, a safer reopening for schools and \$262 million of that went to Alberta schools. We were depending on the federal government to step in. We could not count on our provincial government to do what it needed to do to protect teachers, to protect students, to protect our loved ones.

Rather than address infections in homeless populations, Jason Kenney claims that the homeless somehow have immunity to COVID-19, stating that they have "a very high level of immune resistance against an influenza of this nature". Again, it is "an influenza".

Our seniors were dying and the seriousness of COVID-19 was downplayed by comparing the average age of those dying at the time, which was 83, with the average life expectancy of age 82. It was so callous and cruel. Everybody else has been to blame for the failures that have happened in Alberta. There are stories of birthday parties and that was why there was transmission. There is the blaming of the South Asian community for high rates of transmission in Calgary.

Last week, I stood in the House because Jason Kenney blamed high rates of infection in Wood Buffalo on indigenous people, when he knows, when I know, when we all know, that the high rates in the area are from work camps serving the oil sands. Wood Buffalo is just one hotspot in Alberta, but it is an important one, because rising infections there could lead to the rapid spread throughout the rest of Canada.

In Alberta, oil and gas workers were deemed essential by Jason Kenney's United Conservative government. That means that dozens of oil sands workers have been flying in and out of the area from all over Canada since the beginning of the pandemic.

Perhaps the biggest failure has been the dance around COVID restrictions. I believe, honestly, this is the biggest lesson all of us need to take from this pandemic. The failure to acknowledge the reality of COVID-19 and to commit to ending its spread is devastating to our health, our lives, our economy. We have seen time and time again that half measures do not work.

Throughout this pandemic I have to say Jason Kenney has been the king of half measures. One day he is placing restrictions; the next day he is playing them down. He wants to rely on personal responsibility rather than government action, but that has left Albertans in a devastating position.

Last week in the face of overwhelming evidence from around the world that restrictions are highly effective at stopping the spread of infections and one of the only ways to fight COVID-19 other than vaccines, we were told it is “a false idea” that lockdowns stop the viral spread.

Now, thanks to Jason Kenney's lack of leadership, thanks to the provincial government telling police authorities not to enforce the few restrictions in place, thanks to the bumbling, stumbling joke that our provincial government has become, we have the single greatest public health crisis Alberta has ever seen. Despite all this, despite the highest rate of infection in North America, despite the crisis in our ICUs, I am still the only member of Parliament from Alberta to call out Jason Kenney and this nonsense.

With a positivity rate of 13% this week, infection hotspots like Wood Buffalo mean that Alberta's COVID crisis will soon become Canada's COVID crisis if nothing is done. We are in a race between vaccines and variants. This is true everywhere in Canada and it is true all around the world, but we are losing the race in Alberta. On Monday, Alberta Health Services stopped testing for variants of concern. The reason is that the variants have taken over.

- (1905)

Virtually every case of COVID in Alberta is a variant of concern now. If left unchecked, the COVID petri dish that is Alberta promises to create more variants. It is a matter of time.

The goal now must be to stop the exponential growth of infections in Alberta; to save lives; to not put doctors, nurses and other health care workers through the trauma of saying “no” to patients who desperately need help; and critically, for the sake of all of us to prevent a new variant that threatens every Canadian from emerging.

Alberta must not be left to deal with this crisis on its own. There is simply too much at stake, and I have to say that Jason Kenney is not alone in his failure of Albertans. The government bears part of the responsibility for this crisis as well. Throughout the pandemic, Jason Kenney has maintained that his policies are designed to protect livelihoods as well as lives, so there has been this focus on our economy, but we know now that countries and provinces that have focused on stopping COVID-19 are the ones that have succeeded in protecting their economies, and that they are integrally tied together. Alberta has failed in both.

We have the worst infection rates and we have had the greatest negative impact on our economy. Over and over again, the Prime Minister has stated that he has our backs and that every Canadian,

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and I would remind the Prime Minister that “every Canadian” means every Albertan will get the support they need to get through COVID-19. If this was actually true, if we actually were going to give the support that was necessary to Canadians, then premiers like Jason Kenney and Doug Ford could have imposed the strict regulations we needed to stop the spread of COVID and not have had to worry about the economy.

The truth of the matter is that Jason Kenney is not the only one guilty of half-measures. When the government promised us sick leave, they gave us a “sort of” sick leave program. When the government promised income support for workers, they gave us a program that did not work for at least a third of those workers who were impacted. When the government promised programs to help businesses, those programs left out countless small businesses, self-proprietors and the self-employed. When the government promised jobs for students, it designed a program that would not work with an organization that could not deliver, and those jobs were never created.

I stood in the House and got unanimous consent that we would protect recent graduates, and the government never followed through on that. When the government promised in the throne speech that it would extend the moratorium on student loan repayments, when it promised support for people living with disabilities, when it asserted that workers threatened by COVID-19 transmission in their place of work could rely on it for support and it would protect workers' rights to refuse unsafe work, every time the government has failed.

We have not even been able to get the government to move on one of the most basic things we should be looking at right now during a global health pandemic. We have not been able to get the government to move beyond the study of pharmacare. It voted against a pharmacare program in the middle of a global health pandemic. We should be expanding our health care system. We should be making sure we have a pharmacare system now, more than ever, and the government has failed us there.

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Jason Kenney has been an unmitigated disaster for Alberta, but his terrible job is happening on the Prime Minister's terrible foundation. The federal government needed to do a better job preparing us for this pandemic, ensuring we had paid sick days, implementing a pharmacare program and making sure indigenous communities were better supported. The Prime Minister saw this coming. He has watched this happening in Alberta, and he has done nothing, because he would rather watch Alberta burn than help Jason Kenney. Both the premier and the Prime Minister are playing political games, and Albertans are dying. People in Alberta are dying because of inaction and because of the finger pointing between the federal and provincial governments.

• (1910)

While these governments are trying to decide who is to blame, families are losing loved ones. Not one family I have spoken to is worried about jurisdiction. Not one family is saying that they do not want help from either government to save their loved ones. No one is saying that the feds should not act because it is up to the province. They want us, their elected representatives, to throw everything we have so that their loved ones can come home at the end of the day. It is our job to do everything we can to help people survive this.

The federal government needs to listen to the NDP, and it needs to do more. We need to help get more vaccines to Alberta, especially to the hot spots that we have identified. We need to get vaccines into the hot zones right now. That needs to happen, and it needs to be a priority. We need to get fixes to paid sick leave so that workers can actually use the program. We need to fix our long-term care systems. We need to make sure that seniors are protected. We need to make sure that we are protecting everybody so that when this is over, and we know that we are facing future pandemics, we will have learned our lessons and be better prepared for the next time around.

It seems to me that Jason Kenney and the Prime Minister are putting all their hopes into vaccines and the coming warmer weather, and I understand that. Vaccines are the ultimate answer to come out of COVID-19 and be able to get our families back. However, there is a problem with that. We do not have a guarantee that this will work when, right now in Alberta, there are 1,500, 1,700, 2,000, 4,000, who knows, who are becoming infected right now, today. We simply do not have time to wait. Every second counts in this race, and this is the most important wave that we will deal with.

We know that we need to act, and we need to act fast. Alberta needs the federal government to step up to the plate. Alberta and all of Canada needs this government to live up to its obligations and support us through the third wave.

Albertans are incredible people. Most Albertans are following COVID-19 protocols. Most Albertans want to solve this crisis, but we need help. We need this government to work directly with indigenous communities in Alberta municipalities to deliver the support they need to get through the third wave. We need money for social services. We need federal support for rapid vaccination programs in the hardest-hit areas. We need this government to live up to the promises that it has made to Albertans.

• (1915)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would just say to the member that I came here tonight to participate in a debate about the federal policy response with respect to the impact on COVID-19 in the province that I represent. We are not here to have a debate about provincial policy.

I certainly share my feedback with elected representatives at the provincial level, and leaders in Ottawa have to be prepared to work across party lines. In the last Parliament when I was an elected MP, we had three provincial NDP MLAs and a provincial NDP premier in Alberta, and I did everything I could to work constructively with them to find areas of common ground.

It is not constructive that the member is using the federal House of Commons as a platform to attack provincial policy. There is always an opportunity to run in provincial elections, but at the federal level we need to be talking about borders. We need to be talking about the fact that we are in a third wave, because the Prime Minister failed to secure the borders. We need to be talking about the failure of the federal government to deliver vaccines to the provinces.

Let us talk about the federal failures and we can leave the provincial debates to the provincial legislatures, instead of using this seat to attack provincial politicians who are not even here to defend themselves.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Madam Speaker, I would very much like to live in a province right now where I did not have to call out my premier for his behaviour. I would very much like to live in a province where my premier had taken COVID-19 seriously, where we were not in a third wave, and where we did not have hot spots that were worse than in India. Unfortunately, that is not the province I live in. In the province I live in, people are dying.

As I said in my intervention, people in Alberta do not care whose jurisdiction it is. They want to see help; they need to see help. We are watching a premier who is in over his head, and so the Prime Minister and the federal government need to step in. We cannot sit back and say, "It's not my problem. It's not our jurisdiction."

I would remind the member that there are people in our province who are going to die because of inaction.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I really appreciate the member bringing forward this issue to discuss tonight. I think it is important that we talk about it in all contexts, federal, provincial and so forth, but I take exception to her comment that the Prime Minister would rather see Alberta burn to the ground than take care of Albertans. Certainly, she was being slightly facetious with that comment. I do not believe any member of this House genuinely believes that we want to see anybody in any province, territory or jurisdiction in this country fail in this regard and lose lives. Would she like to rephrase that so we can better understand what her concern is?

Ms. Heather McPherson: Madam Speaker, I want to rephrase that. I am very concerned. I feel the Prime Minister is playing games. We have not seen him. We have not seen leadership in Alberta from the federal government. I feel like it is missing in action.

I am sure everybody in this House can hear my frustration. Every day I listen to people talk about how bad it is in Ontario, Quebec or other parts of our country. It is very scary across the country, but I have not heard anyone, the Prime Minister or anyone from the official opposition, talk about how absolutely terrifying it is in Alberta. Alberta is literally on fire right now and we are not seeing support. We are seeing a ton of fingers getting pointed back and forth. There is a ton of—

• (1920)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I have to allow for other questions.

The hon. member for Jonquière.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Madam Speaker, I understand my colleague's concerns and I am sure she has good intentions.

Quebec experienced something similar with the outbreaks in long-term care centres. Everyone was worried. I know it is annoying, but we cannot act as a substitute for the Alberta legislature or take over the role of the opposition party, which will certainly be able to point out the Kenney government's shortcomings.

I would like my colleague to comment on what the federal government could do in the short term to at least contain what is happening in Alberta.

[*English*]

Ms. Heather McPherson: Madam Speaker, first I would say that when we had the deep crisis in the long-term care homes in Quebec, the federal government stepped in with the Canadian military and did what it could to support long-term care homes that were clearly overburdened and in over their head, so we have seen this before, we just have not seen that support come to Alberta that way.

Regarding the things we can do right now, we can get some vaccines to Alberta as fast as we can, really focus on those hot spots and tamp down where those hot spots are showing up already. We can make sure those supports are in place that I talked about in my intervention. I think it requires the federal government to work with

the provincial government and provide that assistance, and both sides need to be prepared to offer and accept that assistance.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Edmonton Strathcona for the passion with which she defends her constituents and her home province. The fact that she has provoked this debate is extremely important. I think all Albertans and all Canadians thank her. Everyone sees the tragic numbers coming out of Alberta. It has the highest infection rate in North America. It is a tragedy that is unfolding.

The member spoke very eloquently about the impacts of not having the adequate sick leave the federal government has not put in place, and not having pharmacare at a time when it is critically needed.

Also, the domestic production of vaccines would make such a difference.

I ask the member simply to put forward what she believes the federal government should be doing now to make sure this tragedy that is unfolding is stopped in its place by having the provincial and federal governments both doing the jobs they are supposed to do.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Madam Speaker, what we need to see the government do right now is work with the provincial government, recognize the crisis Alberta is in right now and recognize that we need to get vaccinations out to those hot spots immediately. We need supports for our health care system. It is under collapse and we really need to get those supports right now.

The people of Alberta cannot pay for the fact we have an incompetent leader. We have to get some supports immediately. We will not be able to wait through and hope that the third wave somehow resolves itself or that the vaccine variant race is somehow won; we have to do more now, which includes making sure there are vaccines and sick time, and that people are not forced to go to work when they are ill.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, this is desperately serious and our hearts are in our throats as we look at the variants. Members of my own family have COVID now, and with the infection rates in Alberta, which are 80% higher than the rates in Ontario, clearly more must be done.

Does my hon. colleague think we should look at the Emergencies Act now? Getting the provinces to co-operate and getting across party lines is very difficult. Is it time to look into coordinating our national response?

Ms. Heather McPherson: Madam Speaker, at this point what we need to do is finally take steps to recognize how much Alberta is suffering right now and think about what those steps could be. I am hoping this debate is part of that very important conversation.

The federal government needs to speak with the provincial government. There needs to be discussion. The provincial government needs the support to get people vaccinated, as it is clearly in over its head.

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I am not sure we need to invoke the Emergencies Act at this point. What we need to do is make sure there is support from the federal government in the many ways that I outlined. One of the key things is going to be making sure that we get vaccines to Albertans.

● (1925)

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, first of all, my heart goes out to my colleague. I listened to her speech, and I can hear the fear and worry in her voice for her community, her province and the people there. I share her worry and concern.

We are at a critical point in the fight against COVID-19, and the third wave is sweeping across many parts of the country. As my colleague pointed out, hospitalizations and ICU admissions are surpassing previous records. Unfortunately, this third wave is, indeed, taking an enormous toll on Albertans. As I have said before, this is an unprecedented situation and we have to respond with unprecedented and swift actions together.

The government has been offering Alberta support. We will continue to be there for Alberta and Albertans, of course. We have done this recently, as we have with other provinces that have been facing rising numbers of cases. We work continuously with our provincial counterparts to share expertise and provide support to augment the provinces' capacities to respond.

My colleague talked about vaccination. As she knows, despite her claims, we have continued to deliver vaccines to the provinces as they scale up and expand vaccination programs. I happen to have the numbers today: 17.2 million vaccines were delivered across the country and nearly 15 million have been put into arms. We are making tremendous progress, but as we vaccinate Canadians, we have to continue to keep each other safe. This virus has shown us time and again that it is sneaky, it is insidious and it can gain on us very quickly if we do not take it seriously.

We have to remain focused on reducing infections, protecting each other and ensuring that people stay safe in their communities. This means that despite how tired we all are, we have to continue to follow public health guidance and do everything in our power, individually and collectively, to stop the spread of the virus. Vaccination is the finish line, but until we are all safe, we have to keep each other safe. Businesses, governments, families and communities have to do everything in their power to reduce the risks to each other.

Health Canada has authorized four different COVID-19 vaccines: Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, AstraZeneca and Janssen. Just today, Health Canada authorized the use of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine in children 12 to 15 years of age. All of the authorized vaccines have been shown to be very effective at preventing hospitalizations and deaths.

We are making good progress, as I said, distributing these vaccines to the provinces and territories. Over 17 million doses of all authorized COVID-19 vaccines have gone to the provinces and territories, and nearly 15 million Canadians have received their first dose.

Earlier this week, we received two million doses of Pfizer-BioNTech, the largest shipment from the manufacturer to date, and last month, my colleague, the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, announced that Canada has secured COVID-19 vaccines from Pfizer for 2022 and 2023, with options to extend into 2024. As we have often said, we will be there for Canadians in this fight against COVID with whatever it takes, for as long as it takes. We expect that COVID-19 vaccines will be available to every eligible Canadian who wants to be vaccinated well before September 2021. This is just part of our commitment to the provinces and territories as we stand together in the fight against COVID-19.

We continually work with our colleagues to make sure that they have the help they need to manage outbreaks and keep people safe. This includes purchasing and delivering vaccines and PPE, buying and boosting the use of rapid tests, working with the private sector to deploy rapid tests and augmenting contact tracing. Eight dollars of every \$10 spent across our country to respond to the pandemic has come from the Government of Canada.

Much of the on-the-ground support is being provided through the COVID-19 public health rapid surge capacity initiative. This program, in addition to the safe restart agreements, has provided the provinces and territories with \$19 billion in federal investments and additional support for health care system capacity, testing, contact tracing, epidemiological support and other social services to support Canadians. It allows the provinces and territories to respond more effectively to outbreaks and to mitigate transmission in hot zones where there is additional pressure on the health care system. It allows for isolation housing for families and communities that do not have the ability to isolate safely when they become infected or have been in close contact with an infected person.

Of course, this support can also be used to strengthen existing services in areas where there is the most need. The eight fields of response under this program include the public health rapid response team; outbreak management; vaccine support; COVID-19 patient testing; laboratory services and equipment; contact tracing; safe voluntary isolation sites; and human resources recruitment.

● (1930)

Recently, we have been able to help struggling health care systems in Ontario, for example, with the health human resource assistance program. This program will provide reimbursement to the provinces and territories that need to use health human resources from another jurisdiction. This will help particularly with respect to staffing intensive care units. The funding helps to ensure that specialized health care services, including ICU nurses, physicians and respiratory therapists, among others, are deployed where and when they are needed. Up to \$20 million per province or territory will be available to support their deployment of resources to other jurisdictions in need.

This is really a team Canada moment. The provinces and territories are stepping up for each other, and the federal government is helping to make sure that financial resources are in place to move the health human resources to where they are needed the most.

I will speak for a moment about testing and screening, which, along with public health measures, continue to be at the foundation for slowing the spread of COVID-19. So far, more than 25 million rapid tests have been shipped to the provinces and territories, and when combined with the federal allocation, over 41 million rapid tests have been distributed across the country.

The Province of Alberta recently announced that more than 2 million rapid tests will be available for businesses in the province. This follows the successful rollout of more than 1.2 million rapid tests to long-term care facilities, hospitals, homeless shelters and other outbreak sites where we see the virus transmit more easily. These rapid tests have value. They can help identify presymptomatic and asymptomatic cases, which allows for earlier isolation and quicker stoppage of the spread of COVID-19 in workplaces and other settings.

Another example in Alberta is the Suncor employee screening program. Suncor is one of the first members of the Creative Destruction Lab Rapid Screening Consortium. That is quite the name, but it is an innovation and a private sector workplace initiative that utilizes rapid COVID-19 screening with a commitment to keeping people healthy in the workplace.

Suncor's COVID-19 screening program is focused on the hundreds of fly-in, fly-out workers that conduct maintenance in northern Alberta over the spring and summer months. The company is using 100,000 rapid tests, provided through the Alberta government's allotment, and is administering over 300 tests a week. Suncor is also conducting rapid testing for first nations and Métis communities in Fort McKay, including for regional health facility workers and primary caregivers for the elder care centre. The Government of Canada has so far provided Alberta with almost 3 million rapid tests to support initiatives like this one.

The government continues to work closely with all the provinces and territories, as I said, to ensure that they have the tools they need to respond to the pandemic, including procuring point-of-care PCR and rapid tests, in addition to other public health measures. This is another layer of protection that can help keep workers safe.

We have also worked really closely with the provincial and territorial governments to strengthen health care and adapt the system to the challenges of delivering health care during the COVID-19 pandemic. Just last month, I announced the signing of a bilateral agreement with Alberta to support efforts to expand virtual health care services for its residents. We know that virtual health care has been a real boon to community members across this country who are accessing health care from the safety of their own home or from the safety of their own residence. Under this agreement, the province will invest federal funding to accelerate virtual health care services during the pandemic. This bilateral agreement allows Alberta to receive nearly \$16 million to expand its efforts on these virtual health care services.

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Some initiatives Alberta will use the funding for include expanding My Health Record patient portal information and capabilities, and developing a privacy and security framework for virtual care. These initiatives will help the province not only improve access to health care services, but also prioritize the patient experience and keep the privacy and security considerations of health information top of mind, something that we know is important to people accessing virtual care across the country.

We know that COVID-19 presents a significant physical health risk, but we also know that the COVID-19 pandemic has taken a toll on folks with respect to mental health. That is why early on in the pandemic we launched Wellness Together Canada, which is an online portal that offers free mental health and substance-use support 24 hours a day, seven days a week, in both official languages with translation into 60 others.

● (1935)

Budget 2021 proposes to provide \$100 million over three years to support projects for innovative mental health interventions, because we know that many populations have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, including health care workers, frontline workers, youth, seniors, indigenous people, racialized communities and Black Canadians. There are so many incredible community organizations across this country, including in Alberta, that are closest to folks and know how best to deliver those services. We want to support them, especially as we see demand for these kinds of services growing.

Thankfully, we continue to see a significant drop in the number of outbreaks in long-term care homes. We are working to ensure that long-term care residents and caregivers are well supported. The fall economic statement invested \$6.4 million to the Canadian Foundation for Healthcare Improvement. This funding is being used to expand its long-term care program to address pandemic preparedness.

I have to say the foundation has done incredible work on helping long-term care homes across the country become more equipped at infection prevention and control, and other measures to protect their residents. Alberta has 238 of the 350 long-term care homes and retirement homes supported through this program.

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I will close with a few thoughts about the ongoing importance of public health measures. Vaccination campaigns are ramping up, but as we have said before and as we can see, we are not out of the woods yet. Even those who are vaccinated must continue to follow the basic public health measures that are keeping all of us safe. While numbers are growing every day, many people in Canada, in fact most people, are not fully vaccinated yet. Until they are, we need to hold the epidemic at bay with public health measures to provide protection of the population level.

Lifting measures too soon will cause an upsurge in cases, and indeed the modelling all along has shown that. The science has not been wrong. If we lift measures too quickly, or apply them too slowly, people will surely get sick and some will die. That is the reality. Despite the frustration, the fatigue that infuses us all, we have to continue and commit to each other to apply public health measures because they do work.

International experiences show that stringent public health measures control rapid epidemic growth and allow that time that we need for vaccination rates to grow and to work to reduce the spread. We are at a critical point in the battle against COVID-19. We need to be very careful and protect the progress we have made, even as we look towards a more hopeful future.

That means acting on the evidence and continuing to work closely with provinces, territories and municipalities on a coordinated response. It means we need to keep public health measures in place and encourage Canadians to continue to protect themselves by taking the appropriate personal precautions. It means we have to be patient, and we have to hold on just a little more before we relax our guard. It means that we need to hold on together, governments at all levels, businesses and people.

We cannot ignore this virus. COVID is not partisan. It does not care about our divisions. In fact, it actually exploits them. It exploits communities and countries that do not work together. It is why our federal government has been there for provinces, people, workers and businesses. Every step of the way, we have been there for Canadians. We will continue to be there for Albertans every step of the way. We will be there with resources, people, vaccines and equipment, testing, and financial supports for families, as they work so hard to protect each other.

The Government of Canada will continue to support provinces and territories as we finish this fight. I spoke with Minister Shandro last week. The Prime Minister has spoken with Premier Kenney last night. We both reiterated our ongoing offers of support for Alberta and Albertans during this tough time.

I know Albertans are working hard together, and I encourage every Canadian, every Albertan to accept vaccination when it is their turn. Vaccines do save lives, and they stop the spread. It is the biggest gift of health that we can give ourselves and our communities.

We can see the finish line. We need all to take actions together that will defeat this virus from infecting new people. We have come a long way over the past year. We have learned a lot of hard lessons. Now our challenge is to stay the course. The Government of Canada is committed to doing that, and I know that Canadians

share that determination. We will continue to support each other until we have overcome this third wave of the pandemic and have emerged even stronger on the other side.

● (1940)

Hon. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, taking a look at the Our World in Data numbers for COVID vaccinations, yesterday we were at about 37.85 vaccine doses administered per 100 Canadians. When I look at the numbers for other countries, I see that the U.K. passed that threshold on March 13, almost two months ago, and the U.S. passed it on March 21.

Regarding the U.K. numbers two months ago, when we take a look at Alberta's numbers on that same day, we see that in Alberta our ICU number was 35, our hospitalization number was 254 and our active cases were 4,500, which are significantly different numbers than we have now.

I would like to hear the minister comment on the reasons for the delay and, on reflection, what she might have done differently. Most importantly, I would like to hear how the evaluation of those things will impact the government's decisions moving forward to improve this very difficult situation facing our province.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Mr. Speaker, first of all, while the U.K. has been pursuing vaccination, it has also had extremely stringent public health measures, far more stringent than Alberta and many provinces in Canada. In fact, it had a very severe wave just prior to Christmas and was significantly impacted, so that country has been under significant public health restrictions as it vaccinates.

I am extremely encouraged by the rate at which we are vaccinating in this country. As the member opposite knows, we are now second or third in the G20, depending on the day, as vaccinations continue to be administered in all the provinces and territories. The provinces and territories are doing a phenomenal job with all kinds of innovation to get at vaccinating populations in hot spots, at workplaces, through pharmacies and in other venues. We have to continue to protect each other collaboratively and collectively while we get the job done.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the minister.

I have no doubt that she genuinely wants to help Alberta, all the provinces and Quebec in the context of this pandemic. However, the best way to help the provinces is to have a robust health care system. Unfortunately, the funding is just not there.

I would like to ask the minister whether she agrees with me that the best solution is to increase health transfers to 35%, as all the provinces are calling for.

[English]

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Mr. Speaker, no one is arguing that we need to continually invest and reinvest in our health care systems. In fact, that was the intent behind the tremendous amount of money we have spent throughout the pandemic, no questions asked, with \$19 billion being transferred to provinces and territories, so they could augment their health care systems. The Prime Minister has been very clear that we will continue to talk about how to strengthen our public health care system now and into the future. This is an important conversation, and it is one we have committed to time and again.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister spoke of the work camps, the support going to the work camps and the use of rapid testing. The Financial Post wrote:

On April 30, the Alberta government listed 14 oilsands camps and production facilities as the site of COVID-19 outbreaks....

Those sites include Suncor's base plant, Firebag project, Fort Hills oilsands mine and Mackay River project as well as Syncrude's Aurora and Mildred Lake sites, which Suncor now operates.

If rapid testing were the answer, Wood Buffalo would not have the highest rates of COVID-19 in the country. Will the minister prioritize vaccines in hot spots like Wood Buffalo? Will she prioritize indigenous communities that are paying the price for the outbreaks in oil sands camps? Will they be prioritized for vaccines?

• (1945)

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Mr. Speaker, again, my heart goes out to the member opposite, and I thank her for this emergency debate. I did speak to the mayor of Wood Buffalo last week as well, and we spoke about the intersection of small communities, work camps and indigenous communities. I am from Northern Ontario, and although it is a different industry, it has very similar dynamics. We talked about the role of vaccination, the role of rapid testing and, indeed, the role of isolation.

I think rapid testing cannot be done in isolation. It is a tool, an extra layer of protection. It allows for people to understand very quickly if there are infections in a workplace, but then the next steps are equally important. The mayor talked extensively about the supports that need to be in place to help people when they are, in fact, positive with COVID-19.

We also talked about targeted vaccination. This is something that is completely in the province's control. The province has the ability to target vaccines and hot spots. In fact, that is exactly what Ontario has done, at the community level and at the provincial level. It has been able to move vaccines around as a way to help bring down some of the case growth in very precarious settings or precarious regions of the province. We will be there to continue to support those conversations for the Province of Alberta.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I want to shift the focus slightly because the minister made the very critical point that we are not out of the woods until everyone is safe and vaccinated. This is a global concern.

Earlier today, in a historic turnaround for the United States, the Biden administration changed its position and now supports giving an exemption through the World Trade Organization on trade-relat-

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ed aspects of intellectual property rights, or TRIPS, so that patent protection would be removed and developing countries could manufacture vaccines and get them to the people who need them.

Is Canada prepared to step up and at long last go toward removing patent protection for big pharma?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the acknowledgement that this is, indeed, a global pandemic and we need to take care of each other at a global level, as well as a community level. The Minister of International Trade and I did exchange some texts when that happened, and my understanding is that Canada is moving forward to support that. I think the question would be better posed to her for the specifics, as it is her file.

My understanding is that we have, as a government, a full recognition of the importance of ensuring that everyone around the world gets access to vaccination as quickly as possible. It is likely going to be an all-hands-on-deck endeavour because it will be a challenge, but the pandemic has taught us that until we are all protected from COVID-19, none of us are. It is a very important consideration.

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 do appreciate the work of the minister, her staff and those at Health Canada. They are doing a fantastic job.

Canada is a large country, a federation where provinces, territories and indigenous leaders all play very important roles. There has been a strong link between her department and other departments, and they are co-operating and offering support in every way imaginable to combat the coronavirus.

Could she provide her thoughts on how important it is to have that relationship and to provide that support to our provinces and territories, given the size of our country?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his observation that this really is an all-hands-on-deck event for the world, for Canada, and indeed for government departments. I have never worked so closely with my provincial counterparts as I have through the pandemic. We have each others' cell phone numbers. We are able to contact each other directly, sometimes to share ideas or talk about emerging issues. This has been a feature of the pandemic that has served us well.

I spent many years in public health prior to being elected as a member of Parliament. I worked at the Thunder Bay District Health Unit for a very long time. I have taken it upon myself to also reach out to local public health leaders and local elected officials to understand the local perspective as it fits into that of the province and territory, and to work directly with local communities.

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That is where the idea of the isolation housing was born. It was from local public health units talking about their deep need to support people in isolating safely, especially people who did not have options in their lives. I want to thank all the public health units and workers across the country who—

• (1950)

The Speaker: Resuming debate, the hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Foothills.

In Alberta, I am giving this speech from my riding in Calgary Nose Hill. What I would like everybody listening to this speech tonight to understand is that Alberta was in a very bad spot prior to the pandemic. We were in a severe economic downturn, and that really exacerbated part of the problem that we have faced here over the last year and a half. I would argue that in a lot of ways it has been worse.

I know that there has been a lot of conversation, and I have watched the media narrative play out over the last 72 hours, with comments like “Why are restrictions not working in Alberta like they are in other places?” with the implications that Albertans are not following the rules. Here is the reality from Calgary: People need to eat. Therefore, it is very paternalistic to say just that people who might not be following restrictions are doing so from a place of bourgeois contempt for the law.

There are so many people in my province, I would argue most people in my province, who want to do everything possible to abide by public health rules, and they are doing their best, but they are also really struggling. There are a lot of people in my community who do not have the luxury of being able to stay at home and work from home and self-isolate or wait for the disastrously termed “preferred vaccine”. That is just not the reality. Lockdown is a luxury for a lot of people in my community. That is the reality for gig economy workers, taxi drivers, people who were in the resource industry; they are the Alberta economy. We do look different economically than other parts of the country do, so yes, measures are going to affect how people respond differently. That is a reality that I just do not feel has been adequately acknowledged by policy-makers.

We need to start there. We need to start understanding that a year and a half into this, people want to do everything they can to observe these measures, but they also feel like there has to be an end in sight; they need to work—

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: Order. The member for Jonquière on a point of order.

Mr. Mario Simard: Mr. Speaker, there is a problem with the interpretation. We are hearing some very loud static. I am not sure if it is coming from the interpreter's microphone, but we can only hear it on the French channel, not the English one. It is nearly impossible to listen in French right now.

The Speaker: I think it may be the member's microphone arm.

[*English*]

I just want to ask the hon. member to maybe displace her microphone, on the arm, just up or down. There is a little popping sound.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Simard: Mr. Speaker, I do not think the issue is coming from the member. I think it is an issue on the interpretation side. The sound is very good on the English channel, but there is static on the French channel, and I am not sure where it is coming from.

• (1955)

[*English*]

The Speaker: It sounds like it might be a problem in the interpretation booth with the microphone.

Has it been resolved?

I will let the hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill continue. I apologize for the interruption.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Mr. Speaker, it really sort of stinks to be interrupted in the middle of that, because that is the key message here: My community cannot afford lockdown. Everybody wants to do their part, everybody wants to stop the spread of COVID, everybody understands how serious it is, but we need a durable solution, which has not been delivered to us, and the federal government has a major role in that.

What does the federal government need to do from a solutions perspective?

First, the government needs a stable supply of vaccines. The provincial government, every provincial government in the country, has seen supplies, like Lucy and the football from the Charlie Brown cartoon series, where vaccines are coming, but then they are not. We have not had a single dose of AstraZeneca delivered from the actual contract with the manufacturer. It has only been raided from COVAX, or charity from the Americans, or from the Serum Institute of India. We need to provide more details to the provinces about the future of vaccine rollouts. There needs to be stability. Again, every week, the numbers seem to change, and that is not going to provide a durable solution.

Having the public be able to look at the details of contracts so that Parliament can understand whether or not the government is doing its job in holding manufacturers to account on recourse could have been part of it as well. However, the federal government has not been transparent on that, and Parliament has not been able to do its job because of it.

I implore the health minister, and I know she may not like me, but she needs to talk to Health Canada, PHAC and NACI and get their act together on the confusing messaging that is coming out on vaccine efficacy and safety. It is her job. She needs to pull those people in together, knock their heads together a little bit and say, “What happened this week can never happen again.” It has happened numerous times now, and she needs to take a leadership role so that Canadians can have trust in public health institutions, and so that the debacle that happened this week does not happen again.

The government also needs to come up with some better use or national strategy for rapid testing. I think the federal government has really kind of wiped its hands of that. It could be providing advice and support for advice on that, but that has not happened. Even things like using rapid tests in airports for domestic travel are something that the government has not looked into. There could be more approval of over-the-counter rapid tests or home-purchased rapid tests. We have not seen that happen. Again, I understand that the regulator has to do due diligence on that, but certainly we can have diligence and a good review process to give more tools to people to stop the spread.

We could remove the hotel quarantine policy. It has been such an unmitigated disaster. We are hearing reports of COVID spreading in these facilities. I mean, I could litigate all the failures around the border, but how do we move forward from this, given the failures? There will be a time for inquiry, but moving forward the government could immediately cut down on the list of those who are exempted from quarantine until more vaccines can be deployed. It could limit those who are exempted to a very small number of critical workers, like truck drivers, and prioritize access to vaccines for those persons. It could put in place measures to ensure that every person entering Canada is required to be tested upon arrival, including at land and sea borders, with exemptions only for critical workers who are fully vaccinated.

The government could develop a clear set of parameters for identifying risks presented by emerging variants and present this to the public in an easy-to-understand format. I do not understand why we do not have a Defcon level ranking system for when variants are emerging, and why that is not being communicated to the public in terms of travel or even around essential travel. It is like, "The risk is low, but it is not." The confusing messaging that the Auditor General rightly criticized the Public Health Agency of Canada for issuing at the front end of the pandemic could be fixed.

Also, we could provide a data-driven plan to provinces and Canadians on how and when lockdown measures will be lifted. The federal government still has not provided any benchmarking for what fully vaccinated persons could do. If we start telling the public what fully vaccinated persons can do, there will be more uptake of vaccines. For those who are having mental health challenges, there will be some hope in knowing that, "Okay, when I get both of my doses, I can do this."

• (2000)

However, we know that is not coming forward, I would surmise, because the federal government does not have a line of sight on when everybody will be fully vaccinated, because of the shortage and because of concerns about what the dosing delay is going to mean for long-term efficacy. That needs to be solved.

I cannot stress enough how critical this is for the people in my community in Alberta, who have long-sufferingly provided support to the rest of the country through hundreds of billions of dollars in payments to the federal government and have not received a lot in return. We get forgotten by the federal government all the time. In these instances, at these times, casting aspersions or finger pointing or playing politics between the NDP and the provincial government is not going to cut it. What we need is a plan.

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I wish I had three hours to talk about all the things that we could be doing right now that the federal government and the provincial government are not, but I do not. Suffice it to say, there are things that could be done that we are not doing, and I implore the federal government, I implore the health minister to put these things aside and start understanding that everything is not fine. It is not okay. We are not in a position of success federally in this country, and more must be done. That is why I needle the government every day. That is why I prep for committee, and that is why I hold the government to account, because we can and must do better.

Instead of casting aspersions that somehow Alberta is to blame, that the spread that is happening is the fault of the people of my province, legislators and leaders in this country need to start standing up and doing their job: being stricter on the border, doing better on vaccines, having better data, supporting people more effectively and giving them hope for when this is going to be over. I cannot say enough how hard it is to be in one of the hardest-hit communities in the country right now. It breaks my heart. It is the place from which I get up in the House of Commons every day and ask questions and demand better.

I implore the federal government to do this on behalf of every single Albertan who is listening to this tonight. We need more vaccines. We need a clear line of sight. We need clear communications, and we need the federal government to stop patronizing us in its response. When we are holding it to account and demanding better, that is its job, and hopefully there will be a solution for Albertans because of the work of everybody in Parliament who is doing their job here tonight.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am sorry I had to interrupt my colleague's tirade earlier because of interpretation issues. I would like to come back to what she was saying at that exact moment. She said that her community could not afford the luxury of a lockdown.

That concerned me a bit. What public health is telling us is that social distancing is essential, and I think that we really need to listen to science during a pandemic.

I would like my colleague to clarify what she meant by that. Is she against the lockdown? That is what she seemed to be saying.

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[English]

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Mr. Speaker, lockdown is a blunt tool used to stop the spread of the virus. By now, there are better tools, more durable solutions, that should have been deployed across this country. Lockdowns are a very bourgeois concept for a lot of legislators. For the frontline grocery store worker or the mom who shares custody and is working three jobs to make ends meet, who cannot do her job sitting at a desk and having Uber Eats deliver to her, lockdown is paternalistic. It is unaffordable, even with CERB or whatever. It is a luxury.

Being able to stay at home and protect themselves from the virus by isolation is a luxury most workers in Canada cannot afford. That is what I am talking about: understanding that this is a year and a half in and we need a more durable solution that keeps people safe, that stops the spread of COVID, but also understands and highlights the inequities of lockdown that have been exacerbated. Lockdown is classist. We need more vaccines. We need more equity in this country, and the only way we are going to do that is to start saying the obvious: that not everybody can afford to sit at home indefinitely.

• (2005)

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for mentioning the fact that Alberta had economic hardships facing us before the pandemic hit and that the pandemic has made them so much worse.

We have seen time and again that when we allow the virus to run rampant, it hurts the economy. It is the slow peeling off of the band-aid. It is the very thing that the member is talking about that is hurting our population, and makes it harder for Albertans to get over this virus.

We need to put those supports in place. I called on the federal government to do that: to make sure there were more supports for people so they could stay home and stay safe.

I am wondering this. Why did her party not support sick leave legislation? Why did her party not support pharmacare legislation? It is legislation that Canadians, particularly Albertans, need right now.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Mr. Speaker, I do not understand why the member opposite did not support a motion to provide support and benchmarks for a clear path out of the pandemic and out of lockdown, such as what vaccinated persons can do or deploying more rapid tests. This is what we need.

I fully and deeply support ensuring that front-line workers have the resources they need to ensure that they can isolate. Often they do not have that right now, but we are a year and a half into this and we are talking about more programs to keep people at home. We should be talking about how we are getting them back to work safely through vaccination.

I am worried at this point. I think one of the cabinet ministers was talking about what would happen if there was a fourth wave. What? People need hope. They need to know when we are getting out of this. They need to understand what the path forward is and when they are getting those tools. That is what we need the federal

government to be working on right now collaboratively with our provincial partners.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I find it ironic that I was standing in the House only a couple of weeks ago in another emergency debate on the COVID-19 pandemic. I believe I started off my speech that night saying that I had been here in February in an emergency debate on COVID-19. I certainly hoped that I would not have to be here for a third emergency debate on COVID-19. I was hoping that the government would get its act together and start getting vaccines to provinces for them to distribute, to get Canadians vaccinated and get immunity.

However, here I am, less than two weeks later and we are in a third emergency debate on the COVID-19 pandemic. This has been a very difficult two weeks, certainly this past week, when we are seeing once again very mixed messages from the Liberal government in terms of efficacy and immunity when it comes to certain vaccines.

Today's debate is specifically about Alberta. I want to take this opportunity to talk about what could have been. We had opportunities to have made-in-Alberta solutions to address the COVID pandemic. I want to start with the Alberta pilot project at the airports and land borders. Almost a full year ago, Alberta took it upon itself to initiate a pilot program where travellers would be given a rapid test before they started their travels, either on flights at the Calgary International Airport or at the Sweetgrass Coumts Border Crossing, and were given a rapid test again when they returned.

I want to give some numbers for non-exempt travel participants, or non-essential travellers. During the pilot project timeline in Alberta, 50,929 travellers were tested using the Alberta pilot program rapid test. Of those test results, on the first test at the point of entry, 1.37% of travellers tested positive for COVID. On their second test, 0.7% of travellers tested positive.

The total travellers who tested positive was just over 1%. Of the almost 51,000 travellers tested via the Alberta pilot program rapid test, 1% were positive. Let us put that in perspective. That program was extremely successful at identifying the small number of travellers who had COVID. They were forced to do a 14-day quarantine at home while the rest were able to go about their daily lives. Instead of taking that program, which was successful, and moving it to every other international airport in the country, the Liberal response was to shut that program down.

We had a successful program that was identifying positive COVID results of travellers arriving in Calgary and in Alberta through the land crossing, and the Liberals cancelled it. Instead of taking that program and using that template in other international airports across Canada, the Liberals invoked the hotel quarantine program at a cost of \$250 million, not to mention the stress and anxiety that it put on travellers coming back into Canada.

I want to be really clear that these were not just snowbirds coming home or people coming back from sunny locales. These were people who were travelling internationally for funerals, medical appointments and cancer treatments. I have had many of these conversations with my own constituents who were in tears trying to figure out how they could get home, and spending hours on hold trying to book a quarantine hotel with little success.

The Liberals took a program that was working, which put minimal stress and anxiety on travellers and certainly did not cost \$250 million, and they scrapped it in favour of a disastrous hotel quarantine program. We know it is even worse now. We are seeing outbreaks in hotel quarantine sites. Sexual assaults have happened in these hotel quarantine sites. It has been a complete and utter disaster.

Instead of scrapping that program and going back to the pilot program, which we knew worked, the results were almost exactly the same. This is the most frustrating thing. The hotel quarantine identified about 1% of the travellers. It is not like it was identifying an exorbitantly different number. It did not work. It does not work. Alberta had a made-in-Alberta solution that could have been copied across Canada.

● (2010)

I also want to talk about an opportunity to address the vaccines. I have spoken about this in the House a couple of times. Providence Therapeutics in Calgary started approaching the government a year ago with the same innovation and technology that other mRNA vaccines were using, such as Moderna and Pfizer, and it could have been produced here in Canada. Now we have the CEO of Providence saying that he is sick and tired of banging his head against the wall trying to get support from the Liberal government. He is now looking to go abroad, either to the United States or the European Union.

I asked this in question period the other day. The minister said there was a \$100 million program, and Providence got \$10 million from it. Let us put that in perspective in comparison to Moderna in the United States. Through Operation Warp Speed, Moderna has been given \$2.4 billion by the United States government. In comparison, when we had the possibility with Providence Therapeutics of a made-in-Alberta, but more importantly a made-in-Canada vaccine solution, which could have been developed and manufactured here in Canada and for which we would not have to rely on unreliable global supply chains, the company was given \$10 million by the Liberal government. That is 0.4% of what was given to a comparable company in the United States.

To compare that again, the Liberals were willing to spend \$250 million on a hotel quarantine program that does not even work, but they could have supported a Canadian innovator, a Canadian company, to manufacture and develop vaccines right here in Canada. Instead, Providence has been invited by other countries to go to the United States or the EU to develop and manufacture that program.

That is not the first time. Solstar Pharma was in a very similar position. It is based out of Laval, Quebec, but has investors in Calgary. It has been funded by Operation Warp Speed in the United States and its product is being developed in San Diego. That is another one that could have been done here in Canada.

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Is the Prime Minister so focused on ignoring Alberta that the Liberals would ignore a made-in-Canada solution just because Providence Therapeutics is based there? I would hope that is not the case. Certainly, that is how those of us who are members of Parliament from Alberta feel. We feel that Alberta has done its part when it comes to trying to address or offer solutions to the pandemic, and we are being ignored. I can certainly understand. I hope members would see how frustrating it is, not only for the elected officials representing Alberta ridings but certainly for our constituents.

Probably the biggest frustration that we have as Canadians, and certainly as Albertans as well, is the mixed messages we are getting from the federal government. The other day, my colleague for Calgary Nose Hill asked the health minister about Canadians who were getting certain vaccines and were not sure about their second ones. I want to add a personal perspective to this. My wife has had her first AstraZeneca vaccine dose. Now she has no idea when she is going to get her second, because AstraZeneca vaccines have been delayed. She wants to know how long her immunity is going to last or if she is going to have to take one or two doses of a Pfizer, Moderna or Johnson & Johnson vaccine because she is not going to get her second AstraZeneca dose. The minister did not feel it was worth answering real questions from real Canadians who have real concerns. My wife wants an answer to the question of whether she will have to take the AstraZeneca or have to take two doses of another vaccine.

That is the frustration that Canadians are feeling from these mixed messages and the inability to access vaccines. Fewer than 3% of Canadians have had their second dose of a vaccine. I am getting calls, as I know almost all of my colleagues here are, from frustrated, depressed, stressed business owners, moms, dads and grandparents. We want an end to this. We want Canadian businesses back open. We want Canadians back to work. I want to be able to hug my loved ones, whom I have not seen in more than a year. We need a clear path to how this is going to be resolved, and we need to see that sooner, not later.

● (2015)

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 suspect that if members were to be honest, they would recognize that virtually from the beginning there has been a plan that ultimately has seen Canada do relatively well. Has it been perfect? No, and I do not believe any country has been perfect.

Alberta just recently made some announcements in terms of further restrictions and the speaker before him commented that Alberta cannot afford to have a lockdown. She gave the impression that she does not support a lockdown.

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Does the federal Conservative Party have a position on lockdowns in situations of this nature or any other nature?

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Speaker, the focus of my presentation and certainly my colleague from Calgary Nose Hill is these lockdowns would not be necessary if the Liberal government had been focused and had been able to procure and distribute vaccines. The Liberals spent all of last year focused on a partnership with CanSino, a company that is affiliated with the Communist regime in China, rather than supporting Canadian innovators, manufacturers and pharmaceutical companies that could have been manufacturing and developing vaccines right here at home.

To be honest, I am not worried if that company is from Alberta, Quebec, B.C., Saskatchewan, Newfoundland. I would rather see us have a dependable supply of vaccines. These lockdowns would not be necessary if the federal Liberal government had its act together.

• (2020)

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am here in B.C. and I live in the Vancouver Island Health Authority, which has been broken into sections and we are not supposed to leave those sections unless it is an absolute emergency because we care about public health.

When I look at the reality across this country, where we see public gatherings, we see things happening that we do not want to see. Misinformation about lockdowns and restrictions has caused a great deal of confusion.

I am wondering if the member could be clear. Does he believe a full lockdown needs to be implemented to keep people safe during this time and that the resources that they need to do that should be there?

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Speaker, I know the New Democratic Party is pushing very hard for the Prime Minister to enact the Emergencies Act so that the Prime Minister can have full control over the pandemic issues across the country. I do not support that because the Prime Minister has failed miserably at how he has handled certain parts of the pandemic that he should be able to control: procuring and distributing PPE and vaccines.

If he cannot even handle that part of his job, which I would argue is the most important part of his job, I certainly do not want him in charge of health care in each and every province and territory. If he cannot do job one, I certainly do not want him in charge of the entire country.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am distressed to understand now that the Conservative Party does not seem to believe that lockdowns work. We have evidence from the U.K. In fact, the countries that had a strategy of going to full elimination of the virus did much better than countries that tried to bend the curve.

However, even the U.K., which made the mistake initially and had such bad rates, instituted lockdowns and mandatory hotel quarantines far stricter than Canada's. It has a mandatory hotel quarantine of two weeks in which a traveller must pay for their own accommodation in a hotel.

I ask the hon. member if he does not think we should look at the evidence?

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Speaker, I am enthusiastic about the questions I am getting from the NDP and the Greens because they are asking questions as if I am in government. Obviously they feel that the trend is going in the right direction.

What we have seen is countries around the world like the United States, which is a very similar democratic system as we have here, and the United Kingdom, start to lift restrictions and lift lockdowns because they have access to vaccines, rapid testing, home-based testing, things that we have not had access to here in Canada.

I never said anything about lockdowns. What I am saying is these lockdowns would not have been needed had we had access to those important tools like vaccines.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform you that I will be sharing my time with the charming member for Saanich—Gulf Islands. It is a pleasure for me to do so.

First, I would like to say that I completely understand the heartfelt concern of the member for Edmonton Strathcona. I was listening to her earlier, and I understand her concerns because we experienced something similar in Quebec during the first wave, when the situation in our long-term care facilities was very troubling, very worrisome. Today, we see that there are 23,600 active cases in Alberta compared to 8,800 cases in Quebec. Demographically speaking, we see that the situation is very worrisome.

As legislators, what should we do in a growing pandemic? This situation is not good.

I would say that the first thing to do is not to give in to the instinct we have as politicians. It is unfortunate, but often as politicians, our instinct is to look for a scapegoat. I am saying that because we often get into the habit of pointing the finger rather than looking for solutions.

I would like to say that I have a great deal of sympathy for Albertans and for what they are going through. I may have a little less for Jason Kenney. Perhaps his handling of the crisis was not totally perfect, but that is not for us to say. It is not the House of Commons' job to judge Jason Kenney; that is the Legislative Assembly of Alberta's job. It is the opposition parties' job to do that and to show that there were perhaps some serious flaws in the way he managed the crisis. To sum up, it is not our job to put Jason Kenney on trial.

Although I say that, I am also aware that the preferred attitude during a crisis is, in my opinion, a responsible one. I think that responsibility dictates that we listen to science. We have an obligation to listen to science, especially in a pandemic. Perhaps that is not what Mr. Kenney did. He will have to answer to his fellow Albertans. However, science tells us that lockdowns can be useful.

Earlier, I heard my colleague from Calgary Nose Hill say that the lockdown was an issue in her riding, that it was unfair, that not everyone was being treated the same during lockdowns.

I do not know if this is the case in Alberta, but I can say that during the lockdown in Quebec, grocery stores and essential services remained open. We debated that at length in the House of Commons. There were benefits for people losing their jobs. There is a social safety net that lets us keep a roof over our heads and food on the table during a pandemic.

I find it most unfortunate to let our constituents believe that there is a magic solution that does not require lockdowns. What science is telling us and what public health is telling us is that this dreaded lockdown is necessary. In Quebec, it is very well managed by public health authorities.

At this time, we know that the situation is alarming. There is one thing that will surely make an appearance again and that is the Emergencies Act. Ontario invoked the Emergencies Act to get help from the federal government. Quebec did the same thing for its long-term care facilities and the army came to give us a hand.

Personally, I can see how this would be a useful tool, but it is up to the provinces to use it. It is not up to the federal government, which does not have jurisdiction or expertise in health matters, to tell the provinces how to manage the pandemic. If the Emergencies Act were to be invoked, it would have to be in response to a formal request from the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. The federal government has no business taking that power away from the legitimately elected members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. I think that, if the government wants to do something useful in terms of pandemic response, the best thing it can do is make sure we have a more robust health care system going forward.

• (2025)

In Quebec, I think most health care providers realized that there were weaknesses in our health care system. Where do those weaknesses come from?

I have to say that for the past 20 years there has been a systemic problem in the Canadian federation, and that is the fiscal imbalance. It is not normal that the level of government with the greatest financial capacity provides just slightly more than 20% of every dollar invested in the health sector and that the provinces are forced—at least that is the case in Quebec—year after year to deal with difficult budget situations because the government's contribution to health care funding is inadequate. In the next few years we may have to face a similar crisis. If we do not have a more robust health care system at that point, then we will not have learned from our mistakes.

If the government wants to be helpful, the best thing it can do is listen to the provinces, like Quebec and Alberta, which have been calling for health transfers of 35% for far too long. That way the pressure and problems that Alberta is currently experiencing with intensive care might be problems that could be dealt with much more easily.

What Alberta is currently going through is similar to the problems experienced in long-term care centres and seniors homes in

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Quebec. Part of the problem was the burnout being felt by health care staff, who have been overwhelmed for years now. Fewer employees are being hired and more work is being done in mandatory overtime to reduce the financial strain on the system. In the end, it became quite clear that our system is very ill-equipped.

In my view, the best response the federal government could give today would be to better fund the provincial health care systems.

I ask all my colleagues not to give in to the political instinct we all have, as I said earlier, to want to score points by finding a scapegoat for the current crisis. Instead, we must try to respect each other's jurisdictions and ensure that rational political action is taken.

I will close by saying that I encourage everyone to listen to science-based recommendations. We need to follow public health rules and know that this imposes certain limitations on us both in terms of vaccination and lockdown. If every politician would follow the rules and encourage their constituents to do the same, I think that would be a very good start.

• (2030)

[English]

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am sure my hon. colleague will not be surprised that we do not necessarily agree on all the facets and debate on jurisdiction. However, I know we all believe that no matter what, when lives are at stake, working together and doing whatever we can is key.

I wonder if he could comment on the need for the federal government, at the very least, to ensure that people in Alberta and across Canada have all the access they could possibly need to the vaccines.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Simard: Mr. Speaker, I could not agree more with my colleague about the access to vaccines. Procurement was not the responsibility of the provincial governments. That responsibility fell to the federal government. As for the way vaccines are distributed once they are received, that is a public health issue, which is a provincial jurisdiction.

My colleague said that I would disagree with her. I would simply say that to be efficient and effective, we must respect the different jurisdictions. I cannot imagine a municipality poking its nose into the vaccination process. That would clearly fly in the face of common sense. I would therefore expect the federal government not to interfere in provincial jurisdictions, just as the provinces do not interfere in municipal jurisdictions.

There you go. It is as simple as that.

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[English]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there has been a lot of discussion, and I know this member touched on certain members, primarily the NDP in this House, as calling on the government to use the emergency measures act. At the end of the day, this government has demonstrated that it wants to work with provinces and has pretty much given provinces everything that they want in terms of making sure that they have access to supplies as soon as they can get it, PPE and rapid tests.

I realize this member is not from Alberta, and neither am I, but at least within his province, would he not see the federal government using the emergency measures act almost as an act of bad faith in that relationship that has been used over the last year in order to combat this virus together on a collective front?

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Simard: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure I understand my colleague's question.

The Emergencies Act was invoked to send the army to Quebec to help out in the long-term care facilities when the situation got out of control.

My colleague said that the federal government had made some efforts. I am prepared to agree, but it did not make the effort that it should have to ensure that the health care system is adequately funded. It is totally unacceptable that barely 20% of every dollar invested in health, one of the most important budget items, comes from the federal government. In Quebec, if I recall correctly, more than 48% of the government's entire budget goes to health care.

In the next few years, if the federal government does not understand that, I think the provinces will have a very painful time getting out of this crisis.

• (2035)

[English]

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Mr. Speaker, when the member is talking about the health transfers, I agree that the federal government should increase the health transfers. We started with a 6% escalator and that was cut back to 3% escalator during the Harper government years.

I think that we should be looking at demographics rather than just per capita in terms of how much money is transferred to the provinces, because some provinces have a much older population, like here in British Columbia. Would he agree with that idea?

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Simard: Mr. Speaker, we have to bear in mind the provinces' total spending on health care, not just the per capita amount. It has been shown, not by me, as I am a sovereigntist, but by the Parliamentary Budget Officer, that if nothing is done by the end of this decade, the provinces will be posting annual deficits as a result of federal underfunding.

[English]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saenich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, my thanks to my hon. colleague from Jonquière for splitting his time with me.

We are in a terrible place now. When we were first getting used to the idea that we were in a pandemic and needed to adjourn Parliament on March 13, 2020, some of us stood in this place to say that by unanimous consent we were going to adjourn until April 20, 2020. It seems absurd now. I clearly remember saying that the Greens had given their unanimous consent, while wondering if we really needed to stay out as long as April 20. It seemed maybe a little extreme, but we would see.

We have learned a lot. We started talking about flattening the curve. We thought that would be adequate, because we were told it would be, but we have learned more. This has been a very steep learning curve. We could have learned faster, gone faster, and followed the models of countries like New Zealand, Australia and South Korea, the countries that decided to go hard and fast, using the kind of advice that the World Health Organization, Dr. Michael Ryan, recommended back then of, "Go hard, go fast. Don't wait to be perfect. Speed trumps perfection." I thought we were going fast and I certainly am not at the level of someone who wants to start casting blame.

I find this debate tonight difficult because, as much as there is blame to be cast, does it help? I do not want the people of Alberta to feel that the federal Parliament has decided to lay into them with clubs. It is pretty clear that their premier miscalculated badly and cost people's lives.

I want to reflect a bit on something that I do not think gets said enough in this place. I think there is a perception in Alberta that people like me, who want to see the fossil fuel industry shut down, phased out over time and take care of the workers that that somehow means we do not love Alberta. I really love Alberta and I love Albertans.

I have so much respect for the grit of Alberta in facing major disasters. I remember very clearly, of course, the 2013 floods in Calgary. I went. I pulled rotted debris from people's basements in High River because I found myself in the days after the 2013 flood in Calgary for the stampede and just thought I could be more useful if I got a friend and we went up to High River to see if we could help. I have the t-shirt that says, "Come Hell or High Water". Mayor Nenshi decided that even though it looked impossible to have the stampede, they were going to have it. I admire that spirit.

Soon thereafter, during the 2016 fires at Fort McMurray, there was incredible community spirit with no one left behind. There was a very strong image of a patient, orderly evacuation with fires on all sides, and the residents of Fort McMurray moving out along the single road. If somebody's car ran out of gas, they got into somebody else's car. It was inspiring.

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For Alberta to be the site of the highest COVID rates in North America is devastatingly frightening, because we know more about this pandemic now. We know about this virus. We know the longer the virus lives among us, the more likely we are in a human petri dish to have more dangerous variants. We do not know yet if it is all about getting vaccines in case a variant overcomes a vaccine. We are in a very dangerous place during this third wave.

Today we are marking Red Dress Day, to think about and to pledge solidarity with all of the families of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. It was early June, two years ago, that the government had delivered unto it the report of the inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women and girls and two-spirited peoples. One of the inquiry's key recommendations was to shut down the "man camps". At that point, the threat to human life was from what were called the "man camps" in the inquiry. Many Canadians may not know the term, but it meant that large construction sites represent a threat to the vulnerable, to the marginalized who have to hitchhike.

● (2040)

I know there was a very strong reaction from people in Alberta, and of course most of the workers are the dads, the grandads, the brothers, the sons and thoroughly decent people, but there is no question but that the evidence shows that missing and murdered indigenous women and girls are at more risk when there are transient camps of workers.

In COVID, I just want to ask why it is that we, public health officials and governments, decided that when other things had to close down, like mom-and-pop shops and various places where people might have been able to be better off than in a concentrated place like a work camp, the work camps were so essential that we could not shut them down. The highest rates of COVID in Alberta right now are in the region of the oil sands. They have very high rates.

In British Columbia the NDP Government of British Columbia has decided Site C is so important to continue, that we would not possibly think of shutting it down when it has outbreaks. We have outbreaks right now at the Site C dam site, the Kitimat LNG facilities that are being built, along the Trans Mountain pipeline construction link, the Coastal GasLink. All the man camps turn out to also be places where COVID flourishes.

One of the key things about the oil sands is that the workers commute by airplane. Members can think of poor Newfoundland and Labrador, where they were in the Atlantic bubble and felt that the rates were low enough to meet the requirement under Newfoundland and Labrador law that new Premier Andrew Furey had to call an election within a few months. Suddenly, they had an outbreak of COVID from the oil sands workers, and they are having them now. If we search this we will find it everywhere that academics and scientists are saying they have a problem with these fly-in, fly-out camps. One expert said that COVID did not just walk in there by itself, it showed up on an airplane.

While we worry about international borders and why we are not being tighter with our borders, how is it that we are so addicted to oil that we turn a blind eye to the impact of these man camps that we should have been shutting down, or at least ensuring that the work force there was not commuting across many provincial bor-

ders? There were ways, perhaps, to keep people in the construction industry working when many other industries were shut down, but we have turned a blind eye to the fact of these squashed, busy workplaces like slaughterhouses. We have shut down parts of our economy, but turned a blind eye to the places that seem to me, in reviewing the evidence, to be the places where COVID flourishes.

We have seen the mayor of Lethbridge, Chris Spearman, say, "We have done the least of the provinces. We've tolerated protests against masks and at the hospital and rapid vaccination clinic." We need to do more. One of the Albertans I admire the most, because he is brilliant, is journalist, Andrew Nikiforuk, who wrote a piece just a few days ago in *The Tyee* entitled "A Coronavirus Hell of Kenney's Own Making". I only mention the title so members can look it up.

He said the "numbers reflect, first and foremost, Premier Jason Kenney's callous and persistent disregard for scientific findings and mathematical reality." One of those mathematical realities is exponential growth. Alberta is in a dangerous place right now, and it is certainly not the fault of Albertans. We had a government in Alberta that, over Christmas, had a fairly significant portion of its elected provincial leadership decide it was okay to go on a vacation. As I dug into it, I found one of the ministers excused herself by saying she wanted to make sure she was helping the airlines in this economic crisis. I thought it was a facetious comment that would not land well, but then I read further and found that the premier had thought it was a good way to help WestJet and that there would be a kind of safety on an Alberta-to-Hawaii corridor that could somehow live outside the reality of COVID.

There were problems in leadership. There were problems of not leading by example. There were problems in not wanting to address the science of COVID by allowing the policies to be ideological. None of us can let this be ideological. We have to set aside whatever partisanship we bring to this and end up where Andrew Nikiforuk's article ended, which was, "It's time to pray for Alberta," and I will also note that faith by itself does not do the work.

We need to do the work to help Alberta and Albertans in any way we can.

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• (2045)

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 add my voice to those who are thinking of Alberta during the most recent outbreaks. I spent five years of my life there, and in 2013, when I was personally evacuated, I saw first-hand what a good neighbour looks like. There was hardly a person I knew who was not picking up scrap from their neighbour's yard and making sure they had groceries and were taken care of.

However, during this debate, I sit here stunned. Living in Nova Scotia, I sometimes hear people say, "Where you stand depends on where you sit." We have had the benefit of a thoughtful pandemic response from a public health point of view. We are in a lockdown now, after seeing our cases go into double digits and now triple digits for a few days. The collective response has been one of acceptance.

We know that the option is not between a lockdown and not a lockdown. The option is between having a short and serious lockdown or a lengthy and drawn out lockdown. Those who have studied pandemic responses around the world, as seen during COVID-19, have found that the jurisdictions that have embraced a strict and swift lockdown have seen a lesser impact on their economy and their public's health, and fewer restrictions on their civil liberties.

I am curious if the member could offer commentary on the importance of following the epidemiological research and science to understand that we need to be neighbourly once again and need to support Albertans with financial supports, federally and provincially, to ensure that they can afford to do the right thing and stay home.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague, the parliamentary secretary, came awfully close to his former premier's famous words, "Stay the blazes home."

I am astonished that in this country we do not learn, even within the boundaries of Canada, what is working and what is not. The Atlantic bubble was an extraordinary success of, as the hon. member said, evidence-based decision-making and strong instructions for people to stay home. They were able to create an Atlantic bubble so that New Brunswickers could drive to P.E.I. and Prince Edward Islanders could get to Nova Scotia.

The case rates in the Atlantic bubble, compared with those in Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia and now Alberta, show a real success story. I certainly hope, for the sake of Nova Scotians and New Brunswickers, that this recent spike is quelled very quickly.

• (2050)

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in an earlier intervention, the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands spoke about the U.K. It should be noted that the U.K. has had some of the most restrictive measures in Europe, yet it has fared much worse than most European countries in terms of cases, hospitalizations and mortality.

I want to look at some preliminary figures published by the Office for National Statistics in the U.K. On January 19, there were 1,372 COVID deaths. By the week of April 16, the average death rate was 29. Compare this with the average rate of 80 for the flu between 2015 and 2019. What happened between January and April? The government unveiled a very successful vaccination strategy. That has clearly not been the case in Canada.

Could the hon. member speak to that? How, in the face of such statistics, can she possibly criticize Premier Kenney without uttering one word of criticism for the Prime Minister and his total failure when it comes to vaccinations?

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, the U.K. initially made a lot of mistakes. Up to the point when Prime Minister Boris Johnson came down with COVID, they had not been moving as quickly and as hard as they have done recently, which is why they have been able to deal with variants.

The variants in particular are quite terrifying. I have lots of criticism to go around on all sides. I even hate the partisanship of focusing on only one province right now. However, I think our bigger problem is the fractured federation and not being clear on how we can work together. We are not even using the Emergencies Act.

As I have said to my hon. colleague for St. Albert—Edmonton, I do not intend not to criticize the federal government, as mistakes have been made everywhere. However, the more we can approach this in a non-partisan fashion, the more chance we have of being team Canada and getting through this with minimal loss of life now that we are in a third wave that is quite terrifying.

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 appreciate the opportunity to speak this evening to this very important issue. If we track it to its very beginning, we will find that at that point, the Prime Minister of Canada made it very clear to all Canadians, including members of Parliament, that the first priority of the Government of Canada was to take a team Canada approach in combating the coronavirus. That has happened, and there are ample examples of how we have managed it.

I was born and raised in the Prairies. In fact, Alberta is where I served my time in the Canadian Forces. I was posted in Edmonton at Lancaster Park, and I spent a few very good years of my life there. I also have family members who live in Alberta, particularly in the Lethbridge area.

My heart goes out to the province of Alberta, as it does to the province of Ontario. When a province is getting into an area of concern, it starts to put so much stress on our institutions, particularly our health care institutions, and one cannot help but wonder what the impact of that will be on the health conditions of citizens in the province.

We need to put the COVID-19 virus into the perspective of our federation. Canada is very different from the U.K. We have jurisdictional control here in Ottawa for certain things, and the provinces have jurisdictional control over other areas. However, all in all, as a federation, we have done quite well, and there is no exception here. Yes, there have been some concerns, but it is important that Ottawa continues to work closely with the provinces and territories, which we have seen from day one.

When it comes to the province of Alberta and its recent third wave, the Minister of Health and the Prime Minister have been talking with Premier Kenney. As I understand, it happened just the other day. The Government of Canada is very much aware of what is taking place in Alberta, and we are concerned about it. I do not think that will come as a surprise to the people who are following the debate this evening.

When we look at where we came from and where we are today, I am glad to say that so much more hope is there. We can see the light at the end of the tunnel. Vaccines will play an absolutely critical role in the post-pandemic recovery, as we all know, and we have seen significant gains in that area.

I have been listening closely to members providing their thoughts on the federal government and the role we have played. I take a great deal of exception to comments by the Conservatives, given the degree to which they continue to want to politicize, give false information and give the opinion that Ottawa cares less for Alberta than it does for the rest of the country. What absolute and total garbage. Shame on each and every member of Parliament who tries to give that impression. The Conservative Party has spread misinformation, and I question some of the statements that have been made this evening.

● (2055)

We have been going through this for 14 months, and the former leader of the Green Party talked about flattening the curve. It has been a very steep learning curve for all of us. It is not like we had a foundation of knowledge around the world that we could draw upon to make instant decisions. The Conservatives believe they could have, as though they can just pull them out of a hat.

This government believes in evidence-based decision-making, so we put together the committees and advisory groups that were absolutely essential. We continue to follow the advice of health experts and science, knowing full well that it is our best way out of this situation, and we are not alone. The provinces and territories equally bring together health experts, look at science and make decisions.

My concern in part is that we should be trying to send a consistent message from Ottawa. We should not be telling communities that they cannot have a lockdown. That is not a positive message. It is confusing. That comes from the Conservative opposition health critic. She makes it very clear that she does not support lockdowns. Think of the costs of not taking some of these actions.

We have consistently recognized that at times there is a need for change. I made reference to the flattening of the curve. That was an educational experience for all Canadians. When COVID-19 first came out, we all learned that we had to keep the numbers down

during the first wave. That meant having to wash our hands, use some sort of sanitizer and physically distance. Members will recall that at the very beginning, the health experts were not saying we had to wear a mask. It was not until we were a few weeks into the pandemic that they started saying we should be wearing masks. Then all of us, at least I would hope all of us, were conveying to our constituents the very simple but important message to wash our hands, wear a mask and maintain physical distancing.

The provinces, Ottawa, indigenous leaders and territories, working with a team Canada approach, recognized that we needed to shut down certain aspects of our economy to protect the interests of Canadians and their health and safety. The federal government therefore developed programs for all Canadians, whether in Alberta, Ontario or my home province of Manitoba. These programs saw literally billions of dollars going into the pockets of Canadians to ensure that they would be able to continue making the payments that are necessary. Even if they cannot work, the bills continue to come in. They still have a requirement to buy groceries and pay rent or a mortgage. The government, through different programs, made a very clear indication to Canadians at the very beginning that we would have their backs, and we have done just that in every way.

As we have seen, the provinces, at different times and in different ways, have had different impacts, in good part because of the decisions that were being made. As a federation, we recognize that there is jurisdictional control and that the provinces lead in certain areas. One of those areas was deciding what would be closed down and if there was a need for a full lockdown.

● (2100)

Some provinces did exceptionally well, others maybe not as well. Many different factors need to be taken into consideration. At the end of the day, Ottawa and in particular the Prime Minister have maintained communication with premiers and first ministers through the numerous meetings that have taken place. The Minister of Health and other ministers have maintained communications with provinces, territories and indigenous leaders.

We ensured there was a high sense of co-operation and that there were no surprises. People who might be following the debate should be made aware of this. We understand that Canadians want us to be working together and we have been working together in that team Canada approach, even though it has not been universal on the floor of the House of Commons. At the beginning it was, but I now find more and more misleading information coming from the Conservatives.

There are areas that cause a great deal of concern. If we listen to the Conservative members, they will say that it is all Ottawa's fault. They are more concerned about placing blame. They said that if Ottawa would have only had 50 million vaccine doses back in January, we would not have the third wave or any other wave. It is all Ottawa. The Conservatives say that if the Conservative Party of Canada were in government, it would have had manufacturing at full capacity back in August of last year and no doubt approved a vaccine back in June of last year.

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Of course, the vaccines and the acquisition of them was of critical importance. The government recognized that early last year. Where was that concern with respect to vaccines back in June and July? The Conservatives asked hundreds, if not thousands, of questions. I cannot recall one question from the Conservative Party in June or July about the vaccine. If I am wrong, and many of them were there, they can give me the date. That is the nice thing about Hansard. They can show me that I am wrong.

As a country, we are doing exceptionally well. The Prime Minister made assurances to premiers and anyone else who wanted to get information that because of the contracts we were able to negotiate through our procurement minister and procurement staff, we had a commitment of six million vaccine doses by the end of the first quarter. We were saying that for months, like back in December when the first vaccine was approved last year. Not only did we meet that target, we exceeded it.

Now, because of the agreements we achieved with companies like Pfizer, Moderna and AstraZeneca, we are now in a position where we are the third best out of the G20 countries in terms of people getting their first dose. Well over 30% of people in Canada now have that first dose. We understand the importance of it.

The Conservatives will fall back and say that we are only at 2% on the double dose, that the Liberals are bad and so forth. We should listen to the evidence-based decision-making. Are the Conservatives suggesting that everyone should be getting the second dose now? What would that first dose percentage be? I am inclined to agree with what our health care experts at the national level and provincial level say.

● (2105)

We are on the right track and the numbers are clear on that. Issues in the months of January and February did throw us off course to a certain degree, but they were not necessarily under our control. When Pfizer said that it had to retool, so it had to cut back for a couple of weeks on its numbers, it was not like we were in a position to say no. We had a contract that said we would get a commitment from Pfizer. We will be receiving over two million doses of vaccine a week come June, and I understand we will receive two million doses this week. The numbers are very impressive.

The provinces are aware of it. They know the number of doses coming into Canada. In fact, when we talk about transparency and accountability, any Canadian can click on the Government of Canada's coronavirus website and get the hard number of vaccines that are in the country. It will say which province has what number of vaccines.

In comparison, we are doing well. Canada has a population of 37.5 million people. We have close to 17 million doses in Canada. Before the end of June, we will be somewhere around 48 million doses.

We can look at what is happening in Alberta today. We only need to read some of the headlines, such as "Alberta tightens restrictions, increases fines for COVID-19 rule-breakers." That is from a CBC report. It lists a number of areas where it is now tightening things in hopes of minimizing the damage of that third wave.

I am glad to see the province of Alberta has made that decision. I do not know if the federal Conservative Party supports what Premier Kenney is doing based on one or two comments today. Premier Kenney is right to put in these restrictions. The numbers are concerning. In the report it said that hospitals were treating 671 patients with the illness as of Tuesday, including 150 in intensive care beds. The numbers matter. We know that.

I used to be the health critic in the province of Manitoba. There is a limited number of ICU beds. We should all be concerned. I was concerned when Manitoba had the highest cases in the country in November. I was concerned about what was taking place in the province of Ontario. Many of my Ontario colleagues talked about how serious the situation was and how we had to be on message and communicate to people what could do to get through this third wave.

I am concerned today about what is taking place in a province I care deeply about, the province of Alberta. The message I would like to leave for the people of Alberta is that the full weight of the Government of Canada, that the Prime Minister of Canada, who has a very caring heart for the province of Alberta, is very much watching, listening and communicating with the province of Alberta, whether it is the premier or other leaders. Alberta will pull through because of the health care professionals, because of people coming together despite what many members of the Conservative members of Parliament might be saying this evening.

● (2110)

Hon. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that was quite something. The hon. member talks about a consistent message from Ottawa like that is the whole point of Parliament. It is as if parliamentarians on opposition benches should not ask tough questions of their government and expect actual answers from their government and that Canadians would not be better served by that.

He talked about false information, accused Conservatives of throwing it out there and then went on to list about six or seven completely false examples of things Conservatives had said, including that Conservatives demanded "50 million vaccines" by January.

Let us talk about real information. Yesterday, we passed 37.85 doses administered per 100 Canadians. On March 13, 52 days ago, the U.K. passed that threshold. On the same day, the U.S. was at 31.61 doses per 100 Americans. Canada had 7.77 doses administered per Canadian on that day. I am wondering if the hon. member would verify that information is indeed true.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, everything I indicated is in fact accurate, and I challenge the member to point out any aspect of what I said specifically that was not. I was being hypothetical when I made reference to the Conservatives and the 50 million vaccines.

The member poses a question that shows how the Conservatives are more concerned about partisan politics than they are about being truthful. If the member were truthful, what he would say is that of the G20 countries Canada is number three and the two countries he cited were one and two.

Yes, the U.K. and the U.S.A. are doing better than Canada on the first doses, but what about the other 17 or 18 countries? We are ahead of those G20 countries.

• (2115)

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member speaks about jurisdiction. I hope he heard my intervention, where I spoke about how Albertans were not interested in these back-and-forths on jurisdiction. When their loved ones are sick, when our health care system fails, they are not interested in this back-and-forth.

I am going to humour my colleague right now. He talks about federal jurisdiction. I think we can all agree that working with indigenous populations is something within the federal jurisdiction, yet we know in Alberta and across Canada, indigenous communities do not have the supports they need to fight the COVID-19 pandemic.

Could he talk about the idea that we do not have clean water for indigenous communities? People cannot wash their hands if they do not have access to clean water. If Liberal promises on clean drinking water in indigenous communities were currencies, we would all be rich. Could the member talk about how he can prioritize the health of indigenous communities, which is clearly a jurisdiction to which he can feel comfortable speaking?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I would welcome a discussion regarding a wide variety of issues within indigenous communities. In many areas, there has been significant improvement. In other areas, yes, we do need to work to do better. As a government, we are moving forward.

The issue of jurisdiction is important, which is why we saw the Prime Minister work with provinces and territories right from the beginning. It is why we had a \$19-billion provincial restart back in August to help support provinces and territories. It is absolutely critical in situations like this and others that Ottawa and provinces work together.

Canadians want us to be working together. They do not want to see fed-bashing and passing the buck onto provinces. They want to see the different levels of government working together.

The Deputy Speaker: We will go to the next questioner, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Mr. Speaker, I know the member touched on it a bit throughout his speech, but—

The Deputy Speaker: I will interrupt the parliamentary secretary and go to the next person who wishes to pose a question or comment and give him a chance to throw a necktie on. We try to stay with our usual standards and protocols.

We will go to the hon. member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith.

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Mr. Speaker, one of the things that is really frustrating people is the inconsisten-

cy of messaging that has happened from the federal government and different provincial lockdowns. We really feel uncoordinated as a federation in dealing with this pandemic. Would the member not agree that we would be better off if we had a task force to deal with this? We have medical health officers working together province to province, but there are people travelling from province to province for work.

I really feel for the folks in Alberta. My daughter's Albertan boyfriend cannot come here to visit. He can cross the border into British Columbia into one zone, but my daughter cannot leave Vancouver Island because there are lockdowns here. We have very inconsistent rules. We have a right to travel from province to province, but—

• (2120)

The Deputy Speaker: We will now go to the hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, let me talk about the most important thing that I believe can come out of tonight's discussion, and this is a personal opinion. It is that there be a consistent message from every member of Parliament, no matter what political stripe, which is to get the vaccine. The best vaccine is the first vaccine people are able to get.

Health Canada has done a phenomenal job. All vaccines that have been approved by Canada are safe and are being made available. The best vaccine is the first one available. All of us should be saying that.

Mr. Darrell Samson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government has invested almost \$20 billion in the restart program to support provinces and territories, as well as \$2 billion for education, opening classrooms and various renovations in schools. In Alberta, for the restart program, that represents about \$1.3 billion and for the education program almost \$300 million. The numbers are similar in Manitoba.

I would like the hon. member to speak about those investments that are so crucial to all provinces and territories in this great country.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, that is a good way to demonstrate to those who might be following the debate the degree to which the Prime Minister and the government really want to work with other levels of government and stakeholders to minimize the negative impacts of the coronavirus.

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Billions of dollars were invested in the restart program. The member referenced the amount that went to Alberta, but that was to support additional testing, for example. It was to ensure that provinces were in a better position to deal with issues related to mental health and long-term care facilities. The additional \$2 billion was to support school divisions, so that as children and young adults across the nation went back to school, they were in a better, safer and healthier environment. That is what I mean by a team Canada approach. Not only did we talk about it, but we also delivered in terms of dollars.

Hon. Tim Uppal (Edmonton Mill Woods, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Edmonton—Wetaskiwin.

It is a privilege to speak on behalf of the constituents of Edmonton Mill Woods. My constituents, like those right across Canada, are having a very difficult time coping with the current spike in COVID-19 cases and the accompanying lockdowns. It is unfortunate that we are even in this position to be having this emergency debate and that we could have so easily been in an emergency debate on many of the cases that we have seen and are currently seeing right across the country.

In the last seven days, we have seen the Atlantic bubble burst, with Nova Scotia seeing nearly 800 cases over the last week. Nunavut, which just weeks ago had zero cases, is now facing its own outbreak. We are still seeing British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec continue to cope and grapple with the third wave. We are in this position today because the response of the Liberal government throughout the pandemic has been slow and confusing at every single step.

Let us go back to the beginning of this pandemic when we were just seeing the reports of the first cases that we all then called the coronavirus. My colleague from Edmonton Riverbend, then our shadow minister for health, had questioned the government consistently on its plans for stopping flights from Wuhan province, when the health minister said that closing the border was not effective at all. On January 28, 2020, over a year ago, we learned from the health minister that the first individual identified with the coronavirus did not self-identify when entering Canada. He had travelled from Wuhan and had a cough. The Minister of Health stated that this individual took exactly the appropriate precautions that he was given at the border, and that the systems were working and were working very well.

One year later, and with more examples than I have time to discuss tonight of the Liberal government's failure, our entire country is facing lockdowns and restrictions over and over again. This stands in stark contrast to places like the United States and Britain where restrictions are being eased and economies are reopening. What is the difference between Canada and those other countries? It is vaccines. While both the U.K. and the United States were rushing to secure vaccines for their citizens, Canada stood at the back of the line, dawdling.

The government pursued a dubious vaccine partnership with CanSino, a Chinese state-owned company. The deal fell apart almost immediately after the Prime Minister made the big announcement about it. It took only a week for the Chinese communist gov-

ernment to stop necessary materials from being exported to Canada so research and production could happen. It was the only leading vaccine that the Liberal government was pushing to be made in Canada. Instead of working with the private sector to build vaccine production capacity right here in our own country with companies like Providence Therapeutics, just one of the 17 companies that have submitted proposals to build and roll out pharmaceutical strategies in Alberta, the Liberal government decided to build a new vaccine facility which will not be ready until 2022 at the earliest, well after the pandemic should be under control.

The government's failure on procuring vaccines is shown with the wait times between the doses. The four-month wait period is longer than that of any other country in the world and contrary to the advice of the developer and manufacturer of that vaccine. The Liberal government has forced an off-label usage of vaccines only because there is insufficient supply. The NACI has acknowledged it would not be recommending a four-month delay if there were sufficient supply. This, of course, is leading to more COVID cases, more vulnerability. This is the result of the government's failures.

● (2125)

As I mentioned earlier, another massive failure by the Liberal government has been in being very slow on closing the border. For more than a year, we have been calling for greater border measures to protect against COVID-19 and ministers of the government said that we were spreading fear and scaremongering.

More recently, we saw the ravaging effect that the variants of the virus were having. The double variant in India was first identified in October. The government continued to see variant cases pop up right across our country, most notably in British Columbia and Ontario. Now we are seeing the effects of these variants right across the country. Today, nearly 60% of the active cases in Alberta are variant cases. Simply, we needed the government to listen to our calls to secure the border. Its slowness is why we are here today.

Despite all of that, the Prime Minister has come out and said he has no regrets regarding his leadership throughout this pandemic. That is astonishing. He has no regrets that the government shut down our pandemic early warning system months before COVID-19 happened. He has no regrets that the government sent hundreds of thousands of masks, gloves, gowns and the government's own reserves to China, leading to our own health care professionals and first responders being forced to ration their own PPE and recycle masks. He has no regrets on telling Canadians that the risk was low at the beginning of the pandemic. He has no regrets about not securing our border at the beginning of the pandemic or stopping flights from hot spots earlier as variants were ravaging countries across the globe. He has no regrets about the mental health crisis that my community of Edmonton Mill Woods and communities right across Canada have been struggling with as a result of lost lives, livelihoods and more lockdowns.

For us to prevent the surge in cases we are seeing right across Canada, we needed to vaccinate Canadians in January and February, like the United States did. By the end of February, only 4% of Canadians had received their first shot, while 10% of Americans were fully vaccinated. From the very beginning, the Liberal government has been slow and confused at every step, leading us into this situation. Its slowness to procure the vaccines that we needed was a major contributor to this third wave. Its slowness to close the borders as highly contagious variants were emerging across the globe left us vulnerable to the same variants that are driving the third wave today. My constituents in Edmonton Mill Woods and all Canadians deserve better.

● (2130)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member took 10 minutes to cast blame. I am not exactly sure how that is going to create any meaningful outcome in this debate. Nonetheless, let me go back to what he said at the beginning of his speech. He said that the government is fully responsible for everything that has happened in Alberta. If someone is going to sit at this table to have a discussion about this in any meaningful way, they will have to accept the fact that there were many different partners at the table who participated in this and have responsibility in this.

Is the member saying that Jason Kenney and the government in Alberta have no responsibility for this?

Hon. Tim Uppal: Mr. Speaker, what I am saying is that what everyone agrees with and all experts are saying is that vaccines will help us get past this pandemic. It is what other countries have used. It is what other countries had back in January and February. We can see that in the United States. They are opening up their economy. People are going back to work. They are going to be able to meet with their families. We can see that in Europe.

What I am saying is that if we had had those vaccines here in Canada, we would not be in this situation today. We would not be putting premiers right across the country in the situation that they are in today, having to ask Canadians to sacrifice more because the government mismanaged the situation from the very beginning.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I think the member is quite right to point to the lack of vaccine acquisition as a major problem when comparing Canada to the rest of the world. When we look at Alberta, however, the real tragedy is that Alberta actually has the worst infection rate in all of North America.

The member referenced the issue of no regrets. Should the Kenney provincial Conservative government not have regrets about trying to push for international travel? Should the provincial Conservative government not have regrets about cutting health care funding? Should the provincial Conservative government not have regrets about what we saw over the Christmas break with members of that government travelling all over the place? Should the Conservative Government of Alberta not also have regrets about its actions that have led to this unfolding tragedy in Alberta?

Hon. Tim Uppal: Mr. Speaker, the member is comparing Alberta's numbers with other jurisdictions right across North America, and Alberta is in this position today because it did not have the vac-

cines it needed. It did not have the vaccines available to give to Albertans. As soon as Alberta received the vaccines, the rate at which they went into the arms of Canadians and Albertans was very high. It was one of the best rates in the country, but the province can only do that once it receives the vaccines. As we know, right across the country we have been receiving vaccines much later than other countries. That is what we need to beat this pandemic. I am certain we will now. I know there are more vaccines coming. There have been more announcements. I hope those vaccines show up so Canadians can get back to their lives, small businesses can open up again and kids can get back to school, but we needed those vaccines in January and February. Unfortunately, they did not arrive. I am looking forward to them coming now.

● (2135)

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, something I have heard from many constituents is their frustration regarding the status of things. They see that Disneyland opened this past weekend in California and are seeing news reports of other jurisdictions opening, yet because of a third wave Alberta and other jurisdictions across Canada are being forced back into lockdown, which is a serious action being taken for a crisis that really could have been avoided. The Prime Minister has bragged all along about his response of pouring cash into the different programs in response and whatnot, but the delivery record is very poor.

Does my colleague have any comments about how the Prime Minister seems to take credit for all the success, but diverts all the blame for the failures to other jurisdictions that have to make the tough decisions on things such as public health measures?

Hon. Tim Uppal: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is quite right. The Prime Minister continues to make these very big announcements, take credit for things and have no regrets regarding his failed leadership on this pandemic. What he does not see is the reality on the ground. People in my riding of Edmonton Mill Woods have lost their jobs. People are now dealing with some very serious mental health issues and drug addictions that have gotten worse. The unfortunate fact is that I have had to attend funerals because of those drug addictions and because of what this pandemic is doing to families. This is a serious struggle. The Liberal government should take responsibility for its mismanagement and try to fix it. I understand there are more vaccines coming now. It is quite late, but it is good to hear they are coming. That is what is going to help us get past this and start looking toward opening up the economy. I know we are much farther behind other countries, but I know as soon as we do that, it will be what Canadians are looking forward to.

Hon. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was great to listen to my colleague speak on behalf of his constituents in Edmonton Mill Woods, which is an area I represented for 10 years before the boundaries changed. I am so glad that those constituents have such a fantastic MP advocating for them. I sensed the passion in his speech, and I share that passion. My thoughts tonight, as we are having this conversation, are with my constituents here in Edmonton—Wetaskiwin.

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It has not just been a tough last year and a bit, but a tough five years for the people of our province and of my riding. When COVID hit in March 2020, we woke up to a different world on March 11, 12 and 13, and the government put in place programs to deal with the emerging situation. One of the things that was really tricky was that many of the income support programs did not actually address the needs of my constituents. They had been on EI long enough that their benefits were just about to run out or were running out, so they did not qualify for the early programs put in place by the government. Things have been tough here financially for a long time.

From that time to where we are today, many months later, one of the challenges has been a complete lack of transparency and accountability on the part of the government, and it started almost immediately. We had two weeks when we were supposed to be sitting, with a weird schedule of three constituency weeks thrown in. For these five weeks we had an opportunity to shut down Parliament and rely on the advice of some of the world's best public health experts to treat Parliament as an essential service and get back to work. Members from all sides could have been acting on behalf of their constituents, and those of us in the opposition parties could have been asking tough questions of the government to come up with the best policies to serve Canadians. Instead, Parliament was largely shut down for the better part of six months. It sat as a glorified committee most of the time, when it sat at all. Of course, we had the six-week prorogation period when everything was shut down so that the government could avoid scrutiny on some particular problematic programs.

We finally came back in late September. Ever since then, question after question from members of the Conservative Party, but also from the NDP, the Bloc, the Greens and independents, was met with condescension and derision. It is immeasurable how many times Liberal ministers, led by the Prime Minister, stood in the House of Commons and, rather than actually answering a question, met the question with an accusation of partisanship. We have seen it tonight in the debate. For example, a couple of minutes ago we saw the member for Kingston and the Islands talk about using 10 minutes to cast blame, and he was talking about the previous Conservative member's speech. The Conservative member simply brought up issues that are the responsibility of the federal government. As a federal member of Parliament serving his constituents, it is his responsibility to ask those questions or bring up those issues.

We heard the minister earlier talk about opposition members playing partisan games tonight. We heard the member for Winnipeg North make all sorts of accusations, and accuse me of being untruthful when I asked a question of him. Here is the funny thing about it. His response was in reference to March 13 numbers and where we were in terms of doses administered by countries. I was referencing March 13. On that day we were behind the U.K., U.S., Turkey, Germany, Italy and France. He put forward misinformation in his accusation of untruthfulness. This is the constant, daily m.o. of the government right now, and it is problematic.

Right now, I think members from all sides, but particularly members of the Conservative Party, have rightly raised the issue of vaccinations.

• (2140)

As we have raised the issue of vaccinations, going back to when we were raising those issues in November, December, January and February and when we were not completely discounted out of hand, the promise that was given was that a whole bunch of vaccines would be coming down the road, far in the future.

Here we are today. The vaccines did not come in time, and across the country there is a price being paid for the fact that the vaccines did not come in time. The lockdowns we are seeing in different parts of the country are part of the price that is being paid.

I liken the response to the question of when vaccines are going to come to buying an old house with old wiring and no fire extinguishers. There might be a chance to redo the wiring one day when it can be afforded, but imagine having a family meeting and bringing up the issue of fire safety. Imagine one of the kids saying that they heard in class they should have three fire extinguishers in their house. Imagine, as a parent, saying that instead of getting three fire extinguishers for the house they were going to wait until September, and in September they would get 15 fire extinguishers, three per member of the family, many months from now. Imagine the reaction of the kids who were simply raising what the experts were saying was best for the house.

That has been the response of the government. Somewhere down the road, by September, everybody who wants a vaccination will get one. Clearly there is a price to be paid for that.

I have pointed out multiple times tonight, and I think it is worth pointing out again, that as of today, we were at 37.85 doses administered per 100 Canadians. If we are going to talk about information, let us deal with real information. That is 37.85 doses administered. Fifty-two days ago, on March 13, the U.K. passed that threshold. On the same day, the U.S. was at 31.61 doses administered per 100 people. On that day, Canada was at 7.77 doses administered, or one-fifth of where the U.K. was. Imagine if we had met the same standard, and had taken it as seriously as other countries. We would not be in the predicament we are in today.

Tonight we are talking about Alberta. Let us look at the Alberta situation. Today we have 146 Albertans in the ICU. On March 13, we had 35. Today we had 2,271 new cases. On March 13, we had 474. Again, imagine if we were at 35 doses administered per 100 Canadians, instead of 7.77 on that day.

It is absolutely fair and right for opposition parties to hold the government to account for its lack of performance, and to ask tough questions about where we are going. It is absolutely right for Canadians to expect their government to answer those questions. That has not happened up to this point. I hope that for the rest of tonight and moving forward, Canadians and Albertans particularly, the folks we are elected to represent, can expect answers from their federal government.

• (2145)

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's remarks, and I appreciate the opposition member wanting to ask the government tough questions in good faith and to hold the government to account.

However, I want to address the claim that the member made about vaccines being late. I really fail to understand how the member can claim that when our government, all along, has been very transparent about vaccine doses, timelines and the rate at which those vaccines would be coming into the country. In fact, it has published those on a website. Aside from minor changes to delivery schedules, which happened due to suppliers and changes in those suppliers' facilities, etc., more doses have been coming in than the targets that were committed to.

In the first quarter there was a commitment to six million doses, and there were just over nine million, almost 9.5 million. In the second quarter, the minister has been working, very transparently, about exceeding the targets. In fact, it is not quite double but it is very close to double what was anticipated—

The Deputy Speaker: We will have to leave that there so we will have time for some other questions.

The hon. member for Edmonton—Wetaskiwin.

Hon. Mike Lake: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure if the hon. member listened to my speech. Maybe he just came in time to ask the question because I referenced the fact that the targets were not good enough. They were not ambitious enough in the first place, so I ask who cares if we meet the targets.

We are talking about a target down the road of six vaccines for every Canadian three years from now. That does not matter right now. We needed vaccines when other countries in the G20 were getting them. We needed them when our closest comparators, the U.K. and the U.S., were getting vaccines months ago. We needed them. We are in this circumstance right now.

I am hearing questions about lockdowns tonight. The lockdowns are only necessary as a last resort, because we did not actually deliver vaccines and we did not do a good enough job on testing. We could get into a whole variety of things, such as our approach on the borders early on. We need a better plan, and the government has not delivered. We need—

The Deputy Speaker: We will move on to the next question.

The hon. member for Calgary Shepard.

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member had an exchange earlier in the day with the parliament secretary to the government House leader talking about debates and us raising vaccines. The member rightly pointed out that the issue is numbers, targets and performance. That is what we are here to do. We are here to make sure the government is performing up to the expectations of Albertans and of Canadians. As of May 4, 85.5% of Alberta's vaccine supply has been used up. I am one of those who got vaccinated.

I wonder if the member could comment on the fact that we had not received the vaccines on time and in ample supply in January and February, and there were problems delivering them to people

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who wanted them. I was one of those who had difficulty getting an appointment. It kept getting cancelled because there was not enough vaccine supply. Could we have gotten that number even higher and gotten more of our population vaccinated to avoid these restrictions?

• (2150)

Hon. Mike Lake: Mr. Speaker, that is a fantastic point.

Obviously, if we had gotten similar numbers of vaccines delivered earlier and spread out over time, we would have been able to deliver them in a more efficient way. We would have put less pressure on our frontline responders.

By the way, I got vaccinated this past weekend with my first shot as well, and I want to use this opportunity to comment on the unbelievable professionalism of people running the vaccination centre in Alberta. I know folks across the province right now are putting in extra hours to make sure Albertans are getting vaccinated and doing fantastic work, but this would have been a very different story, had we been receiving vaccines at the same time as residents of—

The Deputy Speaker: There is a final question in this round.

The hon. member for Hastings—Lennox and Addington.

Mr. Derek Sloan (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to raise my concern with the idea, not expressed by this particular member, but by others, that lockdowns are the answers to all our problems. Of course, we can cherry-pick different examples that seem to have been effective, but there are many studies that undermine the idea that blanket lockdowns are effective. There are many jurisdictions, for example Florida in relation to California, that have not been doing the lockdowns and are doing quite well.

Acting quickly is advisable, and targeted measures can be advisable, but locking everyone and all businesses down, in my view, is not helpful. I would like to also mention that Canada has failed to implement any other treatments. I am just reading the latest issue of the American Journal of Therapeutics that has a meta-analysis of 18 different studies that show significantly reduced risks of contracting COVID-19 with the regular use of ivermectin. Let us try new things and do whatever we can to address this virus.

Hon. Mike Lake: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure I sensed a question in that, so maybe I will give someone else a chance to actually ask me a question.

The Deputy Speaker: We are out of time, so we will now go to the next speaker.

The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Pickering—Uxbridge, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health.

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It is an honour to rise today to talk about such an incredibly important issue.

The member from Edmonton asked why I was taking the approach that the Conservatives are being overly partisan about this. It is because they have come into the House, and every Conservative, one after another, has only talked about vaccines. Yes, vaccines are very important. They are important to getting through this. They are important to getting through to the other side, but there are other important things too.

When the Conservatives come in here and only talk about vaccines, it makes me wonder why they will not talk about things that the provincial governments are responsible for, or other things the federal government could be doing. I think there is a lot of criticism to go around.

As we look back on this years from now, we will be able to say the federal government should have done this, or the federal government should have been more prepared. I hope we learn from this. If we do not learn from this, then what will we have accomplished?

First and foremost, I hope we learn that we need to do something about our vaccine manufacturing in this country, our biomanufacturing of vaccines. We need to make sure that when the next pandemic happens, because history tells us it will at some point, we are better prepared.

I am willing to let that responsibility go around, and I am willing to say that Liberals were just as responsible for that as Conservatives were in the past, but I do not think anyone saw it coming. Therefore, there was not an urgent need placed on it. Yes, we do need to do something about making sure that it is better.

When history looks back on this, we will also look at ourselves and say, when we were weighing the options, did we put too much emphasis on the economy and not enough emphasis on the advice of medical professionals? I really get a kick out of some of the stuff I have heard, not just today in this debate, but over the last number of weeks and months, and how sometimes there seems to be a complete disregard for the experts and for science.

It is based on emotion. I do not want to say ideology, but it is based on emotion. I want this to be over too, but that does not mean I should believe everything I see on the Internet that suggests there is an easier way.

From the beginning, I have always said I will take my health advice from the Chief Public Health Officer of Canada and, more importantly, the medical officer of health in my riding of Kingston and the Islands, Dr. Kieran Moore, who has done a phenomenal job of taking care of our community. For some reason, there has been this desire out there to disregard experts. If we do not shut that narrative down, we are only complicit in helping that narrative snowball and build momentum. I think that people in the House are responsible for allowing narratives to continue on.

Who else should we trust? If I am on an airplane and the pilot suddenly passes out, and we are looking for someone to fly the plane, and someone says they are a pilot, I am going to tell them to get in the cockpit and land that thing. Likewise, I am going to

believe the experts and the medical officers of health, the people who have studied pandemics and have planned for them, and take their advice.

● (2155)

When they say lockdowns are important, then I am going to believe them. I do not understand how a body such as this, the House of Commons, has come to a place where we regularly disagree with medical experts. It absolutely boggles my mind.

When the Conservatives come in here, they are only talking about vaccines. Yes, there is a lot we could have done to do a better job of making sure we were prepared, and that includes Conservatives, Liberals and opposition parties pushing the agenda.

I know there were no Conservatives before March 2020 asking why we were not making more vaccines in the country or where our manufacturing is for this. Nobody was saying that over the last five or 10 years. No Liberal was saying it when Stephen Harper was the prime minister either because we did not see this coming.

In the same regard, we have to respect the fact that we can criticize this government's approach and delivery of vaccines as a result of the infrastructure and resources that were in place. We can criticize that. It is fair to criticize. I think history can look back on that and see where we went wrong, where we went right and how it played out.

What we cannot be critical about is that the government did lay out the exact plan. The provinces knew what the timeline was going to be. They were told in the late fall what they should expect in terms of vaccines coming along.

The only part of that plan that had a hiccup was the 10 days back in February, which the Conservatives keep talking about, when one of the primary delivery manufacturers of vaccines retooled its plant so that it could produce more vaccines, but we still ended up getting caught up very quickly.

By the end of March, provinces received more vaccines than they were told they were going to have. They were originally scheduled to get 29 million vaccines by the end of June, but now they will be getting closer to 50 million. They are getting more vaccines than they were told they were going to get.

Yes, we can be critical, but the provinces knew this was the schedule. In Ontario, and I am sure it is the same in Alberta, the province, on February 11, had its projection of the third wave and knew exactly what it would be getting and when it would be getting it. The federal government delivered more than it promised, yet the provinces still did not use other measures in order to curb the third wave. Instead, they relied on hoping that maybe, miraculously, things would go even better than the schedule, which was a horrible plan.

I regret that we are here and having this conversation, as I am sure everybody does, but at the end of the day, I genuinely believe that, if a province wants to work with the federal government, it has to take the information we have been giving it on vaccines and plan according to that. They need to understand that medical experts are going to give them advice, and they could say the vaccines we are going to get will not get us beyond the third wave. They could say we better do something about this now and start talking about other measures, such as lockdowns.

I have yet to hear a Conservative tonight say that they support lockdowns, which I cannot understand because they have happened throughout the entire world, and they have been shown to be effective. This is just like two years ago when they could not utter the words “climate change”. They cannot even utter the words because they are afraid of saying it, and I do not know why.

• (2200)

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague said that all the Conservatives are talking about is vaccines and how important they are, and that is exactly right. My colleague also said there is no way anyone predicted this pandemic was coming, which is patently not true. That is what our early warning was in place for, the GPHIN program, but the Auditor General's report showed how poorly the Liberals mishandled the early warning system by dismantling the GPHIN program.

Would my colleague not admit dismantling the GPHIN program, our early warning pandemic system, has played a significant role in the position we are in today?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, I go back to what I was saying. History can look back and judge that stuff, absolutely, but the situation Alberta is in right now—

An hon. member: It would have been better.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: No, the member cannot say that would have been significantly impacted. It has been a year. It has been over a year. How can he possibly say that?

Medical experts, as in Ontario, were predicting the trajectories of the waves for Alberta and could calculate that against the arrival of vaccines. They did the calculations, they knew how it was going to go. In Ontario, unfortunately, it happened exactly as predicted because the province would not put in the lockdowns when it should have.

• (2205)

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have spent time with the member on the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs and enjoyed working with him there.

Today what we really need to focus on, though, is the fact that Alberta has the highest active rate in this whole country. There are 508 active cases per every 100,000 people, and the next highest province is Ontario with 252. These numbers are terrifying and staggering, and I cannot imagine the fear and concern happening in Alberta.

We know that right now for the first time in history Alberta's doctors are literally being given emergency instructions on how to

determine whether patients will receive life-saving treatment or not. I just cannot imagine making that decision as a health care provider.

Could this member please tell us when the Liberal government is going to step up and step in to protect Albertans?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, I do not understand why the NDP is fixated on the Emergencies Act. Tell me what more the federal government is going to give as a result of invoking this particular piece of legislation. The federal government is there. When Ontario said it needed the Red Cross, the federal government asked how soon. When Ontario said it needed rapid tests, the federal government said it would get them there. Things rolled out and are rolling out.

The federal government is there. The federal government wants to help. The federal government is continually in contact with the provinces asking what more they want from us. I do not understand why invoking this piece of legislation written on a bill is going to make the situation any better in terms of delivery. We will give them what they want. We will be there for the provinces. They just have to work with us, which they have been doing.

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 important we reflect on the fact this motion is about an absolute public health crisis going on in a Canadian province right now. It is not just the risk to an individual. When our health system's capacity is overwhelmed, if someone gets in a car accident there may not be a place for them to go.

The Conservative argument has been essentially that their vaccines did not come quickly enough. If we accept their argument, which I do not, I still do not understand how it justifies not putting in place the other public health measures we know will save lives. Can the hon. member offer his thoughts on the importance of putting those public health measures in place until there is herd immunity through vaccination to ensure we can save lives we know will be lost in the absence of these kinds of measures?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, this is the point I have been trying to make, and the parliamentary secretary is absolutely correct.

The province knew when it was going to get the vaccines. It also received professional medical advice from the experts as to what the waves would look like, yet it still chose not to take additional measures.

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Absolutely, if vaccines came sooner we probably would not be standing in this place right now, but my point is the provinces knew we would be in this place right now. That is the whole point. They knew we would be here because they knew the trajectory of vaccines, and it has only been better than what they had been promised.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to follow my colleague, the member for Kingston and the Islands. I could have listened to a 20-minute speech by him. The member for Saanich—Gulf Islands also gave a speech that I really appreciated this evening. I will pick up on her speech, as well as the speech just given by the member for Kingston and the Islands. The point of this debate is truly important and they both touched on the theme. I am sure others have, but I am calling these two members out in particular.

Where the member for Kingston and the Islands finished off is where I would like to begin. He spoke about how we can look back at where we could have done things better, where things were done well, where we were a success story or where we need to be better prepared. He and I both came from municipal politics, where there were all these plans in place and after years and years of a pandemic or an emergency not coming, unfortunately, sometimes plans sit on the shelf. I am not saying that is the right approach, but the lessons we are learning are incredibly important and a constant reminder to never take our eye off emergency preparedness.

The member for Kingston and the Islands said that we can look back and do that work, but what has been frustrating in listening, in particular, to Conservative members is all they are doing is looking back. I made note of some of them. One pointed out where we were 52 days ago. My God, how the people of Alberta must feel hearing that tonight. What are we going to do today, tomorrow and the days and weeks after that to support and help the people in this country? We can look back on vaccines, we can look back on whatever else the Conservatives want to look back at, but are we not going to focus our collective energy to support the people in this country now?

I am listening to this debate as a member from Ontario and people in my home province are living it now. I think about the anxiety people felt when these spikes first happened, the confusion, the lockdowns, no lockdowns and the pointing of fingers. I think of my friends, neighbours and family who just want to know how we are going to get through this. That is what our government has been focusing on.

Many members have spoken about no country being perfect, but that does not mean we stop acting. It means we continue to move forward, to provide the supports the provinces and territories need. It means getting vaccines faster, getting the Red Cross out to support the vaccination efforts, if need be. It is seeing health care providers in Newfoundland and Labrador coming to Ontario to help support health care workers. It is seeing people step up in unimaginable ways during this time. It is what else the federal government can do.

As the member for Kingston and the Islands just said, we will work with provinces and territories and provide whatever they need, particularly in Alberta, providing mobile health units, contact

tracing, rapid tests, funds for the safe restart agreement to help protect and insulate between the second and third waves, even between the first and second waves. The government has provided whatever each province and territory has needed. Every province and territory in this country is different, has different needs and requires different resources. We have been there. We have heard Quebec members talking about the supports needed in long-term care. We were there for that. We were there for PPE.

We should not be talking about all the things that we have done; we should talk about all the things we are going to continue to do until we are through this. That is what Canadians expect of us. That is what this debate should be about and why I noted the speech of the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands. This is the debate we should be having.

• (2210)

Conservatives consistently stand up and say there is confusion and mixed messaging. Nothing has frustrated me more because the confusion and mixed messaging is coming from the Conservatives themselves. They can go back to early March of this year when their own health critic was saying to remove border restrictions, ease the border restrictions, that all they need is a pre-boarding test and then a test when they land and people should just go on their way. If we had listened to them, we would not have caught those people who had tested positive after being tested when they landed. They would not have been in isolation and they would have been out in the community. Again, there are additional measures we can continue to take and we will happily be here to support Canadians to do that.

They are Conservatives who constantly stand in this place and say, “we do not need restrictions, we need freedom”. The member for Carleton posts pictures when he is sitting outside, eating on a patio and goes, “freedom”. Then, they have the nerve to come in this place and say that vaccines would have solved everything when they refused to listen to the public health experts, and not even Canadian public health experts if they do not want to trust Canadians. Globally, we know that vaccines are an important tool, but they will only work if the public health measures are also in place.

The Conservatives love to quote the U.S. or Israel or the U.K. for their programs, but the U.K. and Israel both saw, during their vaccination campaigns, that as they lifted restrictions too quickly they saw spikes. We heard testimony from experts at the health committee. Governments there quickly realized that vaccinations are not the only tool, they have to be done in conjunction with strong public health measures to give vaccinations the time to work, the time to be distributed across the communities and to become effective.

It is this ignorance of listening to the public health advice, which is not governments' opinions but public health advice, that is frustrating to watch because I see people suffering, I see small businesses close and I see people being sick. To send out a message saying that if only we had done this nobody would have suffered is simply unfair to Canadians. We need to be honest with Canadians that as our vaccine campaign is rolling out and everybody needs to roll up their sleeves and get vaccinated, we also need to listen to the public health advice. Those mixed messages coming from the Conservatives, saying lockdowns are not needed and looser border measures would be okay are just not truthful, are not helpful and are certainly not going to help the people of Alberta or those in my home province of Ontario or anywhere else across this country as we battle this third wave.

I hope we get to the point where we are having conversations about what more we can do to support Alberta, what more we can do to support any jurisdiction in this country to get through this third wave, and actually acknowledge and admit that the public health measures are there to work in conjunction with vaccines and that we are only going to get through this if we listen to the experts and medical health professionals who know what they are talking about. We have seen it work in other countries, so we do not even need to imagine it; we know it is real. I truly hope that the Conservative members will come and work with us on helping to support our fellow Canadians during this difficult time.

• (2215)

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, certainly it has been an enlightening evening listening to members of the government, in fact for the first time, acknowledge some of their failures.

I wonder if that member in particular agrees with what the Liberal member for Kingston and the Islands said in the speech just prior. He said that if we had more vaccines, we would not be here in this place. Does that member agree with that statement? I certainly do.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Mr. Speaker, I am so disappointed that after my speech the member opposite completely missed the point. Perhaps he does not understand. I cannot assume what he is capable of understanding, but what I just said, my entire speech, was about the importance of vaccines in conjunction with strong public health measures. I challenge him to show me a jurisdiction in the world that got through this COVID pandemic on vaccines alone, without a single lockdown or a single public health measure. If he can show me that jurisdiction, I will come back and apologize. The member did not listen to the speech and is not listening to public health experts. There is no jurisdiction that got through this pandemic with vaccines alone; it has to be both.

• (2220)

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I know that the member is not from Alberta and her focus is clearly on Ontario.

I have to say I am extremely frustrated when I sit in this House and listen to the Conservatives blaming the Liberals and the Liberals blaming the Conservatives, back and forth, with me being stuck in Alberta trying to get anyone to do something for Albertans in-

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stead of blaming each other, instead of just telling each other they are asking the wrong questions or doing the wrong things.

Will the member commit to sending help to Alberta, not through the Emergencies Act, but to help with our failing Alberta health care system? Will she commit to having her government do that?

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Mr. Speaker, yes, we are absolutely committed. I give the member my word as well that I will advocate for the supports that are needed. Whatever we need to do, we absolutely need to do to support the people of Alberta and every Canadian across this country.

I agree it can be partisan. I am guilty of that too, because I get really frustrated at some of the misinformation. It really frustrates me to see my own constituents being misled by misinformation, so I get the partisanship, but I do not think this should be a partisan issue. I think we have to get the supports to Alberta, in this case, that are needed. We can go back and point those political fingers and get back to regular business in the House of Commons, but not until this crisis is over. We need to be working together in this moment, if not now, when—

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments, the hon. member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith.

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Mr. Speaker, the one thing that really disappoints me about this debate, and about the ongoing debate on this pandemic, is the partisanship. It does not really matter which political party is running a province; we have all seen problems. Whether it is the NDP in B.C., the Conservatives in Alberta or the federal government, there are issues we need to deal with. We have not acted like a federation during this pandemic, and it is really disappointing. We look at Australia, where there are political differences between the states and the federal government, but they have managed to work it out and get to zero. We have not, and we continue to play this blame game.

I do not have a question. I am just saying I am disappointed. It is hard to listen to this ongoing, toxic, partisan debate.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Mr. Speaker, I know that was not a question, but I would say I agree. It is hard. Even in my position as parliamentary secretary to health, the focus is wanting to provide solutions in this time. I know it is idealistic to hope that we can put partisanship aside all the time, but my ask and my main point from that speech is to say that we need to come together with solutions moving forward. We will have lots of time to point blame and take partisan swipes, but the crisis in Alberta right now needs to be at the forefront, and finding the solution to protect Canadians.

• (2225)

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Calgary Midnapore.

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As I enter into the emergency debate related to the crisis that is taking place here in Alberta, I want to acknowledge that there are a number of friends of mine currently in the hospital. It appears that they are going to pull through, but it has been a challenging time for many Albertans and many, many Canadians. Certainly it drives home the seriousness of what we are discussing in this place. I also want to acknowledge the 24,000 or so Canadians who have passed away because of COVID and COVID-related complications. I was reading an article earlier today about the so-called “COVID long-haulers” and the challenges they have.

On the other side of that issue are the millions of Canadians who are facing significant impacts, as well as businesses. As I was getting groceries earlier today, a business owner came up to me asking if there was anything I could do to help him get support as his business fell through all the cracks, in terms of qualifying for support. It did not quite meet the income threshold on the months that were prescribed, but had zero income in certain other months. It speaks to the significant challenges that all Canadians have faced in the last year and a half.

When I learned that this debate would be taking place, I thought of a couple of main subjects that I want to touch on: one, the challenges that many Canadians are facing as this third wave has gripped Alberta and gripped our country, and to ensure that there is some context provided with some of the challenges that certainly my constituents are facing in Battle River—Crowfoot, and then to talk about some of the other challenges and the reason why we are here.

I found it very interesting listening to some of the Liberal members. The Prime Minister was asked a number of weeks ago whether there was anything he regretted. There have been a number of analogies used in this debate this evening, so I will use another one: When a sports team, be it someone's favourite hockey team or favourite football team, makes some mistakes, the people who take responsibility are the captain of the team and the coaches. They take responsibility for their mistakes and they commit to do better.

I heard for the first time a number of Liberal members admit their failures, because the captain of their team, the leader of this country, refuses to admit mistakes. Unfortunately, it is not surprising. I have been a long-time political observer and a member of Parliament for a year and a half. Seeing the Prime Minister's personality, it is unfortunately not surprising that he refuses to take responsibility for some of these clear failures.

Then we see the members opposite trying to pivot the blame. They say that Conservatives spread the misinformation. I have dozens of pages of clear examples, numerous examples of inconsistent messaging and changing direction. The fact is that even the member for Kingston and the Islands said very clearly that had we gotten more vaccines, we would not be having this debate. A number of the Liberal members opposite have said things like “Well, we only want to talk about vaccines.” Well, it seems like the Liberals only wanted to stop talking about vaccines when their failures on the procurement of those vaccines became widespread. Then, all of a sudden, Canadians were seeing the consequences of that, and we see that now. This truly is the Prime Minister's third wave.

I think back to the beginning of the pandemic, when I, among many other Conservatives, started asking questions about securing our borders. They were valid questions about what was happening with this virus, which we did not know very much about, and we started asking about measures being taken. I remember the public safety minister stood up and said that the government had put in enhanced border measures, yet I would talk to constituents who had just returned home who said that they did not see any border measures. I talked to some constituents who saw those border measures, and literally, and I wish this was a joke, the enhanced border measure was a check mark on the immigration form. As the old saying goes, “An ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure”, and I think that is the reality we are facing, with tens of thousands of lives lost and other significant challenges that we face.

I say often that the government is all style and very little substance. Unfortunately, that has been the case throughout this pandemic, and I would suggest the last five and a half or so years as well, as has been highlighted through the many other failures and tragedies of what this Liberal government has done.

I was speaking to somebody who closely follows the National Research Council, and even some of the regulatory changes that the Liberals brought in right after they were elected actually put Canada further back in terms of being set up to succeed in the case of needing to see rapid investment in emerging health technologies, like vaccines. This was a number of years before the word “COVID-19” was even known to the world, and that really comes back to the issue of good governance.

The Liberals will say, “Well, it is easy to be an armchair quarterback and speak from hindsight.” This is what the Liberals like to talk about to try to pivot away from their failures. However, we see time and again with the current government that truly it has been a failure of good governance. We see things like ministerial responsibility, which, in some cases, appears to have been abandoned. The Liberals simply use it as a way to cover up their scandals but then do not provide the oversight. I have filed hundreds of ATIPs since getting elected, and some of the things I see and do not see are astounding.

I have a couple of minutes left here to talk about some of the things that my constituents have brought up over the last number of months, such as the border issue that the government brought in. Conservatives were critical of the border hotels, especially when the minister himself said that there was no evidence that would work. There could have been other measures that were more effective.

On mental health, we have seen the government support a Conservative motion for a 988 number, yet it has done virtually nothing since. It has made some announcements in terms of dollars in its yearly budget, which was released a couple of weeks ago. Again, it is promising dollars but no action.

• (2230)

A great example is the Service Canada office that is located down the street from my constituency office, where I am currently giving this speech. A sign was put on the door saying that it was closed, and there was a website on it. Hundreds of people sought help from my office, because constituents could not be served by the government. Again, on good governance there was a lack of responsibility.

As I have mentioned, we see businesses falling through the cracks. We see mixed messaging on vaccines. This has been a big challenge. I have had phone calls this week, and people are asking what to believe and who to believe.

There is certainly much more I could say, but it has been good to participate in this debate. Hopefully I highlighted some of the issues that my constituents have brought forward to me over the last number of weeks and months, and in the last year.

• (2235)

Mr. Darrell Samson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I worked in Alberta for a couple of summers when I was studying in university. Albertans are very good people and are very intelligent. They understand what is going on.

When he looks at the investments we have made, the member has to keep in mind that what our government did was done for all of the provinces and territories. We invested \$19 billion for the safe restart program, and we distributed vaccines right across the country, fairly.

The member is pointing the finger and asking why we are in this situation, and I think some of the premiers have to look at themselves in the mirror, as do some members of Parliament. They should not be laying the blame on someone else. They should look at what is happening in their provinces and ask how we can help Albertans, because we are here to help Albertans and all Canadians.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the member remarking on the intelligence of Albertans. I agree with him. There have been some tremendous advances that our province has pioneered. That may be why there are no Liberal members of Parliament from Alberta these days.

There is a lot of introspection being done. In fact, I listened to the premier talk last night. The government members say that the Government of Alberta has to take responsibility for not being able to deal with the vaccine situation. However, it has been made very clear that the issue was not about the ability to distribute vaccines and get needles into the arms of Albertans. The issue was that there was no supply.

Certainly we need to continue to have a lot of conversations about this, but when we look at the failures and what this third wave is about—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I do have to allow for other questions.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for New Westminster—Burnaby.

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Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Speaker, the member referred to taking responsibility, like a sports team. He is absolutely correct to point out that Canada has been trailing much of the industrialized world because of the absence of proper vaccine distribution. However, he has avoided the question. Alberta actually has the highest infection rate in North America. Alberta, unlike any other province or state, has an absolutely deplorable and tragic record that is leading to real tragedy for many Alberta.

Will the provincial Conservative government take responsibility for the cutbacks in health care and its lack of showing any sort of responsibility. Remember, its members were travelling all over the place during the Christmas season. Will the provincial Conservative government take responsibility for its many errors that have led to this tragedy?

Mr. Damien Kurek: Madam Speaker, I am not an MLA; I am a member of Parliament. However, I have a strong relationship with the five UCP MLAs whom I share a jurisdiction with. I have heard time and time again about how frustrated they have been with the lack of leadership at the federal level. Just to correct the record, because I know my friends in the UCP would ask me to do this, there were no funding cuts to health care. That is misinformation, to clarify the record.

At the heart of the issue is the fact that the third wave came at a time when we needed to be three, four, five or six weeks ahead of schedule on vaccines. We have smart people across the country leading the way. In fact, there is a vaccine manufacturer in Calgary. However, it just announced that it may have to leave Canada to be successful.

Canadians are innovative, resilient and able to rise to the challenge. I have certainly seen that within my home constituency, my home region. Given the opportunity, we could have done better. However, the problem is that we have seen failure on the part of our national government to lead us through this.

• (2240)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind members that when they are asking questions and responding, they should do it within one minute. We should be able to get in two one-minute questions and a half-a-minute question. There is a list of MPs who want to participate and they will not be able to do that if members are eating into the time. When I am showing the speed-up signal, finish asking the question or answering the question.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Calgary Midnapore.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am always happy to be in the House to speak on behalf of my constituents, as I am a very proud member of Parliament from Alberta who was born and raised in Calgary Midnapore.

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It certainly has been a very difficult 15 months, which goes without saying. It is the reason that we are here this evening. The pain that I have seen around me has been absolutely extraordinary. I have watched businesses, families and individuals attempt to cope with the realities of the pandemic and what it has meant for everybody, and have seen the sacrifices people have made across Canada, and particularly in Alberta.

I have seen businesses shut their doors, some after many years. That is incredibly regretful. It is the reason I decided to put forth the Calgary Midnapore Economic Recovery Task Force in an effort for us to try to come up with solutions as a community.

I have seen parents struggle with children being out of school as a result of the necessity to make changes to our educational system. Of course this is happening again. Tomorrow will be my son's last day in school until after the long weekend. Today, when I was at the car dealership picking up my car after servicing, I overheard a set of parents talking about it. They do not know how they are going to deal with it this time.

Of course, there is also the terrible toll that mental health problems have taken on Canadians and Albertans during this time. I am very happy that as part of our plan to secure the future, our leader has chosen to make mental health one of the key pieces of the platform.

Like many other Canadians and like many other Albertans, I have a question on my mind: How did we get to this place? That is what this debate is really about.

I think back to January and February 2020 when we were in the House and still had many new members finding their feet. We had a strong team that tried to call on the government to take stronger action. I recall the member for Edmonton Riverbend screaming at the top of his lungs in an effort to get the Minister of Health to take action regarding our borders. Of course, we all know about the Prime Minister's terrible judgment in sending an extensive amount of personal protective equipment overseas to China, only to leave health care workers here without it. Those on the front lines were still defenceless weeks later. It was a very bad start to this situation.

Of course, we called for the government to use the tools that were available, but it refused to use them. Our team, across the board, including our current shadow minister for health, the member for Calgary Nose Hill, was relentless in asking the government to use the tools available, specifically therapeutics and rapid tests. However, this fell upon the deaf ears of the government. Again, I ask the question: How did we get to this place?

As shadow minister for transport, I can say that the industry did everything it possibly could in an effort to maintain operations and resume and maintain normalcy for Canadians so they could continue about their lives and their business. We have all been away from our family members and our loved ones for so long and have not had the opportunities to visit places and see people.

It was actually the industry that led the way on rapid testing. There was the project at YVR set up by WestJet. WestJet is an Alberta company that has suffered terribly as a result of the mismanagement of the pandemic by the federal government.

• (2245)

We have the McMaster project, which led to incredible data finds, and could have been used in a constructive manner going forward, but it was not. Most importantly, and what I am most proud of, was the YYC pilot project, which was set up here with much success and would have allowed for a shorter quarantine time across the nation.

Instead, we saw the government ignore the industry of those individuals who put themselves forward on the part of the data collection. Instead, we ended up with a terrible knee-jerk reaction from the government several times over, where both Canadians and industry had to respond with the 72-hour PCR test brought in at the worst time possible for travellers over the holidays, leaving industry without any time to respond at all.

I must take a moment and compliment what good corporate players and societal players the airline sector has been over and over by repatriating Canadians, and I have done a lot of that in my time as a consular officer previously for the Government of Canada; bringing in personal protective equipment; and really bringing in precious cargo. They are really doing their part, but again their requests and the work they put in were ignored by the government, leading to the 72-hour PCR test.

Like anything, when we do not take action earlier on, the problem compounds. It just creates a larger and larger problem. This happens with anything in life. Certainly, we have even seen it within the government with debt, for example. The next step in that, regarding the transport file, was the resulting hotel quarantine. Again, this was something very severe and draconian that could have been avoided, had the government taken the proper steps earlier on in the pandemic, but it did not. Again, I, like so many other Canadians, find myself asking how we got to this place.

Finally, the point that has been brought up by my colleagues previously, and which I will mention again, is that of vaccines. Everyone has always said the ticket out of this pandemic is the vaccines, but the government absolutely failed at its procurement strategy from day one. The result is that we have been left months behind other nations. We see they are beginning to live life again and beginning to return to normal not only within the travel sector, but in life as we used to know it.

There have been numerous delays as a result of the government's terrible execution of procurement, overpayment for vaccines and us ending up last in line. It has not been transparent in regard to the schedules of these vaccines, leaving Canadians to wonder, as recently as this week, when they will get a second dose and not knowing when life will resume again as normal. There really is just no plan at all forward and no light at the end of the tunnel.

Again, I ask myself how we got to this place. Canadians are asking how we got to this place. The reason we are having this debate here tonight regarding Alberta is how we got to this place, and the answer is obvious. It is the Prime Minister who brought us to this place. It is the Prime Minister and his incompetent cabinet and government that brought us to this place.

I will finish with the very member, the member for Edmonton Strathcona, who proposed the debate this evening. She has been complicit in holding them in this place.

• (2250)

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Madam Speaker, the member repeated time and time again “how we got to this place”. We are here tonight, because we are speaking about the tragic situation in Alberta, the very painful place that Alberta is in. I live in British Columbia, and we have the same access to vaccines that Alberta has. We have the same situation about borders and airlines coming in. The one difference is the haphazard management of the Kenney government in opening and closing businesses and the health orders have been entirely inadequate.

Will she only admit that is the difference and that is how we got to this place?

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Madam Speaker, I find the question from my colleague from the province next door so very disappointing. Posing the very question itself is not recognizing the origin of the problem, which is the federal government. I find the spirit of his question to be very disappointing. This is not a time for comparison of who is doing better, who is doing worse. This is a time for us to come together as Canadians. That is what this discussion should be about tonight, not who is doing better, who is doing worse. This is a time when we should be coming together as Canadians for solutions, and that question did not indicate that.

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.): Madam Speaker, for reasons others have articulated previously this evening, I vehemently disagree with the member on the success of Canada's vaccine procurement. However, if I accept her position that the federal government's procurement strategy has been insufficient, I cannot find a charitable interpretation of her argument that would suggest that public health measures today in Alberta would not be required to stem the spread of COVID-19.

What public health measures does the hon. member think should be implemented in order to protect the public's health until sufficient vaccines are present to inoculate the population?

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Madam Speaker, I know the parliamentary secretary had a brief residence in Alberta. I had the pleasure of sitting on the status of women committee with him.

The way out of this is the vaccine. It could not be more crystal clear than that, so the focus should be on receiving the vaccines, distributing the vaccines and getting them into the arms of Canadians. Everything that is going on now, this week, all of the sacrifices that Albertans have been making and will continue to make even more severely in the coming three weeks are the residue of this government's inaction.

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Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, my concern is that we need everything brought to bear on this threat to our society and the whole planet. We need to keep people locked down because the variants may even be able to outpace the vaccinations.

Rochelle Walensky, the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the United States, said that even with the vaccinations in the U.S., she has “a recurring fear of impending doom”. Those are her words. She is worried that with the vaccinations, the U.S. public will have a false sense of security and will ignore the health warnings and the need to continue to be very careful.

I am afraid the Conservatives may lead people to think—

• (2255)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Calgary Midnapore, a brief answer, please.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Madam Speaker, the real fear for Canadians is that we will never get out of this, because they hear the words and see the attitudes of members such as the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

Mr. James Maloney (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am sharing my time tonight, although I will be honest that I do not know who I am sharing it with.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, Canadians have come together, made sacrifices and done their part to help limit the spread of the virus. Public health experts have provided Canadians with important information and advice on COVID-19.

At the same time, the Government of Canada has taken steps to help Canadians stay home, put food on the table, keep their jobs and help businesses stay afloat. Canada's COVID-19 economic response plan has helped protect millions of jobs, provide emergency support to families and keep businesses afloat throughout the pandemic. Healthy people are at the centre of a strong economy. That is why the health and safety of all Canadians remains our top priority.

The situation remains challenging in some parts of the country. As COVID-19 activity continues in Canada, we are tracking a range of epidemiological indicators to monitor where the disease is most active, where it is spreading and how it is impacting the health of Canadians, and public health's laboratory and health care capacity.

Alberta is in the middle of a third wave right now. The situation regarding COVID-19 in Alberta is of utmost importance to the federal government, and although I am an Ontario member of Parliament, I understand the predicament, because we are experiencing the same thing here at home. I would like to note the current situation to give some context to this debate.

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As members know, Alberta currently has the highest active case rate in either Canada or the U.S. The current active COVID-19 case total stands at 23,623, which is the highest ever. The daily COVID-19 case counts have topped the 1,000 mark for almost a month. Alberta's test positivity rate is now 13.2%, its highest ever, which means one in eight Albertans tested positive for COVID-19.

Yesterday, Alberta reported 1,743 new cases, including a very large percentage of variant cases. This is a situation that is very serious, to put it mildly. We are greatly concerned to see that Alberta currently has the highest per capita case rate anywhere in Canada. In Alberta, elevated infection rates continue to impact COVID-19 severity indicators, particularly in areas with sustained high levels of disease activity.

We are monitoring the spread of new variants in the province, as well as the strain put on public health resources with nearly 700 people in hospital with COVID-19 and more than 150 of those in intensive care.

Premier Kenney announced new COVID-19 restrictions yesterday. These included transition to restaurant takeout service only, closure of personal care businesses and a shift to online learning for all students from May 7 to May 25.

However, there is hope. Mass vaccination is proceeding and accelerating. I am heartened to note that Alberta has administered more than 1.6 million doses of vaccine provided by the federal government, exceeding the 30% first dose coverage. Since May 4, teachers, child care workers and support staff in Alberta are eligible to book COVID-19 vaccine appointments. Alberta is also targeting vaccines in hot spot areas. This includes oil sand work camps in Fort McMurray and Wood Buffalo region, as well as oil sand workers in Calgary.

Earlier today, Premier Kenney announced that starting on May 6, every Albertan 30 years of age and older can be vaccinated. By May 10, every Albertan 12 and older will be eligible for vaccination.

Unfortunately, as our public health authorities consistently remind us, vaccines are not a replacement for strong public health measures, at least not in the short term. The key to reducing the number of cases is to reduce the number of transmissions. To do this, we must have clear enforced measures to discourage social contact and mobility.

We know the majority of Albertans support listening to advice of public health experts and support taking the steps necessary to protect their friends, family and neighbours. The federal government is providing assistance to Alberta for testing and contact tracing and surge support in first nation communities.

There have been 47 vaccination clinics established in the 47 first nation communities in Alberta and 56% of adults from first nations have had at least one shot and 25% have had a second dose.

In addition to vaccines, our government has supported the people of Alberta by expanding access to rapid testing. More than three million rapid tests have been shipped by the federal government to the province of Alberta. The province has deployed more than two million of these tests and recently eased requirements so it is easier

for businesses of all sizes to implement workplace testing programs.

The federal government has also shipped rapid testing supplies directly to a number of large employers in Alberta free of charge, including Telus, TransMountain, Sunterra Farms, Rio Tinto, J.D. Irving and Loblaws. We also have 41 Statistics Canada contact tracers working with Alberta health authorities to try to trace and stem the spread of COVID-19.

We support the efforts of the people of Alberta to fight this virus. The federal government stands ready to support Alberta's citizens and Alberta's health care workers in any way we can. The Government of Canada stands ready to provide additional support to Alberta should it be requested by the province.

We continue to manage the impacts of the pandemic while preparing for future waves. This includes steps to ensure Canadians can access future treatment and vaccines. To help prevent future waves of the virus, we will continue to ensure we have personal protective equipment, a strong health care system and the right measures to limit the spread of the virus.

We must also look for early warning signs so we can quickly respond to future waves. Our country's recovery from the pandemic will take time. Canadians must continue to be careful and listen to the advice of our public health experts. The pandemic has offered an opportunity to think about what really matters in our communities, engage in meaningful conversations about taking care of those around us and reflect on the kind of future we want to build. Together we will build a fair and more resilient Canada that works for everyone.

I have been listening to many of the speeches tonight. I have not listened to all of them, but I think I have heard it all. Unfortunately, we work now in a sound bite world, which is unfortunate, because sometimes I think the only time we can have a truly meaningful debate is if we turn the cameras off.

We are talking tonight about Alberta and about helping our fellow Canadians who live in Alberta. I have friends in Alberta. If we want to have a meaningful discussion, for the rest of the night we have to stop pointing fingers and laying blame. People can point fingers at us and repeat things we said earlier that contradict what we may be doing today and may happen tomorrow. I am sure members could point some things out that I said tonight. I could spend time going through the opposition's speeches and everything they have said over the past months and find all kinds of inconsistencies. It might be entertaining but it is of absolutely no use whatsoever. It is an evolving situation and we need to work together to try to make this better.

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• (2300)

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am glad the member spoke about living in an era of sound bites. A lot of what the Liberal members have been doing so far is blaming the people of Alberta for the situation we find ourselves in, but we would not be in this situation had we received vaccine supplies back in January and February. I am one of those who has been vaccinated. The vaccine supply is almost at 90% used in the province of Alberta.

I want to ask the member whether he agrees with the statement made by the member for Kingston and the Islands earlier when he said that if we had more vaccines we would not be in this situation. I agree with that statement. Many, many Albertans would have been vaccinated and we never would have had this third wave. Does the member agree we would not be in this situation if we had received more vaccines in January and February?

Mr. James Maloney: Madam Speaker, let me answer this way. If we had vaccines last July, we would all be vaccinated by now, but we did not. We knew in January, we knew in February and we knew in March exactly when the vaccines were coming and how many were coming. That puts the responsibility on all of us, whether we live in Alberta, Ontario, New Brunswick or British Columbia, to prepare accordingly. If we compare the regions from Atlantic Canada to British Columbia to Alberta, we see different outcomes because they responded differently.

The member's question is not realistic. That is the answer.

• (2305)

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Madam Speaker, first, I want to express my solidarity with the people of Alberta who are facing this COVID crisis right now. I want to acknowledge that many are doing what they can to save lives in their communities.

I will share the words of Jenn Prosser, founder of the Lethbridge COVID-19 Community Support Circle, who has a question for the government. She says, "The austerity budgets of Alberta's government have hit households hard. Before the pandemic, many families and individuals had lost work and found the provincial supports very difficult to access. While CERB and CRB are critical stop-gaps, many folks did not qualify even if they lost work due to COVID. Why won't the federal government support a guaranteed, livable income to ensure that everyone has the financial supports they need in times like these?"

Mr. James Maloney: Madam Speaker, the member's question is a very important one.

I am not going to do what I just said we should not be doing and start pointing fingers and laying blame. There is no point in looking backward, we only need to look forward. It has been very clear from what this government has done throughout this pandemic to ensure that everybody in Canada is not left without and everybody has enough money to live on to get himself or herself through this pandemic. Going forward, all sorts of discussions need to take place, and that is certainly one of them.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Madam Speaker, I know my colleague from the Liberal Party does not want to go back, but he said that there were no ways that we could have prevented what

had happened. However, the Auditor General's report was very clear on how poorly the Liberals mishandled the early going of the pandemic. One of the things the government did was dismantle the GPHIN system, our early warning system that would have allowed us to be better prepared to handle a pandemic.

My question for my colleague is this. Does he not agree that it was a mistake to dismantle the early warning pandemic system earlier on in this pandemic?

Mr. James Maloney: Madam Speaker, it is an important question, but retrospective analysis is going to happen when this is over, and that will be one of the issues that will be considered, like so many others. However, if we look in the immediate past, January, February, March, we know where we were and where we were going to be.

It is important that we finish this debate tonight, having a constructive discussion about how we can help the people of Alberta, which I genuinely want to do. I said earlier that I have a lot of friends in Alberta, just like I have a lot of friends in other parts of the country, and that is what we are here to talk about. Therefore, let us do it.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Madam Speaker, right now, there is a serious crisis going on in Alberta. I think about the people who I have met in Alberta, hard-working people building a life for themselves and their families. I think of the people I have met in Calgary and spending time in the city and in some of the suburbs, and going to Calgary Skyview. I met the Sikh community in the Dashmesh gurdwara. I think about spending time at my first Calgary stampede and in Edmonton. I used to visit pretty regularly. I have been to the Rocky Mountains. Throughout Alberta, there are good people who are working hard, trying to earn a good living to support their families. Right now, they need our help.

Both Liberal and Conservative MPs are talking about blame. Right now, while people are in an emergency, it is pretty disconnected of them to be speaking about blame. Right now, we need to be talking about the help for the people of Alberta.

We saw that the federal government when pushed was able to provide some support to the province of Ontario, sending in additional federal resources, sending in the military and providing health care workers.

Right now, people need help. We are seeing the highest case counts, the highest positivity rates and the worst situation in all of Canada, in fact, in all of North America. When the house is burning, help needs to be sent immediately. That is what this emergency debate should be about. How do we provide that help? What supports can we give right now to support people?

Speaking to people on the ground in Alberta, hospitals are being overrun and ICU units are filling up. We are getting to a position where people do not know how they are going to respond to the number of people getting sick.

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What are we going to do about it? We need to get vaccines to the people who desperately need it. We know with the people who are getting sick everywhere in Canada, and particularly right now in Alberta, the highest rates of transmission are—

• (2310)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I am sorry to have to interrupt. There seems to be a problem with the interpretation.

[Translation]

The problem with the interpretation seems to have been fixed.

[English]

The hon. member for Burnaby South.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Madam Speaker, we need to talk about the solutions. Let us talk about the help we can provide. We need to mobilize with an all-hands-on-deck approach. Every resource available at the federal level has to be deployed to help people. I am talking about ensuring we are providing assistance and support to get people vaccinated. We need to provide front-line health care workers—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I have to interrupt again. There seems to be a technical issue.

It is working now.

The hon. member for Burnaby South.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Madam Speaker, I want to talk about the whole point of this debate, and I would like to thank my colleague, the member for Edmonton Strathcona, for calling for the emergency debate. New Democrats support this call, and we want to have a discussion about what we could do to help.

Knowing that health care workers on the front lines are stretched thin, knowing that there is a high rate of infection, and knowing that there is a high rate of positivity in Alberta, what are we going to do to help?

For a long time I have often seen, at the federal level, the Prime Minister using jurisdiction as an excuse to not act. When we are in a pandemic, when we are in a crisis, real leadership is not hiding behind excuses or looking for excuses. Real leadership is looking for solutions. We need the federal government to step up.

There is a difference between placing blame for the mistakes of the past and putting pressure on the government to act right now. We need the federal government to step up and provide more help to Alberta.

We know another concrete thing the government could do right now is to improve access to paid sick leave. Experts across this country, including medical health experts and public health experts, have all said better access to paid sick leave will help reduce the spread of COVID-19. That is something the federal government could do right now.

I want to be very clear. I am calling for improving the existing federal paid sick leave program that New Democrats fought for. What is the point of having a program that does not actually work?

This emergency debate is an opportunity for us to talk about solutions.

One solution is to, please, fix the paid sick leave program so that it actually works, so that workers do not have to make the impossible choice between going into work sick or staying at home and not knowing if they can pay their bills. When people do not have paid sick leave and they do not have income coming in when they stay at home, they will not be able to stay at home. It is just not a choice that a worker can make. We need to provide workers with that support.

We need to make sure that people have the opportunity to take time off to get vaccinated. If someone is working and they need every single paycheque, and they are living paycheque to paycheque, they cannot take time off to get vaccinated. They simply cannot afford to. We need to put in place a paid sick leave program that works. That is a concrete step that the Ontario COVID-19 Science Advisory Table has called for and experts across Canada have called for. It is something we could do right now. That is a concrete step we could take.

We could ensure that Alberta gets additional supports when it comes to vaccines. We could ensure that Alberta gets additional supports when it comes to frontline workers. We could look at all federal resources, including considering bringing in the military to provide support. Alberta needs help. The people of Alberta need help.

That is what this emergency debate is about. That is why the member for Edmonton Strathcona called for this emergency debate, so we could talk about solutions. What could we do right now to provide help?

It is important for us to acknowledge that the pandemic has shown us that we are all connected. When there is an outbreak in another country and the numbers increase, it impacts the entire world. When there is an increased rate of infection in our province, in a neighbouring province, anywhere in Canada, it impacts all of us. We have a shared responsibility to care for each other.

This pandemic has shown us something. When we look out for one another, when we take care of one another, we are better off, we are stronger and we have a better response. Right now, the people in Alberta need our support.

Let us look at some other solutions. Something else we need to consider is how we could deploy a national support system. What we have called for in the past is looking at establishing, wherever there is a federal building, wherever there is federal resources, and deploying assistance in a tandem or parallel vaccination site, which could be set up federally to assist in the provincial efforts.

We need to start looking for solutions. I want to find solutions to help out. We know increasing vaccinations, providing better sick leave and providing better supports would help. What are the other solutions? What could the Liberal government do right now, instead of saying that it has done its part and throwing its hands up? That is not good enough. We need to see more supports.

I have spoken with some of the health care workers who are saying that if things continue to get worse, it could get to a point where they have to decide who gets access to ventilators and who does not. This is a real crisis. I have spoken to health care workers in other provinces who have seen the numbers increase, and they are burnt out. They are in shock at the numbers that are happening with increased cases and with people coming into ICU units.

As the numbers increase, we are seeing entire families get infected. Workers who have to go into work get sick and then come home, bringing the illness back. Then entire families end up in the hospital. People are on ventilators. People are struggling to get into ICU units. None of this had to happen.

• (2315)

Right now this is what is going on, so we need to look at solutions. That is what we are calling for. New Democrats are saying we should provide that support and help right now.

What I have noted, and have been troubled by, is that we do not see a response in proportion to how serious things are. When things are serious, when things are really bad, we need to have an immediate response that is proportional to the gravity of the problem we are up against. This is serious. This is really bad. What is the serious response that will address the needs right now? That is what we are calling for.

I can outline what New Democrats think should happen. We have said this from the beginning. We need better paid sick leave, we need better access to vaccines, we need better supports for workers and we need to make sure there is an all-hands-on-deck approach to getting everyone vaccinated. In particular, in Alberta where people are struggling right now, we need an all-hands-on-deck approach. The federal government needs to do everything possible and deploy every resource possible to support the people. That is what we are calling for and that is what this discussion should be about.

I want to thank the member for Edmonton Strathcona for calling for this emergency debate, I want to thank the House of Commons and the Speaker for agreeing to it and I want to thank all members for participating, but let us focus on solutions. Let us focus on what the federal government can do in terms of supports right now to help people right now.

[*Translation*]

I want to reiterate that the time has come to help our brothers and sisters, our neighbours in Alberta. They need the federal government's help to deal with this crisis.

This is a serious crisis and a critical time. We have to give them the help they need, improve access to a paid sick leave program, and do everything we can to get everyone vaccinated. New Democrats will continue to apply pressure in exactly those areas. We must act immediately.

[*English*]

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have two quick comments.

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First, a highly successful pilot project regarding rapid testing in Alberta was cancelled a number of months ago by the Liberal government. Does the member agree with that?

Second, we have all talked about how important vaccines are, but I was interested to note, as I checked a few minutes ago, that the member voted against the Conservative motion last week to have a plan to get vaccines to all Canadians as soon as possible.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Madam Speaker, the plan was that everyone should be vaccinated by tomorrow. Of course New Democrats think that should happen, but it is a little cynical to say that when it is not the reality. That is not happening. That is not the case. Canadians have felt that politics have become cynical because people say things that are just not achievable.

I want folks who are listening to pay attention to the comments from Conservatives. They are talking about things in the past and mistakes that were made. Those are legitimate things to talk about, but not when there is an emergency. When a person's house is on fire, does the individual want to talk about whether the wiring, the plumbing or the connections were bad? No, that person wants to get people out of the house to safety and security. They want to get family and loved ones out of the fire. Afterward, people can figure out what happened, but right now we are in an emergency. Why are members talking about what happened in the past when we should be talking about helping people right now?

I do not know if people understand how serious this is. I do not know if they have listened to the stories or have spoken to people on the ground. Things are bad. People are getting sick and they need help. They do not need people to talk about a decision on rapid testing from four weeks ago or a month ago. They need to talk about what we are doing right now. We know the evidence is clear: paid sick leave, an all-hands-on-deck approach, giving all resources possible to provide support and help to Alberta, deploying health care workers as we saw were deployed—

• (2320)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I have to allow for other questions.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member is talking about what to do right now. It is an excellent point. What can we do right now?

In order to get more health care professionals into Ontario, there had to be co-operation with the Province of Ontario. A lot of the things that we do have to be done with co-operation. We cannot start walking all over provinces. We have to do things with them.

If provinces are not asking for or wanting the help, how does the member recommend we impose upon provinces that we still need to do something, even if they might be against it?

S. O. 52

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Madam Speaker, in a crisis we do everything possible to help. That means lining up the support, saying here is our plan and here is how we can help, and getting on the phone to tell the provinces what we are providing. What we can do immediately, and the member knows this because the experts have said this, is improve access to paid sick leave. There is a federal program. The government has already admitted that there is no jurisdictional issue because there is already a program. Let us make it better so workers do not go to work sick.

These are two concrete steps I have just laid out that could happen right now.

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Madam Speaker, I agree that we need to focus on the things that need to be done right now. Paid sick leave is one of those things that we should do, and it seems like the federal government needs to step up on this because the governments of B.C., Ontario and Alberta have not stepped up as they should. They are the ones in charge of the Labour Code.

Where we see pandemic outbreaks right now are at large construction projects, such as Site C and LNG Canada, and in the oil sands. What does the hon. member think should be done with these construction projects? Are they urgent? Should they be shut down while there are outbreaks going on, or how do we deal with outbreaks at these large construction projects for energy extraction?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Madam Speaker, we need to follow the advice of the public health experts when it comes to where we need to be protecting people and the measures we need. We need paid sick leave at the federal level. The program is there, it just needs to be improved. That would significantly help reduce the spread of COVID-19 in workplaces.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is an honour for me to be able to speak about Alberta, the province I grew up in, live in, represent and love so much.

This is an important debate. I will say it has also at times been an odd debate, odd I think because the federal New Democrats, especially my hon. friend from Edmonton Strathcona, are using the federal House of Commons to offer a highly partisan critique of the UCP government in Alberta. I am not here to praise or critique the UCP government. I think I have enough to do seeking to hold the federal government accountable in the federal House of Commons, to push it to adopt policies that are in the national interest and protect Canadians by getting us out of this pandemic.

The NDP members have declared that Canadians do not care about jurisdiction, they want politicians to act. To this, I would observe that jurisdictional details are actually extremely important to how we resolve this crisis. The federal government cannot impose gathering restrictions and provincial governments cannot control borders. Everyone needs to do their job in their own area of jurisdiction. It is silly to pretend that jurisdictional responsibility does not matter. Jurisdictional responsibility is crucial. Politicians need to understand where their responsibilities lie. Then they need to act in those areas of responsibility to do their part to get the outcomes that we are all looking for.

What we have seen during too much of this crisis is an obscuring of responsibility. It is not just the NDP; many federal Liberals have also taken every opportunity to slam the actions of various provincial governments. That might be understandable if the federal government had carried off its own responsibilities flawlessly, but that is far from the case, so now instead of acting effectively it is often shifting responsibility.

I want to pose what I think is the fundamental question for this conversation, the question Canadians have been asking for a long time. Let us end the finger-pointing between different levels of government and let us establish who is responsible for solving the problem of COVID-19 in Canada. Who is responsible for getting us out of this crisis, for charting a course to something different, for building a plan to get us beyond the current pandemic? Who is responsible?

Too often we hear from the provinces that the feds should do certain things, we hear from the feds about what the provinces should do, meanwhile both are saying they are deferring to experts. The public health experts in different jurisdictions do not always agree with each other and do not actually have the ability to publicly contradict the politicians they report to.

Further, when it comes to expertise, it is, by its nature, specialized. One expert may be well placed to tell us about the spread of a disease, but less able to explain the social factors that contribute to whether or not people follow guidelines in certain situations. A different expert still may be required to explain the impacts on life and well-being that are associated with large-scale unemployment caused by certain kinds of policies. The point is that generally we expect politicians to gather the feedback of different experts and make a decision that synthesizes that feedback and applies collective values as dictated by the electorate. That is the point of having a democracy instead of an aristocracy of expertise.

Today, the politicians say they are deferring to the experts when in reality the experts still report in private to politicians and politicians are the ones actually taking decisions, so again there is a lack of clarity about who is actually responsible. When I say “who” is responsible, I am not intending to refer to the World Health Organization, although it is evident that many people in this government would like to defer responsibility for their decisions to the WHO, even though it has been clear from the beginning there have been serious flaws in its approach and recommendations. The WHO is ultimately constrained by its member states. As we have seen, that has limited its action in particular, for instance, in response to identifying issues coming out of China at the beginning. There has been a lot of just passing back and forth the—

• (2325)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to interrupt the member for a second. I do not know if I was side-tracked, but I do not remember him saying he was sharing his time, so I was wondering if he is or if he is taking the full 20 minutes, just so I can pace myself.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, I was of course intending to say that I was splitting my time. I was saving that for the ninth minute, just to make sure Sean and Sebastien are still awake.

There has been much passing back and forth of responsibility throughout this. It goes without saying that there have been mistakes made at lots of levels, but what we need now is to stop this extended process of finger pointing, and for someone to finally stand up and say, "I am responsible and I have a plan to get us out of this." That person, the person we need to show national leadership, take responsibility and give us a plan for getting us out of this pandemic is the Prime Minister. He has the opportunity, better late than never, to step up and work to unite this country and work to build a safe recovery by leading from those critical areas of federal responsibility.

In my view, the most critical actions required for a long-term solution to this pandemic are all in federal jurisdiction. Therefore, I want to give the Prime Minister some suggestions about what a path would look like to get us out of this in federal jurisdictions.

Making vaccines available to Canadians is critically important. Much has been said, I think very well, by my colleagues about the government's failure to do that. However, as we have also discussed, vaccines are not the whole picture.

We live in an increasingly interconnected world where pandemics are going to become more and more common. Locking ourselves down and bringing our nation to the precipice of a debt crisis every time there is a novel virus outbreak or a vaccine-resistant variant, and then waiting for vaccine development is likely not going to be a viable strategy in the 21st century.

We need to learn how and act to build a system that allows us to stay safe and stay open during pandemics like this. Some countries have done that. Some countries beat COVID-19 long before there was a vaccine. I spoke about that in a question that I addressed to the health minister on March 25, 2020, well over a year ago. Here is what I said at the time:

Madam Chair, Canada must look at international comparisons and copy strategies used by countries that have been successful in controlling COVID-19. South Korea provides one such example. Its approach emphasizes widely available testing and tracking of the spread of the virus, making people aware of specific places where they might have been exposed and providing them with the test results as quickly as possible. This targeted testing and tracking approach has helped South Korea turn the corner. Taiwan's approach has been similar and similarly effective.

Has the government studied, and is the government preparing to adopt, the very successful containment model used by Asian democracies which also have more experience at pandemic control?

I asked the health minister that on March 25, 2020, more than a year ago, and the health minister replied that yes, they were looking at these models and different experiences around the world, and yet, we still have not seen the plan to implement some of those successful measures.

Earlier than that, on March 11 of the same year, I tabled a petition in the House calling on the government to strengthen border screening, including having effective temperature testing at the border. Because the federal government has responsibility for developing and approving new testing technology, for coordinating national systems of tracing, for securing our borders and, yes, for providing clear and accurate advice on masking, something else that the gov-

ernment unfortunately failed to do, it has failed to act and has, in many cases yet to act, in terms of putting in place the systems and charting the path that is going to get us out of this. That points to why we are still really in the midst of a third wave that has not hit many other countries around the world, a third wave that is in Canada and it is hitting every province at different magnitudes in different provinces. We have a third wave hitting this country because of a failure of the federal government to act in areas of its jurisdictions.

I agree strongly with my colleagues about the vital necessity of making vaccines available. The Province of Alberta has been rapidly deploying vaccines as they have been made available, but we also must develop systems of effective border control, testing and tracing, things that the federal government must lead on.

On the issue of responsibility, it is important to say that it is not just about government. All of us are responsible. For our collective response to COVID-19 to work, citizens must choose to be engaged and there has to be a level of social trust.

• (2330)

People have to listen to health directives and follow them. It goes without saying that the spread of COVID-19 is determined by the practical actions of people on the ground, and it is only affected by the regulations that are in place insofar as those regulations are followed. However, trust also has to be earned. When we have a national government that has been inconsistent in the advice it has given, and that is routinely attacking the Province of Alberta and other provinces, it unfortunately undermines trust. The government, in addition to the policy measures, needs to work to rebuild trust with people on the ground, especially people in my province.

With that, I look forward to responding to questions.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague especially for the conversation around building trust. We saw that the Government of Alberta failed to listen to health officials when it came to very critical measures that would have saved lives. That is where the Government of Alberta is losing trust. We are seeing that even in Edmonton, where the government is cutting really important harm reduction measures that are going to cost people's lives. It is not just the opioid crisis and the COVID crisis. The government is failing to protect its citizens.

I know the member and the Conservatives do not want to talk about the provincial government. They want to talk about federal issues. One of the key measures that has been recommended by health officials right across this country is paid sick leave, yet the Conservative members of Parliament have stonewalled and not answered whether they support it. The paid sick leave the federal government is offering right now is weak at best and needs to be improved to save lives.

Why are the Conservatives not doing their job, protecting lives of citizens and standing with the NDP in calling—

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• (2335)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I have to focus on those critical areas of federal response and federal jurisdiction.

The hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, I have articulated what I think are the critical aspects of a response that is required under federal jurisdiction and the member, again, is bringing it back to aspects of provincial policies on a number of fronts. I think we need to focus on those critical areas of federal response and federal jurisdiction.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I really appreciated looking back to questions asked a year ago, such as the point the hon. member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith raised first about Taiwan and the approach it was taking with masks. At that point the Canadian public health advice was that we were not going to go the way of masks. There have been a lot of moments here when members of the opposition like the hon member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan have raised important questions, and at this point we are talking about his home province.

Taking the partisanship out of the debate, what is the best way for us to help Alberta?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, it is to make vaccines available, develop an effective system at the border that is based on science and evidence for controlling the flow of COVID cases into the country, and engage constructively with the provincial government to support the delivery of services that are required. I think that constructive engagement, as well as taking care of those areas of federal responsibility, is precisely what the federal government and national politicians need to be doing.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC): Madam Speaker, the moment the Alberta government says things are serious and they have to act so things do not get out of control, we hear from the NDP member from Alberta that things are really serious and we have to be really concerned. I am not sure whether the rest of Canada understands that at this point in time if we had the vaccines, anybody over 30 would be able to have one. Anybody over 12 would be able to get one, if we had them, as far as next Monday is concerned. We will be able to manage the health care capacity. That is the reason these actions have been taken. The same thing goes for ICU beds, and so on.

Could the member comment on some of the amazing things that have been done, and the rhetoric that has gotten completely out of hand in this evening's discussion?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, I know that the provincial government has been working very hard on this from the beginning. I know, frankly, provincially in Alberta, the NDP opposition there have been attacking from day one. There is a lot of partisan rancour in the tone there as well. I am not going to say that any provincial government is not doing its best. Every provincial government has probably made some mistakes.

However, we are here in the national Parliament. Some of us are in Ottawa, some of us are zooming in from home, but we are together talking about federal issues and the federal response. My contention is that the primary leadership we have lacked on this has been from the federal government addressing those key determi-

nants of success that myself and other members were calling for over a year ago.

Ms. Jag Sahota (Calgary Skyview, CPC): Madam Speaker, I wish I could say that I am pleased to rise tonight to discuss the current COVID-19 situation in my home province of Alberta and in Canada, but I am actually sad that there is a third wave in my home province of Alberta and in Canada.

We have seen a record number of COVID cases. We have seen new lockdown measures in an effort to flatten the curve, yet our hospitalization numbers continue to rise and our ICU admissions continue to soar. I am also disappointed that we are here tonight because this Liberal government failed to protect Canadians and Albertans, both their physical and mental well-being.

We are in the middle of this third wave of the COVID pandemic. Many Canadians across Canada are struggling to cope with the rise of cases, harsh lockdowns and mental health struggles. This is very worrisome.

While our neighbours to the south are seeing their hospitalization numbers go down, businesses reopening, restaurant patios opening again just in time for summer and fans returning to in-person sporting games, Albertans are facing yet another summer of restrictive lockdowns. I cannot help but know that, if our Prime Minister and his Minister of Health took different actions at the beginning, we would now be getting ready to attend in-person sporting events and having brunch with family and friends on patios.

Make no mistake, this third wave and the damage it is doing to our mental health and the economy rests solely with the Prime Minister. Under this Prime Minister's leadership, the Minister of Health allowed our early pandemic warning system to be shut down just months before COVID-19 hit.

This Prime Minister sent hundreds of thousands of masks, gloves and gowns from the government's own reserve to China. A month later, health care professionals and first responders here at home were being asked to ration the use of personal protective equipment, recycle masks and limit their use of hand sanitizer, and in some cases they were using garbage bags as PPE.

The government refused to close our borders at the onset, letting the virus spread across the country. It flip-flopped on whether or not Canadians should wear masks. The Minister of Health repeatedly told Canadians that the risk of getting COVID was low. The Prime Minister was slow to roll out federal aid programs and wrong not to fix them when Conservatives raised concerns and offered productive solutions to help Canadians.

Protecting Canadians is one of the most important responsibilities of the government. We cannot continue with lockdowns and social distancing. Canadians are getting fed up. They want to be able to do what our neighbours to the south are able to do. Therefore, here are some of the things that the government can do to put Canadians first.

The government can develop a clear set of parameters for identifying risks presented by emerging variants and present this to the public in an easy-to-understand format. Canadians should have information on where the virus is spreading, emerging variants and vaccination levels.

The government can provide real-time warnings to the Canadian public when new variants are detected around the world as well as when hot spots for this spread are revealed. This applies to locations here in Canada as well as abroad.

The double variant first detected in India was detected in October 2020. The government could require anyone who has been in the variant hot spot to undergo enhanced screening, quarantine measures or a combination of both depending on the risk evaluated by public health officials. It could require immediate rapid tests at airports for all domestic airline travel.

We have lost so much during this third wave, but how long this third wave lasts is completely dependent on how quickly this Liberal government responds and acts to protect Albertans and Canadians. Albertans can take some assurance that it was the Conservatives who stood up and called for a real plan to protect Canadians from this pandemic.

● (2340)

In October 2020, the House passed a sweeping opposition motion to direct the health committee to study the COVID-19 pandemic and ordered the government to produce needed documents for the committee. This included information on the government's vaccine rollout and key related documents.

In November 2020, the member for Calgary Nose Hill penned an op-ed in the National Post calling for a better COVID-19 strategy from the government entitled "It's time for a better COVID strategy". This included discussion of the government's inaction on vaccines.

Additionally, members were able to question the Minister of Health in a four-hour session in the House of Commons committee of the whole regarding the government's failed response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In December 2020, the House passed a motion calling on the government to be transparent on key information related to the COVID vaccine rollout.

In January 2021, we were able to secure an emergency debate in the House of Commons on the vaccine shortage in Canada.

In February 2021, we demanded that the chair of the health committee call an emergency meeting to discuss the COVID-19 variants and called on the Liberal MPs to stop the filibuster and to finally pass the motion to release the government's vaccine contracts.

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The Conservatives' motion ended up passing, meaning the government will need to come clean on the details of the contract that it tried to hide. In March 2021, my colleagues at the health committee were able to hear from experts of the government ignoring the National Advisory Committee on Immunization recommendations to not administer AstraZeneca to the 65-plus age group.

It has never ended. Every proper and correct thing the government could have done to address this pandemic and help Canadians get back to some sort of normalcy, it did not do. Instead, the Liberals did the complete opposite. It is shameful that the Prime Minister has allowed Canada to fall so far behind our allies. We need the Prime Minister to do better. We need vaccines to be delivered, not the ones that our allies are sending us, but the ones under our own contracts.

Canadians want to return to normal life. They want to have barbecues with their friends and neighbours. They want to be able to go to the movies and watch the latest blockbusters. Most importantly, they want to be able to see their family members who they have not seen in over a year, give them a big hug and socialize with them.

● (2345)

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my colleague spoke about measures on domestic flights, which I hope she knows the premier could actually implement at any time as it is within his jurisdiction.

My question is in regard to international flights. Does she support the mandatory quarantining of international flights landing in Canada? Does she also support lockdown measures that will help people get through this third wave in her home province?

Ms. Jag Sahota: Madam Speaker, I watched the member make her speech earlier today. She talked about the frustration she is feeling because the Conservatives' message has not been consistent when it was actually the Liberals whose message has not been consistent.

It was the committee that said we need to wait for the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines while the Prime Minister made the decision to announce that any vaccine that is available is good. That is where the message is wrong.

In terms of the quarantining, it has been a disaster. We have heard from women who were sexually assaulted at the quarantine hotels. Whatever the Liberal government has done so far regarding the measures at the airports has not worked.

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Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to begin by expressing my solidarity with Albertans facing this crisis. I have family and friends there. I am thinking of them and I am very concerned here tonight to hear the way in which Conservatives are distorting the reality of what people are facing. We know that the Conservative government in Alberta has abandoned Albertans in so many ways during this COVID crisis.

I want to share a particular concern around what workers have been facing. Many workers have paid the price of this pandemic with their lives. We know of workers in meat packing plants, in work camps, many essential workers who have died or have passed COVID on to their family members. We know that Conservatives have not supported measures around paid sick days and other public health measures that are critical in saving lives. Why are Conservatives failing to stand up for working people in Alberta?

• (2350)

Ms. Jag Sahota: Madam Speaker, I have been listening to the debate since it started, and I am kind of sad that a lot of MPs have basically been playing the blame game. In taking part in it, they are pointing fingers at the Conservatives. We are here to come up with solutions and to point out that there is a problem. Let us start discussing the solutions to it.

Also, tonight I have heard the Liberal government acknowledge that there is a problem. However, this is just a start. Now we need to start coming up with solutions, one of which is to bring vaccines to Canadians.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Madam Speaker, my colleague and I share a border and a lot of constituents, and I know she works really hard for them. I wonder if there are a few things she wishes the Liberal government would do right now, whether in the delivery of vaccines or more rapid tests, or in understanding the plight of the constituents in her riding. What would they be?

I really want to thank her for her honesty in rightly pointing out that there has been a lot of finger pointing tonight and not a lot of solutions, even though she brought them to the House's attention in her speech. I would love for her to re-emphasize some of the solutions that she would like to see for her constituents.

Ms. Jag Sahota: Madam Speaker, the solution we need is rapid testing, as my colleague said. We have been calling for a lot of these solutions for a long time, but the government has been ignoring us. The government even told Canadians at one point that human-to-human transmission was not possible and that we did not need to wear a mask. Clear and concise messaging is needed. It is required and demanded by Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages (FedDev Ontario and Official Languages), Lib.): Madam Speaker, thank you for recognizing me.

[*English*]

I am very pleased to speak in the House this evening. First, I want to say my thoughts are with the people of Alberta. I think this

is an important debate and I certainly would like to share a few thoughts. Particularly, I would like to focus my time on our vaccine and our vaccine rollout that began at the end of December and is currently picking up speed.

When COVID-19 asserted itself as a global public health threat at the beginning of last year, Canada mobilized on all fronts to develop a multi-faceted response to an extraordinary challenge. The federal government shaped its plan in a context of rapidly developing uncertainty, and worked with global and domestic communities, an organization of public health experts, to take in the full measure of this threat.

The federal government continues to implement “Canada's COVID-19 Immunization Plan: Saving Lives and Livelihoods”. We are on track to offer all eligible and willing Canadians the opportunity to become vaccinated by the end of September this year.

In the implementation of the immunization plan, the federal government engaged and consulted all level of governments, indigenous leaders, international partners, industry, and medical and science experts, among others. At the heart of it are our core principles: science-driven decision-making, transparency, coherence and adaptability, fairness and equity, public involvement and consistent reporting. These principles continue to govern and inform our vaccination rollout action.

The plan also outlined the steps in the rollout process: communicating with and engaging Canadians throughout the campaign; obtaining a sufficient supply of vaccines; obtaining regulatory authorization from Health Canada to ensure safety and efficacy of vaccines; allocating and distributing vaccines efficiently and securely; administering the vaccine according to a sequence of priority population identified by experts; and collecting data to monitor vaccine safety, effectiveness and coverage.

The federal government and the provinces, territories and indigenous communities are continuing to work closely together on all aspects of the vaccine rollout, specifically the delivery of equipment, ancillary medical supplies and vaccines. The provinces and territories have their vaccination administration programs under way, and are documenting and collecting the data on vaccine coverage.

During the preliminary period of our response, the Government of Canada successfully negotiated advance purchase agreements with manufacturers of seven different vaccine candidates. This strategy has enabled Canada to secure a diverse portfolio of vaccines and to procure more than enough vaccine doses needed to vaccinate every person in Canada.

Last fall, the Minister of Health signed the interim order respecting the importation, sales and advertising of drugs used in relation to COVID-19. This allowed the Government of Canada to expedite the review and authorization of vaccines for COVID-19. Health Canada has so far authorized four vaccines: Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, AstraZeneca and Janssen. Three of them are currently being delivered to Canada, distributed across the country and administered to Canadians.

Given the ongoing aggressive global procurement of vaccines and the high demand for them, Canada can be proud of this accomplishment. Once a sufficient and diverse supply of vaccines for Canadians was secured through the advance purchase agreement, the focus shifted to deploying those vaccines across Canada. A number of features marked the early part of this phase and some of these saw the federal government develop guidance on priority population, resolve supply chains interruption, and support the provinces and territories in their preparation in receiving the vaccine.

• (2355)

I am happy to report that we have made good progress in the vaccination rollout so far. In addition to distributing syringes and specialized freezers to the provinces and territories, we have distributed vaccines in the amount that has enabled over 30% of eligible adults in Canada to receive one dose of the vaccine.

Pfizer has recently confirmed that it will be delivering substantially more doses weekly during the coming months. This sustained increase in scheduled vaccine delivery will enable provinces and territories to have greater certainty in the planning of their vaccination program. The important groundwork we have done to date in establishing the vaccine rollout infrastructure will ensure a smooth and coordinated response.

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Thanks to the early efforts of the government to prepare for the steep increase in the volume of vaccines received, the process and infrastructure in distributing and administering the vaccine has been well established and continues to mature. As increased volumes are delivered to the provinces and territories, the federal government will continue to be responsive to the provinces, territories and indigenous groups to identify areas where assistance and support could be provided.

I would like to share that, and I am sure many have seen the news, the Prime Minister called Premier Kenney today to offer federal support as Alberta responds to an increase in COVID-19 cases. I know, coming from Ontario, that that federal response also came through with military personnel. I have to take the time tonight to thank Premier Furey from Newfoundland and Labrador for the support he has provided to Ontarians.

I would like to end tonight's debate by saying that despite the progress we are making with the rollout of vaccines in Canada, each and every one of us must continue to implement the public health measures that have proven to be effective at containing the spread of the virus. People should wear a mask, wash their hands, maintain a safe physical distance, do not congregate in large numbers, and please avoid non-essential travel.

• (2400)

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): It being midnight, the motion that the House do now adjourn is deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until later this day at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 12 a.m.)

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